

Dear friends, colleagues, and Congress delegates,

It is an honor to address you for the first time at our Federation's Congress, taking place this year in Finland—a country with deep and proud traditions in winter sports.

Thanks to the hard work of our colleague Jani Tilvi and his team, I am confident we are about to experience two well-organized and productive days. We will set new goals and agree on the work that lies ahead, especially as we approach an important Olympic year.

The past year has been full of significant events and major decisions.

Let me first highlight the most impactful among them.

During the Paris Olympic Games, the International Olympic Committee Session presented and approved two host cities for the next Winter Olympic Games at the same time: the French Alps in 2030, with the well-known Olympic track in La Plagne, and Salt Lake City in 2034. These decisions offer a clear path forward—not just for luge, but for all Olympic winter sports.

Another key decision, especially relevant to us, followed soon after. The Winter Youth Olympic Games in 2028 will take place in Italy. Luge, along with skeleton and bobsleigh, will compete on the future Olympic track in Cortina.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to work as a member of the IOC Future Host Commission, representing all winter Olympic federations, and contribute to the preparation of these important decisions.

What do these developments mean for our Federation?

First, they offer us direction and clarity as we plan for the future—particularly in relation to our sport's biggest stage: the Olympic Games.

They also outline specific tasks we must address within our Slide 2026 Strategy and its continuation in Slide 2034.

This includes advancing our efforts in sports programming, technical innovation, athlete quotas and participation, marketing, television and social media outreach, safety, and ensuring equal opportunities.

Last year, our Federation officially joined the Sports for Climate Action Framework. This marks an important step, making us a recognized partner in sustainability—most notably in cooperation with the IOC.

We are continuing the work we began earlier, building on a solid foundation. We're embracing modern technologies, aligning with global sustainability trends, and have already built a significant database under the leadership of Julian von Schleinitz. The working group has developed software that helps us plan and optimize our event calendar. This reduces our carbon footprint around the world.

When we speak about the future, we must recognize that the Olympic Games—and the events organized by our Federation—will evolve in both form and scale.

Today, we must rely on the tracks and organizers we already have. That means using our existing resources wisely, and managing them with efficiency and care.

In this context, I am pleased to reflect on a successful season—on both artificial and natural tracks. Across three continents, we saw high-quality event organization, exciting and competitive performances from our athletes, improved television production, and continued growth across social media platforms. All of this was made possible through effective teamwork.

I am especially pleased that we returned to Olympic tracks in Asia, with events held in PyeongChang, Korea, and in Beijing-Yanqing, China.

From a sport perspective, our World Championships in Whistler and Kühtai were great successes. I would particularly like to highlight the innovations in television production and the side programs in Kühtai, which offered a glimpse into the future of our sport and showcased its accessibility—especially for young people.

A big thank you to all our event organizers and track operators for their highly professional contribution to our shared work, as we look back on the past season.

All I have mentioned so far is all part of the serious groundwork for the upcoming season—the Olympic season.

It must be said that the most critical point in this regard was, and still is, the construction of the track in Cortina.

What the Milano-Cortina Organizing Committee and the construction company Simico have accomplished—thanks to the support of the Italian government—is unprecedented in Olympic preparation history. They made a swift transition from a potential Plan B to actual track construction. The goal was met, and the pre-homologation was completed exactly on schedule, with a full group of athletes testing the Olympic track under their considerable responsibility.

We are proud of and grateful to the entire pre-homologation team, who worked precisely as a single mechanism together with the IOC, MiCo, and SiMiCo teams. We are also thankful to the ice masters, who, despite the challenges, ensured the ice quality was both safe and of the highest standard.

That being said, we cannot yet say with a say with full confidence that everything is in perfect order. Half of the necessary work has been completed, but the remaining tasks are just as crucial. I sincerely hope that the same level of commitment and excellence demonstrated so far will carry through to the final stages.

This is vital in ensuring that the planned international training week and test events will be held at the highest possible level, as scheduled in the calendar.

The Cortina track, the renewed Königssee track, and the completed reconstruction of Igls will undoubtedly provide an even stronger foundation for the future development of our sport.

In line with our strategy, I would also like to highlight the creation of regional and continental training centers, combining the resources of FIL, national federations, and the IOC.

