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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 110
31 March 1953

Participation of Exiles in the Olympic Games

Report[1]
Relations with European Non-Member Countries
Rapporteur: Mr Karl Georg PFLEIDERER, Germany

1. 1953 - 5th Session - First part

A. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

1. On 25th May, 1952 the Assembly decided to include in its agenda and to refer to its Special Committee to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe t h e following question : " Request to the International Olympic Committee to consider any suggestions which would enable political exiles to take part in the Olympic Games in future years. "

2. The Special Committee has given careful consideration to this problem. It was not, of course, thought to have the same importance as the many intricate political and economic problems which confront the Assembly. But your Committee believed that if exiled sportsmen from Central and Eastern European countries were permitted to compete in the Olympic Games, this would contribute greatly to maintaining among them a feeling of attachment to their national traditions.

3. Your Committee instructed the Secretary- General to approach the International Olympic Committee, and this was the beginning of an exchange of letters with its Chancellor, M. Otto Mayer, to whose unfailing kindness in supplying information the Committee desires to pay its grateful tribute.

4. M. Otto. Mayer has agreed to the release of the correspondence, which is published as an appendix to this report. It will be seen t h a t the Special Committee based its attitude on the first fundamental principle of the Charter of the Olympic Games, which states : " The Olympic Games are held every four years and assemble amateurs of all nations in fair and equal competition under conditions which are designed to be as perfect as possible. No discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of colour, religion or politics. It appeared to the Committee that the exclusion of certain sportsmen because they were political refugees or exiles was not in accordance with this rule

5. The Chancellor replied t h a t the Executive Committee of t h e International Olympic Committee had studied the problem raised by the Assembly with the utmost sympathy. It had, moreover, heard a long statement from M. Thomas de Marffy-Mantuano, representing the union of Free Eastern European Sportsmen. Unfortunately, the principle mentioned by the Special Committee had to be read in conjunction with Rules 31, 39 and 45. These state, in particular, that only nationals of a country are eligible to represent that country, that invitations to take part in the Olympic Games are addressed to the recognised National Olympic Committee of each country and that only National Olympic Committees can enter competitors in the Olympic Games. Since exiled athletes were not in a position to comply with these rules, and for many other reasons of a delicate nature, the International Olympic Committee was unable to alter the rules at the present time.

6. The Special Committee learnt of this decision with deep regret but decided to request the Chancellor that, in the event of any future revision of. t h e Olympic rules, the opportunity should be taken to review the problem of the participation of exiled athletes.

7. The Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee has undertaken to keep the Special Committee informed of any future discussions of this problem within his Committee.

8. The Special Committee proposes to the Assembly that this Report which was unanimously agreed to together with the correspondence between the Special Committee and the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee should be communicated to the organisations of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe with which the Special Committee is in correspondence as a modest indication in a strictly limited context of the efforts of the Special Committee to fulfil its mandate from the Assembly.

B. Draft Order of the Assembly

The Assembly,

Having taken note of the Report of the Special Committee to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe, Doc. 110

Instructs the Special Committee to communicate the report to the organisations of refugees from Central and Eastern European countries with which it is in correspondence.

Appendix APPENDIX

Letter sent by the Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Europe to the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee on 11th July, 1952

Sir,

It has been brought to my notice that the question of the participation of exiles in the Olympic Games was recently placed on the Agenda of the International Olympic Committee. I was also informed that the question would be debated at a meeting of the International Olympic Committee to be held in Helsinki.

I should now be obliged to you if you could let me know, first, if the question was indeed debated at a recent meeting, and, secondly, what decision, if any, was taken.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

Signed : F. CARACCIOLO,

Deputy Secretary-General,

Clerk of the Assembly

Reply of the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee to the Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Europe on 8th August, 1952

Dear Sir,

Your esteemed letter dated 11th July, 1952 reached me in Helsinki where our Committee held several meetings during the Olympic Games.

The question of the participation of exiles and refugees in the Olympic Games was, indeed, raised in the course of our Helsinki Session. Mr. Marffy, representing the Union of Free Eastern European Sportsmen having its seat in New York, gave us a complete exposé on this matter.

After a long and sympathetic discussion, it was decided that the idea of exiled sportsmen participating could not be entertained owing to the complexity of this problem. In fact, the Committee is responsible for the Olympic Games in co-operation with the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations, and the problem is rendered very delicate by the fact that all their rules have to be taken into consideration. Our Executive Committee has also heard the delegates of the International Sports Federations on this problem, but it was not possible to find a satisfactory solution.

Finally, and on the proposal of Lord Aberdare, our member for Great Britain, a vote of sincere sympathy was addressed to exiled sportsmen, together with our regrets that no way could be found to give them satisfaction and to enable them to take part in the Olympic Games.

I am at your disposal for any further information and have the honour to remain,

Yours sincerely,

Signed : Otto MAYER,

Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee

Letter sent by Major Tufton Beamish, Chairman of the Special Committee to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe, to the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee on 30th September, 1952

Sir,

The Deputy Secretary-General of the Council of Europe has passed to me, as Chairman of the Special Committee of the Consultative Assembly to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe, your letter of 8th August, 1952, on the above subject.

The contents of your letter were communicated to the members of the Special Committee at a recent meeting, and the Committee has asked me to write to you seeking some further information, so that more consideration can be given to this matter.

I shall be most grateful if you would kindly enlarge upon the information contained in your letter of the 8th August, from which the members of my Committee are interested to note that the question of the participation of exiles and refugees in the Olympic Games has recently been discussed at your Helsinki session.

I shall much appreciate it if you can let me know on what grounds it was decided that the participation of exiles could not be taken into consideration. The only explanation of this in your letter is that this decision was taken ' owing to the complexity of this request'. Your letter also refers to ' various rules which have to be taken into consideration '. It is not clear, however, to what rules you refer. As I write this letter I have in front of me a copy of the Olympic Rules printed in Lausanne in 1949.

