



THE AUTONOMY OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

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ORIGINAL TEXT IN ENGLISH

As all of us at the Congress are well aware, the early years of the 21st century have witnessed the rapid growth of government involvement in sport and recreation. Fifty years ago, 25 years ago even, such state involvement in sport would have been unthinkable, but now it is part of the everyday landscape.

It is a trend that will not be reversed. We in the Olympic family will need to work with the grain of this trend, not against it. We must be realistic yet firm, adaptable yet principled, pragmatic yet determined. We must accept that in this networked, interconnected age, the boundaries between sport, politics and commerce increasingly overlap.

Sport touches on every area of government activity, from health and education policies to poverty and conflict prevention. This is why it is essential for the Olympic Movement to draw up and implement programmes and policies to preserve and secure its autonomy.

Often, government involvement is welcome and we must acknowledge this fact. In some cases, however, it constitutes interference. Why does this happen? One reason is because sport's universal power, its passion and its ability to captivate engages the public in ways which politicians can only dream of. Hence the desire for governments to associate themselves with sporting success and to bask in its reflected glory. Yet it can prove a heady and dangerous cocktail. A tight grip on the purse strings by a government in the hope of sprinkling Olympic gold dust on its electoral fortunes provides welcome funding for sport, but it also risks damaging intrusion through regulatory controls and detrimental policy formulation; risking interference in the running of sport.

Prevention is always better than cure and it is incumbent on the Olympic family to build strong and effective relations with governments based on mutual respect for their roles and the autonomy of the sporting bodies concerned. This will enable us to put our case as forcefully as we can and to prevent infringements on our autonomy wherever possible.

Here at this Congress, convened by our President, we have a golden opportunity to press ahead with the significant work already undertaken

on this issue. I would suggest that any approach to autonomy needs to be constructed on two key pillars: firstly, that the autonomy of sport is an essential pre-requisite for its development and the promotion of its values, for the benefit of all athletes. Secondly, the right to autonomy does not imply absolute freedom with no rules. With rights come obligations – we cannot preserve our autonomy unless we deserve to do so. Our own good governance is a critical factor in ensuring our autonomy is recognised and respected by all our stakeholders and partners.

All members of the Olympic family, and especially each and every National Olympic Committee (NOC) must strive to ensure that they are truly state-of-the-art, autonomous membership organisations, able to bring together public and private sector partners and to fulfil the following objectives:

- to champion the Olympic values and brand in their territories;
- to enhance Olympic success for high performance athletes, both now and in the future; and
- to add value to their membership by enhancing their strengths and capabilities.

We in the Olympic family must be aware that the construction of long-term relationships with key stakeholders on a national and international basis can quickly become imbalanced, particularly if the power of the state is brought to bear on a small NOC without the financial means or the manpower capability to respond. Furthermore, we must recognise that many NOCs have become dependent on government and lottery funding to supplement their income. But there are a number of ways in which we can address these issues:

Firstly, we must ourselves understand what we mean by autonomy before we can expect our stakeholders and partners to respect it. We need a comprehensive, clear and acceptable definition.

Secondly, we must put our own house in order. We know that the successful preservation of autonomy depends significantly on good governance within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), NOCs and International Federations (IFs). The IOC document, "Basic Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement", is essential to this process. We need to complete the task of translating the principles contained therein into practical terms and actions; and to ensure that all members of the Olympic family can act upon it.

Thirdly, we know that better communication and cooperation within the Olympic Movement will help us to resolve our internal disputes and will prevent "divide and rule policies" by governments. The establishment of the Olympic and Sports Network was a key first step. Here at the Congress we have a key opportunity to signal the need to build on this initiative.

Fourthly, the need for better communication and cooperation extends to our relations with governments, not least through the creation of an IOC mechanism designed to initiate a comprehensive campaign to brief governments about the Olympic Movement. NOCs need to engage directly with governments and public bodies. Often, the potential for disagreement and misunderstanding lies in vague, uncertain terminology in the political lexicon. For instance, should the Lisbon Treaty be adopted, references to "the specificity of sport" could herald months of protracted negotiations centring around government interference rather than the potential delivery of wide-ranging benefits for sport based on full recognition of the autonomy of the Olympic Movement.



Fifthly, all members of the Olympic family and especially the NOCs that have a direct interface with their governments need to ensure that their own autonomy is enshrined in relevant memoranda of understanding (MOUs) and legislation affecting the running of sport in their country.

Finally, the IOC and the IFs have the opportunity to work closely together to develop a permanent information exchange system between members of the Olympic Movement in conflict situations and to support the autonomy of NOCs. The watchwords should be analysis, prevention and joint action. A united approach is far more effective than leaving NOCs to defend themselves against the might of hostile governmental institutions.

These challenges will define the relationship between governmental institutions and the Olympic family in the years ahead. The first two IOC Seminars on the autonomy of the Olympic Movement have set us on this journey. But there is far more work to be done to safeguard our autonomy, and only by concerted action will we achieve the right dynamic between a strong and growing Olympic Movement and the increasing influence of government in the world of Olympic sport. Let us today pledge to use this Congress to work together to secure an autonomous and harmonious future for the whole of the Olympic family; and begin the detailed work so necessary to achieve this objective.