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Thomas Bach
President

Remarks on the occasion of the European Evening of Sport

Brussels, 19 June 2017

-Check against delivery-

Thank you for the warm welcome. Let me thank the organisers for having selected the Representation of the State of Baden-Württemberg as our venue today. For me, you could not have chosen a better place for this event. Having been raised in Tauberbischofsheim in Baden Württemberg, I also spent my career as an athlete there. Even to this day, I have an office in my hometown. As you can see I still have a very close connection to the town and the region. Therefore, this location reminds me very much of my roots. Thank you for making me feel right at home. Es ist schön ein kleines Stück Heimat hier im Herzen der Europäischen Union zu finden.

These are certainly interesting times to be in Brussels, on the day that the Brexit negotiations started. Even in this respect, we have a thing in common, because the EU negotiator leader, Michel Barnier, is also a member of the IOC Commission for Sustainable Development. Maybe he will advise us both on sustainable development of the EU as well as of the IOC.

Every day it seems, new challenges to the European project appear on the horizon. In many EU Member States, populist movements are on the rise, threatening to undo decades of progress to bring unity, peace and prosperity to Europe. We seem to have entered a time, when the establishment is on the defensive. Where ever you go, there is public mistrust in politicians, in business, in experts, in sport, or anyone in leadership positions at major institutions.

Studies like the Edelman Trust Barometer confirm that the public trust in governments, political and social institutions, NGOs like the NOCs and IOC, and media is at an all-time low. Whether you are a sport organisation or an EU institution, the message is very clear. Anyone who is part of the establishment is scrutinized by a sceptical public like never before. The world of sport is not immune to this trend. In fact, we face the same challenge of public scepticism or mistrust as the European institutions and other members of the establishment.



We have to be honest with ourselves. For many of the crises that society faces today, whether in business, politics, or sport, the establishment has given the public some reasons to be mistrustful. The world financial and banking crisis, Brexit, emissions scandals or doping are just some examples.

We cannot ignore this new political reality. As you know all too well from many EU Member States, populist movements can be very effective. They might still be too small to form a government. However, even without governing themselves, they have a strong influence over policy and political decision making. The New York Times described this quite well recently when they wrote: “Western populism may be entering something like its awkward teenage years – able to borrow the car but not own it, have an influence on the household but be too young to run it.”

The area where this is most obvious for the Olympic Movement is in the candidature procedure for the Olympic Games. In the past, when we saw that a candidature enjoyed the support of the government, of the opposition, of business and of the sport community, then we were sure that the candidature had broad public support. This has changed dramatically in many Western countries, in particular in Europe, including in my own country. Today, when people see that politics, opposition, business and sports are united behind one project, they immediately conclude that something must be terribly wrong.

Although quoting British politicians here in Brussels today may not be a popular thing to do, let me try to do so nevertheless. This is because Sir Hugh Robertson, the chairman of the British Olympic Association, and former Minister of Sport, summed up this change in attitude very well when he said: “Voting against the Olympics as a tool of the establishment is a profoundly illogical thing to do.”

This is the reality we cannot ignore. We must recognise that we are giving some arguments to this scepticism. In a nutshell, the candidature procedure has become too expensive and too onerous for potential candidate cities. In this way, it is producing too many losers.

For us, this means that we need to adapt and address this reality. We are doing this in several ways. With the reforms of Olympic Agenda 2020, we are already addressing the cost-factor of organising Olympic Games. The candidature process for the Olympic Games



2024 is the first that is fully guided by Olympic Agenda 2020. We are encouraging cities to put their focus on controlling costs, sustainability and legacy. There we are seeing very promising results already today. To give you one example: both 2024 Candidate Cities of Los Angeles and Paris are planning to use a record number of existing and temporary sporting venues. This is something we have never seen before in such dimensions in Olympic history. This leads to significant cost-reductions in organising the Olympic Games, making them more feasible and sustainable.

Guided by this new philosophy of Olympic Agenda 2020, we also made changes to the Host City Contract. It now includes a specific section designed to strengthen provisions protecting human rights and countering corruption. In this respect, we worked in close consultation with a number of different stakeholders to make these changes, including Transparency International, the International Trade Union Confederation, Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, just to name a few.

Reforming the candidature process is just one part of the Olympic Agenda 2020 recommendation. Another important part is strengthening the autonomy of sport and good governance at the same time. We need the autonomy of sport because it ensures the political neutrality of sport and the worldwide equal application of the rules and laws of sport. Without autonomy, there would be no international sport.

With autonomy comes responsibility. Just like we expect politics to respect the autonomy of sport to determine the rules governing sport, our stakeholders from politics and society rightly expect that the world of sport is run according to the standards of good governance. Autonomy and good governance are therefore two sides of the same coin.