The first fundamental principle, as you know, reads as follows :

' The Olympic Games are held every four years and assemble amateurs of all nations in fair and equal competition under conditions which are designed to be as perfect as possible. No discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of colour, religion or politics '.

From this fundamental principle alone it would appear that the exclusion of sportsmen simply because they are political exiles or refugees is not in accordance with the first fundamental principle on which the Olympic Games are organised.

The Committee of which I am Chairman is grateful to you for your kindness in saying that you will be glad to provide us with any further information, and it is in the light of this offer that I have been asked to write to you in the above vein.

I have the honour...

Signed : Tufton BEAMISH,

Chairman of the Special Committee

Reply of the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee to letter sent by Major Tufton Beamish 2nd October, 1952

Dear Sir,

I am in receipt of your esteemed letter dated 30th September.

In accordance with your wishes, I am pleased to give you additional information to thai; contained in my letter of 8th August, 1952.

It is quite correct that the first fundamental principle of our Charter is that the Olympic Games are held every four years and shall assemble amateurs of all nations etc., and that no discrimination is allowed against any country or person on grounds of colour, religion or politics. However, this principle has to be considered in relation to the rest of our rules, as I shall explain below.

If you consider these rules, you will find that we speak about amateurs of a nation. By this we mean that an athlete, to be able to take part in the Games, must be a member of a National Sports Organisation, and that he must also be a citizen of the country concerned. This is, unfortunately, not so in the case of refugees and exiled athletes. You will find this point mentioned in Article 6 of our rules which says

" Only nationals of a country are qualified to compete for that country in the Olympic Games. "

Further in Article 31, it is said :

" The invitations to take part in the Games are sent out by the Organising Committee on the instructions of the International Olympic Committee. They are addressed to the recognised National Olympic Committees of each country, etc. "

A far more important rule is that contained in the long Article 39, which I do not cpiote here, as you have our rules to hand.

May I also mention Article 45 which is also relevant.

I need hardly mention the question of the amateur status of competitors which is fundamental to our organisation. By whose rules would the exiles be governed if they were not affiliated either to a National Organisation or to an International Federation? How could the International Olympic Committee have any possibility of control?

Besides the above-mentioned rules, the Olympic Games are also governed by the National Olympic Committees' rules, and, where technical matters are concerned, by the International Federations.

We have taken up this problem with both organisations, and, in spite of the great sympathy which was shown for exiled athletes, one and all recognised that the question is of too complex a nature. If the International Olympic Committees were to allow groups of outsiders to be admitted as members, a precedent might be created which would lead to all sorts of complications and, in the first place, it would mean a revision of all the existing rules of the International Olympic Committees, the National Olympic Committees and the International Federations. As you will realise, the problem does not concern our Committee alone, for the International Federations are free and independent bodies. Furthermore, the term " apatride " is very difficult to define. If we adopt this policy, it is bound to create serious difficulties.

This brief explanation takes into account the long debates which took place during our meetings in Helsinki last July. The question had previously been very carefully studied by our Executive Committee, and the matter was approached, I repeat, with great sympathy.

As our President, Mr. Avery Brundage from Chicago, pointed out during a meeting, there is always the possibility of aliens becoming naturalized.

Another less important point was also raised : will the refugees whose case is being considered now still be young enough to take part in the 1956 and 1960 Games?

As you will realise, the problem has been thoroughly studied. It has been considered that giving satisfaction to the exiles would mean changing the complete machinery of our whole world organisation, and this is impossible.

We consider it most important that you should be fully informed on that matter and we feel that you will recognise the great difficulties with which our Committee has been faced in considering this delicate problem. We have treated it, as we felt it ought to be treated, with the utmost understanding and sympathy.

Yours very sincerely,

Signed : Otto MAYEH,

Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee.

Letter sent by Major Tufton Beamish, M. C., M. P., Chairman of the Special Committee to watch over the interests of European nations not represented in the Council of Europe to the Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee on 17th January, 1953

Dear Sir,

At a meeting held on 14th January, 1953, my Committee resumed consideration of the question of the participation of exiles in the Olympic Games in the light of your letter dated 2nd October, 1952, which, as you will recall, I acknowledged from London.

My Committee wishes to thank you for the full information which you have so kindly provided. It was, however, with deep regret that we learnt of the great difficulties in the way of admitting exiled athletes to compete in the Olympic Games. My Committee expressed great sympathy for these most unfortunate people, and we would ask you whether the question could not be kept under review, so that, should a revision of the Olympic rules be envisaged at a future date, the opportunity should be taken to reconsider the problem of the participation of exiled athletes.

In accordance with the rules of procedure of the Consultative Assembly, my Committee will have to table a report on this question at the next Ordinary Session. I propose that, subject to your approval, this should include the letters which we have exchanged, and for that reason I should be grateful if you would give your consent to the publication of our correspondence.

I hope that you will be so kind as to keep me informed of any future discussion of this problem within your Committee.

Signed : Tufton BEAMISH,

Chairman of the Special Committee

Reply of the Chancellor of the Internalioncd Olympic Committee to the letter of the Chairman of the Special Committee on 19th January, 1953

Dear Sir,

We are in receipt of your esteemed letter dated January 17th, and inform you that we have no objection to your publishing our correspondence in the report which you are required to table at your next Ordinary Session.

If this is possible, we should be grateful for a copy of your report for our archives and also for submission to our Executive Committee.

I shall not fail to keep you informed of any development in all matters regarding the question of exiled athletes, should discussions on this problem take place within our Committee in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Signed : Otto MAYER,

Chancellor of the International Olympic Committee