



THE AUTONOMY OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT

LAMBIS V. NIKOLAOU

Moderator • International Olympic Committee



ORIGINAL TEXT IN FRENCH

It is an honour for me to open this session, which is devoted to the autonomy of the Olympic Movement.

As part of the discussion of theme 3 concerning the structure of the Olympic Movement, it is unthinkable that the autonomy of the Olympic Movement should be debated without keeping in mind the two other sub-themes that are being discussed at this very moment in the other two rooms: “Good governance and ethics” and “The relationships between the Olympic Movement and its stakeholders”.

During the Virtual Olympic Congress, we received around 40 contributions on this subject from the Olympic family, all of which were of a very high quality. Many of these contributions reinforced and backed up the resolutions of the Second Seminar on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement, which was held in Lausanne in February 2008.

This seminar brought together around 170 representatives of the International Federations (IFs), National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and continental associations, as well as members and senior officials of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The purpose of this Second Seminar on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement was to analyse when and why the autonomy of sport had been threatened since the first seminar in September 2006, and to agree on a number of principles and mechanisms that could be used to help sports organisations to deal with this situation.

The participants in these sessions reaffirmed that the social responsibility and autonomy of sport were the foundation for its credibility and legitimacy. The seminar resolutions stressed that autonomy enables sports organisations to treat everybody equally, irrespective of culture, religion, gender and other diversities.

The rules of the Olympic and Sports Movement that prevail at international level protect the universality of sport and the noble cause that it defends. Sport can play its unique role thanks to the autonomy that

it enjoys. This role could be seriously jeopardised if sports governing bodies were interfered with in some way.

The seminar participants also recognised that good governance and unity were needed if the sports movement wanted to defend and assert its autonomy. They also decided to create an Olympic and sports network tasked with preserving the autonomy of sport, facilitating the exchange of information and allowing for a rapid response to imminent threats.

This seminar aimed to encourage contributions to the Virtual Olympic Congress and to launch the Olympic Congress debate. As I said in my introduction, many of you sent us your contributions on the subject, providing us with your comments and recommendations.

Many contributors welcomed the resolutions of the Second Seminar on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement. Some also pointed out that the European Commission, while drawing up its White Paper on Sport, also recommended certain guidelines aimed at guaranteeing the autonomy of sport.

Numerous issues were therefore raised concerning:

- the degree of autonomy of the Olympic Movement at the political level;
- the degree of autonomy of the Olympic Movement at the economic and financial level; and
- the degree of autonomy of the Olympic Movement at the legal level.

On the basis of the contributions received, it seems clear today that the Congress should be the start of a detailed analysis of the different levels of autonomy of the Olympic Movement, which I have just described.

This analysis is particularly necessary in view of the complexity of the political, environmental and legal environments in which the Olympic Movement exists.

But let us consider some practical examples.

From time to time, economic partners, media or television companies that hold certain rights, try to impose on the sports movement certain obligations that serve their own interests, without necessarily taking into account those of the athletes or the sports movement.

Many think that, if they pay enormous sums of money to use a brand or to broadcast images of an event, this gives them the power or the right to impose their views. It is important that everyone respects the rights and duties of others and vice-versa. The sports movement can accept compromises without its autonomy being damaged by the demands of certain economic partners.

Too often, a government which subsidises one or more National Federations (NFs) or an NOC ends up trying to take control of that Federation or NOC by appointing government representatives under the pretext that it is subsidising the sports bodies concerned.

In such cases, it is vital that, if a government interferes in sports affairs, all the IFs and the IOC should demonstrate an exemplary level of unwavering solidarity, so that the sports bodies can “resist” the pressure exerted by the political authorities. It is indispensable that the most



influential IFs stand by the smaller Federations, and that joint concerted efforts are carried out with the IOC to fight all forms of interference. Creating an Olympic and sports network makes sense only if all the sports authorities work together.

Therefore, alongside the resolutions drafted at the Second Seminar on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement, several contributors have suggested that working groups be set up to study different ways of strengthening the autonomy of sports organisations from the political, economic and legal points of view, paying particularly close attention to legal autonomy.

The other proposals put forward are all extremely pertinent.

As some suggest, for example:

- it is necessary to ensure that all organisations that are part or wish to be part of the Olympic Movement have done everything possible to guarantee their independence;
- it is also necessary to ensure that NOCs systematically seek recognition from their respective governments;
- all forms of interference in sports affairs should systematically be punished in a tough, concerted way; and
- the creation of a permanent, autonomous structure with all the necessary powers to intervene as quickly as possible in cases of interference in sport should be studied.

In the proposals received during the Virtual Olympic Congress, many contributors recommend a series of short-term actions, including amendments to the Olympic Charter designed to guarantee the implementation of the resolutions of the Second Seminar on the Autonomy of the Olympic and Sports Movement.

In the long term, it is suggested that consideration should be given to the creation of working groups to study the different ways of strengthening the autonomy of sports organisations from the political, economic and legal points of view, paying particularly close attention to legal autonomy.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the various representatives of the panel here today to express the views of the NOCs and IFs. Through their contributions to the Virtual Olympic Congress, they have submitted very detailed proposals concerning their respective bodies.