

74th FIL Congress, Berchtesgaden, June 8–9, 2026

Dear friends and colleagues, delegates to the Congress,

Today I have the honor and opportunity to address you at the conclusion of our current four-year work cycle and the start of a new phase right here in Berchtesgaden, where we have returned home after a long time - because it was right here, 58 years ago, that the world's first artificial ice track was opened in Königssee, giving new life and direction to the development of luge. Our Federation's headquarters has been located here for more than 30 years, and thanks to its highly professional work, the development of luge is managed and coordinated worldwide. This is our home, and thanks to the organizational support from our colleagues at the BSD, especially Hans Wolf von Schleinitz and Thomas Schwab, I am confident that we will have two productive days at the Congress, making decisions that are crucial for our future.

Since 2022, the International Luge Federation has undergone significant changes at the sporting, organizational, and strategic levels. This period has initiated and marked the transition to a more modern, digital, and sustainable model of the Federation's development.

The past year has been marked by very close cooperation between us and the International Olympic Committee, primarily in working to ensure the success of the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympic Games. What the Italian government, the Milan-Cortina Organizing Committee, and the construction company Simico accomplished - delivering the high-quality sports facilities we needed in record time - is truly admirable. This allowed us to hold technically sound test competitions and prepare for the main event of the quadrennium - the Olympic Games.

Without a doubt, the International Olympic Committee is the key partner in the FIL's long-term development. The Olympic Games remain the most important platform for the promotion, funding, and recognition of luge. In this context, I would like to highlight the six highly emotional days of competition, marked by top-tier athletic performance, which - thanks to the cohesive work of the team - the Organizing Committee, competition officials, National Olympic Committees and Federations, athletes, and FIL staff - made a tremendous contribution to the future of our sport. The atmosphere in the finish area was certainly unlike anything experienced elsewhere or seen on television broadcasts.

To maintain a stable place in the Olympic program, we must understand that the Olympic Games, just like the events organized by our Federation, will change in form and scale. We have modern sports facilities at our disposal around the world, the sustainability of which depends largely on the decisions we make and our planning. For the first time, FIL is presenting its four-year calendar leading up to the 2030 Olympic Games, allowing our partners at all levels of the federation to plan their work with much greater precision, while simultaneously promoting the adaptation of the sport to the needs of new audiences. In drawing up this four-year racing calendar, the travel

routes were chosen, as far as possible, to keep the carbon footprint as low as possible. We look forward to the new IOC “Fit for Future” program. Milan-Cortina, the French Alps 2030, and Salt Lake City create a solid foundation for the long-term development of all winter sports. For the first time since the Olympic Games, the IOC held a joint meeting on May 13 this year for all winter sports federations, featuring a comprehensive evaluation of the past Games and a discussion on the optimal organizational model for future Games, maximally involving the sports federations directly in the process, streamlining it, and simultaneously seeking opportunities to reduce costs.

And most importantly - snow and ice are the core identity of winter sports and, at the same time, one of the main advantages in attracting young people. Today, as the digital environment becomes increasingly dominant, it is precisely the unique setting of winter sports that creates special emotions and experiences that cannot be replaced by other activities. We offer speed, adrenaline, a direct connection with nature, and the winter atmosphere - all of which together set winter sports apart from other disciplines.

Athletes have become and continue to be one of our key development partners. Today’s athlete is not just a competitor - they are a sports ambassador, a social media leader, a motivator for youth, and a direct contributor to safety protocols. Over the past few years, I have been pleased with the active work of our Athletes’ Commission on such important programs as athletes’ mental health, equipment safety and quality, and anti-doping policy in the fight for clean sport. The role of athletes will certainly grow not only in decision-making but also in financial development. Individual sponsors, personal branding, and collaboration with partners are becoming increasingly important in professional sports. Our task is to carefully balance advertising opportunities among the FIL, National Federations, and athletes. It is precisely the involvement of athletes - leveraging their post-career planning, communication skills, and use of digital technologies - that will help luge maintain its competitiveness, modern image, and Olympic significance in the future.

Engaging young people is one of the most important future tasks for the FIL and all National Federations; at the same time, it is one of the main challenges, as luge in its Olympic format is only available in countries that currently have their own artificial tracks. For this reason, the development of Alpine Luge in its new format - on which a working group of our colleagues and athletes has been working for several years - is becoming critically important. Last season saw the first test competitions, which clearly demonstrated how accessibility is expanding and, consequently, the opportunity - especially for young people - to take their first steps in luge not only in countries with artificial tracks, but first and foremost in places where snow and hillsides are available. I believe we are on the right track, thereby ensuring a broader youth audience while simultaneously drastically reducing the potential financial costs for young athletes. In this context,

there is another important component of development - summer luge - which has been successfully implemented in several countries for years.

