

Dear friends and colleagues,

On November 20 last year, you entrusted our federations management to a renewed and expanded team by electing a new president, Secretary General Dwight Bell, and board member Sorin Buta. During this time much was unknown, and many things happened for the first time.

The world was heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the current routine came to a standstill, new ways were found to achieve the set goals, and we were unfortunately forced to make this historic turning point by using the opportunities offered by modern technology, like ZOOM- system to hold most of our meetings.

At this point, our priorities were clear:

- In the short term, we should provide an opportunity for athletes to achieve their athletic goals on the way to the Beijing 2022 Olympic Games;
 - o It's the FIL's leadership obligation to do everything, that all athletes can take part at the Olympic qualification process, without any entry restrictions by Government Authorities, as long they're vaccinated against COVID-19.
- In the long term, we should ensure strength and sustainability of the historical values of our FIL federation in the general society, as well as in the Olympic movement.

The beginning of last season was like a dark tunnel with many unknown factors waiting for us on the way. The easiest way – to wait, to cancel the planned competition, only to prolong the uncertainty. The more difficult way - to find immediate solutions for implementing upcoming seasons plan that was previously approved. Thanks to a team work, the FIL Hygiene concept was developed, the course of the competition was re-planned, and the competencies and responsibilities of all stakeholders were re-regulated.

Today, I can only thank all the athletes and national federations for their high professionalism and discipline, our excellent FIL team - Marie Luise Rainer, Christian Eigentler, Christoph Schweiger, Peter Knauseder, Andreas Costiglioni, Herbert Schwarz – who, by taking on new responsibilities, successfully ensured the coordination of the FIL plan and the complex compliance with the COVID-19 procedure and seasonal testing.

I would also like to recognize our partners - competition organizers in Germany, Austria, Italy, Latvia and Swiss where, in cooperation with government bodies, a safe way was found to ensure full range of competitions of our calendars in Artificial Track and Natural Track, including junior class in Natural track.

Unfortunately, we faced a number of setbacks and losses. Due to government restrictions in Asia and America, FIL was forced to reschedule its race calendar to

Europe only, and youth and junior races in the Artificial Track had to be cancelled. Regarding youth and juniors, undeniably, we need to fill this gap in the upcoming 2021-2022 season.

However, in general, the past year and the newly established system allows us to look towards the future with much more hope, especially concerning the development of luge sports. I can safely say that the light is at the end of the dark tunnel. Things that had never been on FIL's agenda before, were done and have left their mark on our development forever.

There's a reason why all of the organizers of the competition last season received the highest rating - Category 1. They all did a fantastic job, despite the difficulties they had to deal with.

FIL once again had no positive Doping case in 2020/21 season, although a lot of in- and out of competition tests were carried out. Nevertheless, our responsibilities and the work load we have to deal with, in anti-doping matters, is increasing year by year. Especially anti-doping education will play a more important role. We're working very closely with International Testing Agency (ITA) to implement such seminars for our luge athletes and coaches.

Most of the anti-doping work is going on "behind-the-scenes" because of data protection requirements. I explicitly would like to thank Diana Springl, Dr. Christian Krähe and Christoph Schweiger. It requires constant hard work to keep the status FIL has.

Looking back over the past year, it must be said that FIL was not the only one that had to implement changes, for example, with a new strategic plan "SLIDE 2026". The entire world changed during this pandemic, and is still adjusting people's sports and leisure habits.

During the season, especially in the Alps region, with most ski resorts closed to public access, we saw an increase in luge activities in the society.

We must take this into consideration, especially when thinking about broadening the base of our sport by involving a wider range of people, in particular younger generations.

Luge has been just one small part of everything that has been happening in the global community and, in our case, particularly in sport.

On March 12, 2021, the IOC session approved the Olympic Agenda 2020 + 5 prepared by the IOC Executive Board. The 15 recommendations that contain in this document will have a major impact on the development of sport worldwide in the near future.

The strategic plan SLIDE 2026 adopted by our Federation in 2020 is fully in line with the core values included in the Olympic Agenda:

- Strengthening Olympic ideals, sustainability, role of athletes, rights and responsibilities, involvement of the best athletes in society, safe sport and

protection of athletes, digital connection to society, development of virtual sport, good governance, and gender equality.

These are the main areas in which our colleagues are currently engaged in working groups, organically developing and synchronizing our 'luge' policy with the common sports policy and the Olympic philosophy around the world.

