



International
Olympic
Committee
The President

European Evening of Sport 2022
Brussels, 21 June 2022

After so many virtual meetings, I was really looking forward to being able to join you in Brussels and see all of you in person again. But as we have learned during the course of the last two years, even the best-laid plans are sometimes not enough in our unpredictable times. At least we have all had enough practice to get used to holding meetings virtually, so here we go again.

How much our world has changed since the last time we met for this European Evening of Sport. I cannot remember a time when we in Europe were facing so many truly existential crises simultaneously. The global pandemic is still very much a reality.

The climate crisis continues to be a global challenge of unprecedented proportions. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we are facing another major crisis.

The question for us in the Olympic community therefore is: what is the mission of sport in addressing all these crises and challenges?

The answer is: Our mission is to make the world a better place through sport.

This Olympic mission is not a political mission.

This Olympic mission is a humanitarian mission.

In these extremely difficult times, we all need this mission to promote peace and solidarity more than ever.

Our response to the war in Ukraine is only the most recent illustration of this.

The IOC and the Olympic Movement took immediate action after Russia, supported by Belarus, started this war. The position of the Olympic Movement on the war is outlined in my “Give Peace a Chance” message, which has been widely shared and appreciated by governments and organisations worldwide; and there I would like to also thank Commissioner Gabriel and the entire EU Commission for their support of the IOC position.

Because the Russian invasion of Ukraine represents such a blatant violation of the Olympic Truce and of our humanitarian mission, we had no choice but to take action. Our actions are twofold: sanctions and protective measures.

We strongly condemned this violation of the Olympic Truce just a couple of hours after the invasion happened. We sanctioned the Russian and Belarusian states and governments that are responsible for this war.

We did so by recommending that no international sporting events be held in Russia and Belarus; by not allowing national symbols to be displayed; and even for the first time in our Olympic history by withdrawing Olympic Orders that had been awarded to the President and to the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, we also had to take protective measures to ensure the integrity of international competitions.

We did so, and we needed to do so, because we had to realise that governments were starting to interfere in the responsibility of sports organisations by deciding who would be allowed to participate in international sports competitions.

This jeopardised the integrity and fairness of international competitions, and it jeopardised the autonomy of the sports organisations, without which there can be no truly global sport.

We did so because we have the very unfortunate experience of what happens when governments are taking these decisions based purely on political interests. We have been fighting for this principle in many circumstances. Let us take just some examples, for instance the calls from the government of Iran and some other countries to boycott athletes from Israel. Or the efforts of some European governments not to allow athletes from Kosovo to participate. Or the reactions to the conflict and even war between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

These are just a few examples which concern Europe. I could give you a much longer list when it comes to the situation beyond Europe.

To protect the integrity of the competitions and to protect international sport from full politicisation, we had to take protective measures, while acknowledging the realities, the emotions and the manifold consequences of the Russian war.

We had to take these protective measures with a very heavy heart – because we are in an unsolvable dilemma.

On the one hand, we cannot fully live up to our humanitarian mission, which is to unite the entire world in peaceful competition. On the other hand, the only way to protect this mission for the future was to recommend the non-participation of athletes just because of their nationality.

We have to sadly realise again that the time has not yet come to lift these recommendations.

This is why we hope, and I think we are all united in this, we hope that the day will come soon when we can live up to our Olympic mission again, when we can live in peace again. Once more, I call on all governments and intergovernmental organisations to respect and to support this unifying Olympic mission.

The Olympic Movement is a global movement. As a global organisation, with 206 National Olympic Committees, the IOC has received many questions with regard to our position on the war in Ukraine, in particular from among the around 150 NOCs whose governments have not imposed any sanctions on Russia and Belarus.

A number of them expressed their concern that the IOC was overstepping its mandate in taking its clear position and taking its strong measures against Russia and Belarus.

We were also accused of applying double standards because we would not take such a position and measures with regard to the unfortunately so many other wars and armed conflicts around the world.

The response to these allegations of double standards by the IOC is: first, the war in Ukraine is different because it is such a blatant violation of the Olympic Truce; second, the far-reaching political, social and economic consequences of the war make it a turning point in world history.

There is, indeed, a new world order in the making. The trends for this new world order we can already see on the horizon. This new world order will unfortunately be more divisive than the one we know.

This new world order may very well lead to what some describe as a “decoupling” of the different political and economic systems.