However, without funding and material support, none of the above is possible. Over the past period, we have been developing a new approach to financial strategy and attracting sponsors. The FIL's financial model has changed significantly in recent years. Rising costs are forcing the federation to seek new sources of income, looking at least four years ahead. To date, our main sources of funding have been the following:

- Funding allocated by the International Olympic Committee following the Olympic Games and various development programs,
- Television rights, the main portion of which comes from our partnership with Sport A and Europe,
- FIL's existing sponsors, to whom we are very grateful for their cooperation and trust over many years,
- Competition organizers and National Federations.

In the current situation, we began cooperation last year regarding TV broadcasting rights and their practical implementation with North America, and are preparing long-term cooperation agreements in Asia - with China and Korea. To ensure even higher-quality TV broadcasts and, given rising production costs, we plan to fully review financing costs from the FIL's side. With the involvement of consultants from the company "Theria," we have embarked on a new path in attracting sponsors, as well as in the area of television broadcasting rights, keeping in mind that currently approximately 90% of our main market consists of audiences in Germany, Austria, Italy, the USA, and China. Our collaboration with "Eurosport," which we plan to continue, has certainly boosted our visibility, especially in European countries.

When discussing the budget today - not just for next year but for the next four years - it is important to emphasize, first and foremost, our own internal budget discipline, as well as understanding that IOC budget grants at their usual level are not guaranteed to anyone in the long term and will depend on the organizational model for the Olympic Games that we agree upon in the near future. In other words, the more independent we are with our funding sources and amounts, the more precisely we will be able to plan our Federation's development priorities and allocate funding in a specific order.

To facilitate this process, I would like to highlight the work our colleagues and National Federations have done in expanding our social media presence, creating both content and interactive broadcasts to attract a new audience. Whereas just a few years ago our audience sometimes numbered only a thousand, today we're talking about millions, which opens up new opportunities but at the same time sets new baseline standards. We see what the audience wants:

- shorter content,
- athletes' daily stories,
- behind-the-scenes work,
- dynamic content - and it is our duty to provide all of this.

I would like to thank the team that built this path from scratch, and I wish success and new heights to the team that will take over the baton next season, thereby ensuring the widest possible audience reach and attention.

And here I would like to call on the National Federations to continue their active involvement as before, and even more so. You play a crucial role in the development of luge. It is you who ensure athlete training, youth development, coaching, and the organization of competitions. Our shared future depends on unified cooperation within the FIL and with partners outside the organization. Thank you for your active and constructive participation in ensuring all of the aforementioned processes. Thank you for the constructive proposals we can see in the Congress materials regarding the IRO Regulations and the Statutes, which we have modernized in the first phase and aligned with the current legal situation in Austria, the country of our official headquarters. You play a huge role in expanding our international cooperation and geographic reach, both by collaborating with trail maintainers and by establishing international training centers and programs, always keeping the sustainability of events in focus, which is not only an environmental issue but also a financial and reputational one.

I have the pleasure and honor of working with you on a daily basis, which in recent years has not been easy. A world saturated with politics that are fundamentally changing the established order, and filled with financial crises of varying scales, is not fertile ground for the development of sport. Nevertheless, we have always made carefully weighed and reasoned decisions at our Congresses, listening to discussions and drawing conclusions. We are a force with a visible presence and voice on the Olympic sports stage.

Only by respecting one another, respecting the importance of teamwork, and upholding Olympic and human values can we achieve our goals and fulfill our mission in today's society.

My deepest thanks go to my closest colleagues: Secretary General Dwight Bell and Vice President of Finance Geoff Balme, for ensuring efficient communication across distances and time zones; and to the entire FIL Office team, our directors Matthias Bohmer, Andris Sics, and Andreas Castiglioni. I would especially like to acknowledge Executive Director Christoph Schweiger, who ensures the high-quality work of the office and with whom I have spent considerable time in productive discussions with our partners, agencies, law firms, and auditing companies, preparing this year's Congress materials for your review.

Thank you to my colleagues on the Executive Board for their steadfast support and active involvement, as well as to the Athletes' Representative and the Commission!

Thank you for your trust, colleagues; I am ready to continue to live up to it.

It is an honor to serve the sport of luge!

Yours, Einars Fogelis