For this reason, good governance measures are another central feature of Olympic Agenda 2020. With the recommendations of Olympic Agenda 2020, the IOC has underlined its commitment to strengthen the integrity of sport. This is why credibility is one of the three pillars of Olympic Agenda 2020, next to sustainability and youth.

The IOC has already implemented all good governance measures called for under Olympic Agenda 2020. As a result, all our accounts are audited according to the International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) which is a much higher standard than we are legally



required to have. We have separated the Audit Committee from the Finance Commission. We have appointed a Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer. We have an internal auditor. We have an Ethics Commission. We publish an annual report where you can see all the activities of the IOC and all the flows of money of the revenues and expenses, including the allowances of IOC Members and the President. We have a well-working Ethics Commission, which serves as a model for many other ethics commission in sport founded after we created it in 1999. Just a few days ago, the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has accepted to be proposed as the new chair for this Ethics Commission, underlining its independence, importance and determination.

We have been calling on and expect all other sport organisations to follow this route, because we know that this is the only way that we can maintain our credibility in the eyes of the sceptical public.

There is another reason that makes autonomy and good governance essential to sport organisations. It is the important social contribution of sport. Sport is about so much more than winning or breaking records. Sport improves people's lives. In this way sport is a low-cost, high-impact tool to support all countries – big or small, rich or poor – in achieving their social objectives in education, health, gender equality and many other areas. The unifying power of sport contributes to social inclusion and integration of communities. Sport can only play this important role in society and contribute to the greater public good only if its autonomy and political neutrality are respected.

The overarching mission of the IOC as a non-profit organisation, is to put sport at the service of humanity. Ensuring that our activities have a positive impact on society is central to this idea. It differentiates the the Olympic Movement from sports businesses with purely commercial interests.

This social mission explains why the IOC redistributes 90 per cent of its income to the wider sporting movement. Put differently, this means that every day of the year the equivalent of three million Euros goes to help athletes and sport organisations at all levels in all our 206 NOCs. This social mission of the IOC has been acknowledged by the United Nations in a resolution recognising the autonomy of sport, its contribution to society and the leadership role of the IOC. This recognition was further deepened through a Memorandum of



Understanding between the UN and the IOC, which created a formal framework for collaboration in many important areas where sport can promote social integration and economic development and can contribute to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. If someone in another intergovernmental organisation should have a similar idea for a Memorandum of Understanding, our doors are wide open.

We are convinced such cooperation is key. This is the reason I encourage all of us here today to engage with the EU Commission, with the EU Member States, with the sport organisations and international federations, with the NGOs and civil society. In Europe, the structures for such a cooperation are already very well developed and have existed for a long time. For example, the European Sport Model, with its focus on making access to sport available to all, is fundamental to achieving the EU's wider goals of social inclusion and integration. In this regard, the recent initiative of Commissioner Navracsics for a new EU Sports Diplomacy will promote European values through sport and it is very much welcomed.

It is my sincere hope that we do not lose sight of this important social role of sport by equating it with commercial sports business. This is why we are deeply concerned about certain interpretations of the European treaty and EU competition law with regards to sports. A purely market-based approach would ignore the social contribution of organised sport to help achieve objectives of common interest. Without a proportional application of the anti-trust rules, a sport organisation would be treated like a regular for-profit business. Some appear to ignore the fact that it is the sport organisations, through the clubs and associations, that are investing in youth. We have millions of volunteers who are contributing their time and skills to bring the benefits of sport to society. Such sport organisations, such volunteers, cannot be treated like a purely commercial sports business. These businesses do not contribute at all to the education of youth. They do not contribute at all to form future athletes. They do not contribute at all to the cohesion of society. They just want to profit from this hard work that millions of volunteers and thousands of our clubs and organisations have done for so long.

Such an approach would jeopardize the European Sport Model as we know it. This is why we call on the EU Commission to acknowledge and respect these differences according to the EU treaty which requires it to take the specificity of sport into consideration.



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Let me reiterate my strong belief that in our fragile world, shaken by crises and mistrust, we need more dialogue and more cooperation. The Olympic Movement is ready to extend our hand in partnership with the EU to put sport at the service of society and all Europeans.

The dream of the founder of the IOC, Pierre de Coubertin, was to build a better world through sport and to unite all people and countries with Olympic Values. Many have a similar vision for the European project today. Pierre de Coubertin would be very heartened to see how strongly rooted sport has become in society in Europe.

With the all challenges that we face today, we need this unifying power of sport and the social progress it can bring more than ever before. Therefore, let us join hands to make Europe a better place through sport.