

71st FIL Congress
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Bucharest

Dear friends and colleagues,

Looking back on the first year after the election of Congress, it must be noted that our team closely strengthened the path to realize priorities outlined in our strategy, 'SLIDE 2026'. It must be said that the prevailing geopolitical situation in the world has not radically improved, and this fact has undoubtedly left and continues to leave a significant impact on sports development. Despite the efforts of sports organizations and politicians, there is still a threat of the global sports movement splitting into two parts, actively looking for allies on the side that, as a minimum, does not condemn aggression, which pretends not to see the consequences of violence in the world and its impact on the development of humanity. And we, too, unfortunately, will have to return to this situation and the specific decisions of our Federation at this year's Congress.

I am pleased that by consolidating all the strength and energy of our community, we have had a very successful first season after the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022/2023 is a return to normal competition mode. Competitions and training were held without the strict restrictions previously introduced. Life returned to normal, and most importantly, we were with our fans, who provided fantastic support during the competitions. This was brilliantly demonstrated in the main competition of this season - the World Championship in Oberhof. An excellently organized event, which was a real culmination of a series of excellently organized events - FIL World Cups and Junior competitions.

We must mention the project FIL Studio, which actively allowed us to show luge sports differently. Thanks to the carefully planned competition calendar, we achieved good indicators in the TV ratings. Indeed, the FIL Live Streaming broadcast produced in parallel is a tool through which we can reach our audience worldwide.

Thanks to social media activities, our Federation has made the most significant increase in at least two positions in the past season compared to other winter sports federations working together in the AIOWF association.

This is a platform where currently eight winter sports federations are represented; a platform where problems and issues, which are primarily related to the Olympic Movement and illustrating our interests in it, are jointly addressed.

Current events are:

- A place in the Olympic movement and preparations for Milano Cortina 2026,
- Gender representation (gender equality) and corresponding quotas,
- Rights and funding of federations,
- The future concept of the Olympic Games and the sustainability of winter sports,
- The influence of the current world political situation on global sports development.

We highly value this cooperation, especially the visit of the IOC delegation led by its President Thomas Bach to Oberhof during this year's World Championships.

The sporting issue of the moment is sports facilities - our competition venue in Cortina. During this year, with the involvement of experts from two Federations (FIL and IBSF), continuous work is being done on the preparation of the project so that after the dismantling of the old track, at the beginning of July at the latest, the construction works of the Olympic sports facility will begin in three stages at the same time. This year, this has been a topic of discussion in the working group of the Coordination Commission between the Organizing Committee, the IOC and the Federations. Yes, there are currently several questions that we must jointly find an answer to, including sustainability. For our Federation, this is undeniably a significant object, thinking about the future, not only because of its geographical location, important for Italy, which historically has been a stable support point for luge sports for all 66 years of the FIL's existence.

The progress so far allows us to say that our set time for pre-homologation will be implemented at the end of February 2025. I emphasized the importance of this issue following the decision of the FIL Presidium. A new position was introduced - FIL Event Director for Milano Cortina 2026 - in which Marie-Luise Rainer has started active work, ensuring operative daily communication and information exchange. The answers, collected by the international federations after Beijing 2022, are currently being used as recommendations to provide a new quality in the conduct of the next Olympic Games.

The next issue is equal gender representation. In the past season, the new discipline (women's doubles) took part in a full-fledged World Cup competition circuit, successfully debuting as part of the 15 crews (sleds) of the World Championship. The following season will be full of challenges because, for the first time, it is planned to hold the Team relay competition in the Olympic format - four sleds - men's and women's singles and doubles. Indeed, we might run into issues in this format, but this is the only way to achieve gender equality in the representation of 50-50 while maintaining the opportunity to fight for the number of existing sets of medals with the perspective of increasing it in the future.

In this aspect, a problem arises for all AIOWF federations - the number of quotas and representation of members. This issue was brought up again at the joint meeting of AIOWF and IOC on November 30, 2022. We understand that, unfortunately, the Olympic Charter states only for 2900 athletes for Winter Olympic Games and luge. This is a number with which we cannot ensure the quality of the IOC's setup on the one hand and universality on the other. This means that when thinking about development, we shoot ourselves in the foot because the Olympic Games and participation in them is one of the main motivators for our member states. For this reason, together with the other international federations, we have started an active negotiation process with our partners, the IOC, to change this situation in favour of increasing the quota as early as 2030 and be able, in cooperation with the national Olympic committees, to implement luge sports development programs with the aim of high-quality and broad representation in the Olympic Games. This goal will undoubtedly contribute to attracting additional funding.