This unfortunate trend alerts us because it is going against our mission to unite. And it will make our task to navigate the Olympic Movement through these turbulent times even more complex. But, as always in times of crisis, we look for the opportunities. Our opportunity is that, exactly in these divisive and confrontational times, people around the world are looking for a unifying force. A unifying force that brings humankind together. And this the Olympic Movement can offer; we can offer with our mission to unite the entire world in peaceful competition.

A key element in being this unifying force is solidarity within our Olympic community.

We have been overwhelmed with an unprecedented outpouring of solidarity from across the Olympic Movement, in particular here in Europe, with regard to Ukraine.

To make this as efficient as possible, we have appointed the President of the NOC of Ukraine and IOC Member, Sergii Bubka, to lead the coordination of all our humanitarian efforts for Ukraine. I am sure that you will be impressed and touched by his remarks tonight.

The close cooperation we are enjoying with Ukraine is also reflected by the fact that we have tonight with us the Ukrainian Minister of Youth and Sport, Vadym Guttsait, whom I warmly welcome and greet here from Lausanne.

I am sure that I can speak on behalf of all of us by expressing to him our full solidarity with the Ukrainian Olympic community.

We are all looking forward and are working hard to see a strong, successful and proud team from the NOC of Ukraine at the Olympic Games Paris 2024.

Even though the war in Ukraine has dominated the headlines at least here in Europe over the past weeks and months, other issues like the global pandemic or climate change have not gone away.

With the pandemic, our world has already changed dramatically. One of the things that the pandemic has made clearer than ever is just how important sport and physical activity are for healthy living.

A recent WHO report warns that, in Europe, overweight and obesity rates have reached epidemic proportions. A shocking 59 per cent of adults and almost one in three children are overweight or living with obesity in Europe today. The report further highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded this obesity epidemic.

We have also learned that obesity and cardiovascular predispositions and other non-communicable diseases were the reason for the vast majority of mortality during the pandemic. For all these non-communicable diseases and predispositions, sport is the low-cost, high-impact tool par excellence for prevention.

For all these reasons, we can truly say: Sport can save lives.

This also brings a responsibility – the responsibility for us to put sport at the service of the public health care system. We are doing so through our partnership with the WHO. We are doing so by improving access to sport, by supporting Sport for All programmes and through many more initiatives that reach many millions of people.

We are supporting the Organising Committees of the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and the Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 to improve the health and well-being of their populations through sport.

In this context, I would like to express my great appreciation and my gratitude to Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, who has initiated the “Healthy Lifestyles for All” campaign and the European Week of Sport. Commissioner Gabriel, with this you are setting a shining example for efficient cooperation between governmental authorities and civil society for the benefit of people and their health.

You yourself summarised this cooperation in an excellent way when you said: “The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the importance of sport for our societies, promoting not only the physical activity and well-being of EU citizens, but also contributing to Europe’s economic development and social inclusion, as well as to major societal challenges.” – End of quote.

All of us here in Europe and around the world have to prepare ourselves for the post-pandemic future.

In this context a strong European Sport Model is key to enabling the public authorities to deliver on their economic and social policy agenda in this post-pandemic world.

We are pleased that the recent “Study on the European sport model”, commissioned by the EU, confirms that there is broad consensus on the essence and soul of the European Sport Model. The study shows that its defining features – financial solidarity, openness of competitions, voluntary work, as well as autonomy and good governance of sport organisations – are recognised as essential pillars for sport to contribute to society in Europe. This recognition is vitally important to preserve sport as a public good. It is in stark contrast to a purely profit-driven model which undermines the benefits of this unique European Sport Model.

In these difficult times we are living through, we need this values- and solidarity-based European Sport Model more than ever.

Because even once we have overcome the health crisis caused by the pandemic, we will have to face the far-reaching social, financial, economic and political consequences. These consequences of the pandemic are even further exacerbated by the consequences of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, our cooperation with governments and intergovernmental organisations based on the principles of the European Sport Model and their respect for our responsible autonomy are even more essential.

This responsible autonomy also means the participation of athletes in the decision-making of sports organisations. I can proudly say that, in the Olympic Movement, we have such athlete representation based on democratic elections. They are elected by their peers. The politicians among us might say by their base.

This makes them the truly legitimate representatives of the athletes. I trust that the EU Commission and all the EU Member States, which are themselves built on democratic principles, fully respect and support this democratic legitimacy of the athletes' commissions of the Olympic Movement.