A great example of this cooperation is our ongoing partnership with the Korean national federation and the Foundation. Thanks to this collaboration, joint development programs focused on the Asian region have been successfully running for several years at the Olympic track.

After my visit to Salt Lake City last year with the IOC Future Host Commission, and after seeing firsthand the progress made and hearing the organizers' presentations I see great potential in this direction —especially as we prepare for the 2034 Games. Given the consistently positive cooperation with USA Luge, I am confident we will soon reach an agreement on establishing a joint support center in North America.

In Europe, this dialogue must continue in Bludenz, Igls, Oberhof, and Sigulda, working closely with the national federations and track operators in Germany, Austria, and Latvia.

It is absolutely vital to expand training opportunities for young athletes as much as possible.

At this point, I want to shift focus to a new area for us—**Alpine Luge**. This initiative will play a key role in engaging more young people in our sport, particularly in countries without their own artificial tracks.

Thank you to our Natural Track colleagues who have already done outstanding work in developing and testing potential competition formats and sports equipment.

The development of Alpine Luge is crucial for the future of our sport. It could also open doors for participation in the World University Games, Continental Youth Olympic Festivals, and the World School Games.

This presents a significant opportunity to increase the number of athletes in our sport and expand our geographic reach.

To ensure the success of our sport, we must also engage in discussions here at this Congress. The Executive Board has already begun talks about securing high-quality TV broadcasts and, of course, securing adequate funding.

Until now, part of the responsibility has fallen on the event organizers, with a significant portion covered by the FIL budget. We are seeing that managing this process is becoming increasingly difficult as the costs for TV production and broadcasting continue to rise.

In Europe, we currently have a fixed agreement for broadcasting rights, which provides us with a steady income base through our partnership with the company Sport A.

However, the situation remains open and undefined in the Americas, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand.

Work in this area has already started under the leadership of our Secretary General, Dwight Bell, and in combination with the marketing activities led by Vice President Thomas Schwab.

I am hopeful that very soon we will be able to report concrete results and new opportunities. Securing this will bring in additional funding and advertising possibilities, which is crucial as we enter the Olympic season and begin the next Olympic cycle.

Although small, some changes have already been made, creating more opportunities for athlete sponsors and National Federations. For example, advertising space on helmets has been increased.

We are also actively working on a unified media strategy. This will be one of the key areas in our new strategy plan, SLIDE 2034. Work on this plan will begin in September, with small working groups focusing on each section.

The strategy will continue to evolve in close alignment with the needs of our sport, the goals and tasks set by all of you, and your valuable recommendations. It will also reflect the IOC's strategic documents, especially AGENDA 2020+5, with a strong emphasis on engaging young audiences.

This plan will clearly define the development of artificial tracks, the work of National Teams in the classic format, and the precise and clear financial support for both. It will also include support for the new Alpine Luge discipline.

This is the only way we can attract the largest possible audience to our sport, while expanding our network of supporters—both globally and within the Olympic movement.

We work closely with the other seven Winter Olympic federations and maintain ongoing contact with the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations.

There are many common areas of focus, and often the best solutions come from combining our efforts—sharing experiences and learning from the most advanced ideas and practices from our colleagues. We also share our own expertise, especially on topics such as:

- Athlete rights and safety
- The future of the Olympic Games
- The Olympic qualification system and athlete quotas
- The use of digital tools
- And the use of ChatGPT and modern technologies into daily training.

We can only achieve our goals and fulfill our mission in today's complex and challenging world if we respect the importance of teamwork and the shared Olympic and human values.

Thank you, colleagues, for your daily contributions to the continued development of our Federation.

A special thank you to our family members, whose support makes it possible for us to do this important work for the good of the sport.

Thank you to our sponsors, supporters, and partners—without your involvement, the growth and success of luge would not be possible.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues at the FIL office, especially Executive Director Christoph Schweiger, for ensuring the high quality of our office work. My sincere gratitude goes to my closest colleagues—Secretary General Dwight Bell and Vice President for Finance Geoff Balm. This past year has been particularly challenging, especially with the restructuring of our Federation's funding system.

Thank you to my colleagues on the Executive Board for your productive proposals and creative discussions, and to the Athletes' Commission for providing valuable insights and accurately reflecting the opinions of our athletes.

I wish each of you success in achieving your goals, particularly in this Olympic year.

Our strength lies in our unity!

Yours sincerely,
Einars Fogelis