Representation in the game program is crucial for us when discussing how to maintain and increase the contribution of existing supporters and sponsors and attract new financial sources, especially when our expenses in TV production are growing. However, as I said, FIL is not unique in this situation. This is a common problem for all winter sports Olympic federations.

We take seriously and have already done a lot of work on global sustainability trends. The FIL working group led by Julian von Schleinitz has done an excellent job, the results of which were presented by the FIL Executive and Thomas Schwab to the Director General of the IOC – Christophe de Kepper. This system, which our colleagues developed, and combined with the data we obtained from our event organizers, allows us to optimize our event plan in the near future on how to leave a reduced carbon footprint on our world.

Looking into the future, we must understand that the Olympic Games will probably change their scale. We should count on the tracks we already have at our disposal today and rely on the fact that using the existing resources, several countries will jointly apply to hold a large sports forum. Also, winter sports federations, concerning the use of already existing Olympic sports facilities, especially for the last Games in Beijing 2022, should consider the possibility of cooperating resources in planning the joint venue and time of the world championships, thus ensuring both sustainability and possible support of the host country and sponsors.

There have been many discussions recently, including among the AIOWF, regarding the return of Russian and Belarusian athletes to the international sports scene and the possible status - 'neutral image'. Thanks to the IOC for developing precise recommendations in this context:

- Not supporting war and aggression;
- Not to receive support from national structures;
- Do not serve in the military services of aggressor countries;
- Do not use national symbols;
- Fulfil, like all other tasks, WADA requirements.

It must be said that from our side, we must also take into account the actual situation not only in the political field but also in the field of security, in which we are connected with the organizers of competitions in Europe and North America and clearly with the opinions and interests of our sponsors. In this matter, consultations are constantly held within our organization and with outside cooperation partners.

According to the decisions made by the IOC and the information provided, there is currently no exact answer regarding the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in Paris 2024 and Milano Cortina 2026. Some situations do not indicate easy decision-making in this regard, such as the constant criticism of the Russian Olympic Committee addressed to international sports organizations.

We fully respect human rights, but in conditions where respect is mutual – where the existence and safety of participants and events are not threatened. We are still calling on those involved in wars worldwide to reflect and give peace a chance.

So I say, don't let the aggressors split the sports movement in the world! Only by working together can we ensure unity.

I highly value the contribution of all our Olympic Winter Sports Federation colleagues in this process and especially thank the National Federations and Olympic Committees for their active involvement in solving the future of luge sport. Strategically, the supporter of our sponsor agencies 'RGS', 'Infront', 'Innauer+(f)acts', 'SportA', 'TeRia', companies 'BMW', 'Hargassner', 'Eberspacher', 'Seitz', and 'Strauss' are significant to us. We have a required TV broadcast field in Europe (especially Germany, Austria and Latvia), North America, and Asia, and I am grateful to everyone who has provided us with this support. Close cooperation with the IOC is vital to us, although recently, there is often talk about the growing bureaucracy, new duties and responsibilities. Everyday questions are as such:

- WADA code - Data protection
- Introduction of IT technologies
- Good governance and integrity
- Daily office operation

These are only the main issues that, thanks to the operation of our FIL office, must be dealt with at a high level in the daily process, according to today's standard of living – that is, if we want to be a modern and development-oriented organization, which I believe we all can agree on.

As I said a year ago:

We need to lead sport to the people and people to the sport. And in this context, it is vitally important to grow the influence of public luge in the Federation, creating the basis for the current Olympic disciplines and increasing the circle of supporters. This year, a great natural track season was held with a high-value organized world championship in Deutschnofen (ITA) but this does not mean that we cannot think about the future of this sport. It is urgent to address the issue of access to tracks and equipment for the broadest possible range of people. This is our future, similar to the open discussion in sled standardization on artificial track.

This year, a lot of work has been done in the field of modernization of the Federation's administration, especially if we talk about the modernization of accounting and the updating of financial discipline. In this area, I thank VP Philipp Trattner a lot, and a huge congratulation for your work is in order. A well-prepared baton will be handed over.

I would like to emphasize the FIL Athletes' Commission's role in implementing the SLIDE 2026 strategy. I would like to say a huge thank you to our colleagues Chris Mazdzer for working together and, at the same time, in the direction of the athlete commission, which Leon Felderer currently heads.

I am pleased with the arrival of new colleagues in the FIL administrative and Commission team, which allows us to look to the future confidently, and I thank you all for your selfless work for the benefit of luge sports.

Together we are power.

Einars Fogelis