Athletes' commissions and many individual athletes are also a driving force to address the global climate crisis.

What is true for addressing this challenge is true for addressing any challenge. Bringing about change has to start with yourself.

This is why the IOC is already today a carbon-neutral organisation.

To make this possible, Olympic House, where I am right now, our new IOC headquarters, is essential because it is internationally certified as one of the most sustainable buildings in the world.

Going further, the IOC is committed to becoming a climate-positive organisation by 2024. To achieve this, we are committed to reducing our carbon emissions by 30 per cent until 2024 and by 50 per cent until 2030.

All upcoming editions of the Olympic Games are already committed to being carbon-neutral. But going further again, the IOC will require all Olympic Games to be climate-positive at the latest from 2030 onwards.

We in sport are always ambitious, we always want to do better, and therefore we very much welcome and appreciate the effort of the Olympic Games organisers in Paris to reach this goal of being climate-positive already in 2024.

To even overcompensate our emissions, we are partnering with the United Nations to plant an Olympic Forest with about 355,000 trees in Sub-Saharan Africa. But this project is not only about planting trees. It also comprises a programme to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people living in 90 villages in Senegal and Mali.

The IOC will continue to support International Sports Federations and National Olympic Committees in their transition towards carbon neutrality and I hope soon carbon-positivity.

For this purpose, we have together with UN Climate initiated the UN Sport for Climate Action Framework, which as of today includes 100 EU-based sports organisations among its about 300 signatories worldwide.

In this context of sustainable development, we applaud the priority of the upcoming Czech Presidency of the EU to promote sustainable planning for sports infrastructure. This is also a topic which is key for the IOC and the entire Olympic Movement. We are engaging with Organising Committees, International Federations as well as

representatives of the architecture and construction industries to exchange best practices and innovative solutions.

Just last month, the IOC released a unique report, whose standards were independently certified by KPMG, showing that 85 per cent of all permanent Olympic venues since the Olympic Games Athens 1896 remain in use. This figure even increases to 92 per cent if one looks at Olympic venues of the 21st century.

We also continue to deliver on our long-standing commitment to achieving gender equality in and through sport. Knowing the high priority gender equality has on the agenda of Commissioner Gabriel, we were honoured by the invitation to contribute to the work of the EU expert group on gender equality.

At the IOC, we are pursuing gender equality with full engagement. For participation in the Olympic Games, we can proudly say: we did it.

At the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, we made history for gender equality in sport, with the highest-ever representation of female athletes at the Olympic Games with 48 per cent women participating. We achieved this by setting the appropriate sports qualification quotas. We achieved this by increasing the number of mixed events.

We also changed the IOC's protocol guidelines to allow one female athlete and one male athlete from each NOC to carry their flag jointly during the Olympic Games Opening Ceremony. Eighty-nine per cent of the delegations took advantage of this new policy. They sent a strong signal to their home countries, where in many cases gender equality is not part of their traditional cultures.

We also called on all National Olympic Committees to include at least one woman in their teams for the first time ever.

For Paris, we are ensuring not only gender equality. For Paris, we are going for full gender parity. To achieve this, the IOC has further improved the sports qualification quota and the sports programme of the Olympic Games. As a result, we will have the same number of male and female athletes, and we will have the same number of events.

With regard to promoting women in leadership positions within sport organisations, yes, we have made great progress, but no, we are not there yet.

Thanks to our reforms, we have increased the percentage of female IOC Members from 21 per cent to 38 per cent since 2013. In IOC Commissions, we have increased female membership from 20 per cent to 48 per cent.

We are undertaking all these actions and initiatives based on our Olympic Agenda 2020+5 reforms, in order to contribute to the realisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

This Olympic Agenda 2020+5 is a result of the lessons we learned from the pandemic: We need more solidarity. More solidarity within societies and more solidarity among societies.

This is why we have even amended our historical Olympic motto, Faster, Higher, Stronger.

We are inspired and led now by the new Olympic motto:

Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together

Plus Vite, Plus Haut, Plus Fort – Ensemble

Schneller, Höher, Stärker – Gemeinsam

Citius, Altius, Fortius – Communiter

In the spirit of this new Olympic motto, I am extending the hand of the Olympic Movement to the European Union, to work together for a more peaceful, healthy, resilient and sustainable future.

Thank you very much.