I am certain that the reports prepared by the working groups will be a good basis for the development of our sport, especially in terms of our place and role in the Olympic Movement.

In 2022, during our Congress in Latvia, we will have to make decisions on a lot of recommendations, of the proposals that are made by our working groups. This will lead in IRO changes and changes of the FIL statutes. I kindly ask you to be open minded and support the working groups – recommending changes is not always an easy- going process.

Having said that – we shouldn't lose the sight of the stability of FIL finances. That could lead into a step - by step implementation of working groups recommendations. Everything must be financially justified and covered before we start an implementation or changing process.

Work has already begun successfully in the field of technology, working on technical solutions to make the luge sport more learnable, more available material and financially accessible, and, of course, easier.

In the field of sport, attractiveness and the development of new competition formats, especially those that are attractive to young people, are certainly important.

In the digital environment, we have taken a big step forward, significantly expanding the field of information for the promotion of luge sport. Here I would like to say a big thank you to Margit Dengler-Paar. Very intensive work is currently taking place in the field of visual media, and thanks to the contribution of colleagues Dwight Bell, Britta Semmler-Dzoesch, Thomas Schwab, and FIL office, cooperation with our long-term partner 'Sport A' is developing successfully. As well as new projects for luge sport coverage on Olympic Channel and NBC, which will positively affect sport live-streaming around the world and will make reports from our events much more widely available than ever before, while supporting the development of new marketing directions and attracting sponsors.

I would like to note the tremendous cooperation with our long-term partners RGS, 'Infront' and 'UVEX'. Without you, we would not have achieved so much, and without your participation, we would not be able to shape our future development.

Today, the youth phase is very important, as it is being successfully developed in cooperation with the IOC, especially during the previous Youth Olympics Games in Lausanne 2020. Luge sport has shown its ability to react to the introduction of new disciplines in the Olympic program - in this case, Women's Doubles, ensuring gender equality in our sport.

At the moment, the road to YOG 2024 Gangwon, January 19 to February 4, is very important. Building a strong youth team within our Federation, with strong principles of gender equality and continental representation. In terms of development, I think it would be imperative to have a joint support program in Asia, cooperating with the potential of Japan, Korea, China and countries of Oceania. In Europe, the newly opened center in Bludenz, Austria is significant to us, where, thanks to the successful cooperation of the Austrian federation, local government and municipalities, we now have a center for successful development of programs for young athletes from the Central European region. Base for such a development, when considering Eastern Europe and Scandinavia, has been created in Sigulda, Latvia. In America, I see lots of space for opportunities by utilizing the potential of the USA luge training center in Lake Placid.

Certainly, the team that will start in Gangwon 2024 will form a large part of our future potential, including the representation in Milan-Cortina 2026. Active work is currently underway in cooperation with both the 2026 Olympic Organizing Committee and the IOC, the local provinces of Veneto / South Tyrol / and two federations FIL and IBSF. I hope that in the near future Milano 2026 will be able to present a structured development plan, which refers specifically to our sports – luge, bobsleigh, and skeleton.

From the point of view of FIL, I can surely say that having a operational track in Cortina d'Ampezzo will be of great benefit to all sports, especially in terms of future development. At the same time, we must realize that our federation, like other Olympic luge sports, will have a responsibility to uphold the principles of sustainability and legacy.

With regard to the Milano-Cortina 2026 Games, the main priority in terms of sport is gender equality, compliance with the IOC-defined athlete quota of 2,900 athletes, and endorse the principles of sustainability and legacy.

FIL is currently preparing a proposal to IOC for the discipline of Women's Doubles being part of the Winter Olympic Games 2026.

However, we must consider the current basic principles set out by the IOC:

- 2900 athletes in winter games;
- No new additional sports venues.

This means that, with respect to what our colleagues have achieved so far, the main pre-requisite, which will be stated in the application for Natural luge, is to have additional athletes' quotas, exceeding the 2900 limit set out by IOC.

In conclusion, I am certain that the experience we have gained with our summer IF colleagues in the outstanding games of Tokyo 2020 will allow us to successfully create a playbook for Beijing 2022 and share rewarding games with our partners this season. Our main goal - to ensure maximum safety in these difficult circumstances, taking into account the interests of athletes, and demonstrating the unity of sports to society.

Together, we can learn the right lessons for our future. There is a reason that the Olympic motto today reads:

'Faster, higher, stronger – together'

We will do our utmost to join forces for a better future society.

Thank you, colleagues, for your cooperation and contribution.

Respectfully, E.F.