

# The genesis of Association of the European National Olympic Committees (AENOC) in the 1960s

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## Abstract

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At the turn of the 1960s, relations between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) were at the heart of debates and exchanges within the Olympic Movement. It was during this pivotal period that the NOCs wanted to play a greater part in the IOC's Olympic activities, but also in spreading Olympism throughout their territories.

The desire to bring the NOCs together within an association was one of the solutions being considered. The European NOCs supported this initiative and launched the idea of an association of the NOCs of Europe, but this initiative very quickly ran into difficulties.

## Keywords

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Olympism, AENOC, Europe, IOC, NOCs, History

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## Introduction

This article is part of the IOC Olympic Studies Centre's 2023 Research grants programme for doctoral students and young academics. The selected research project aims at questioning and understanding the history of relations between the IOC and AENOC from 1965 to 1995. The article is therefore based on an in-depth study of the archives held at the IOC Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne. For this article, the genesis of the Association of National Olympic Committees of Europe will be examined from 1965 to 1975. At a time when the NOCs wanted more consideration, they formed a General Assembly in 1965, which led to numerous tensions with the IOC and its President at the time, Avery Brundage. Against this backdrop of the NOCs coming together, the French Olympic Committee and its President at the time, Count Jean de Beaumont, took the initiative of bringing all the European NOCs together in Versailles in September 1968 to lay the foundations of the future Association of National Olympic Committees of Europe.

This group of European NOCs also faces a number of challenges at different levels. On the one hand, it upsets the Olympic order (based on universality and the global dimension) and puts it in competition with the desire to place, or reposition, Europe as the nerve centre of Olympism, all at a time when the political will to build the European community is very strong and wishes to use youth as a lever. The study period for this research extends from the first General Assembly of the NOCs from all over the world in 1965 to 1975, the date when all the European NOCs ratified the statutes of the Association of the European National Olympic Committees (AENOC), although they were not officially recognised by the IOC.

## The turn of the 1960s: difficult relations between the IOC and the NOCs

There was a time when the coming together of the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) did not bode well. It was the time when the NOC Presidents of Italy Giulio Onesti, Switzerland Raymond Gafner and Belgium Raoul Mollet led the battle against IOC President Avery Brundage, who did not want an association of NOCs to be formed independently of the IOC. Nor did Brundage want Olympic Solidarity.

Despite everything, the NOCs met at a general assembly in Rome in 1965, and this meeting marked the beginnings of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), which was created in 1979. The strained relations between the IOC and the NOCs in the mid-1960s were the starting point for the desire to unite the NOCs and speak with one voice. This period can sometimes be seen as rather vague. We will see that some NOC initiatives were recognised by the IOC, while others were not. But the aim of these initiatives was always to improve relations between the NOCs and the IOC.

Before looking at AENOC, it is necessary to understand the whole process that led to the creation of this institution. First of all, we need to understand the context, the issues, the alliances, the players and the questions that led first the NOCs and then the European NOCs to want to unite. This first meeting of the NOCs from around the world in the form of a General Assembly was held with the aim of improving relations between the NOCs and also relations with the IOC. The first initiative for a grouping of NOCs was therefore led by the Italian NOC (CONI) with its President Giulio Onesti, who was also an IOC member

and was supported by the Belgian Raoul Mollet and the Swiss Raymond Gafner. It was against this backdrop that the NOCs met for the first time at a General Assembly in Rome in 1965. Up until then, the NOCs had not had an organised association, but they were keen to meet in the same way as the International Federations (GAISF: General Assembly of International Sports Federations), on the eve of IOC sessions, to make unanimous or majority proposals. The NOCs felt the need to unite, and above all they felt that in order to exist and influence discussions with the IOC and the IFs, they needed to speak with one voice.

Many NOCs identified the relationship between the IOC and the NOCs as one of, if not the major problem facing the Olympic Movement in the 1960s. The IOC did not rely enough on the NOCs. In addition to preparing delegations for the Games, the NOCs' main mission was to promote sport, Olympism, its values and, more generally, the Olympic Movement in their territory. According to the NOCs, if the IOC exists it was because there are NOCs, but the IOC sees this idea in a different light, stating that if the NOCs exist it was because the IOC has recognised them.

But this initiative soon caused a stir within the IOC. In a letter written by Brundage to Onesti, the IOC President stated that "as the NOCs are agents of the IOC and exist only because they are recognised by the IOC, an independent organisation is really unthinkable", referring to the NOCs' General Assembly, which wanted an association of NOCs to be created. In the early 1960s, a number of committees led by Italian committee member Giulio Onesti sought to bypass Brundage and the IOC by creating the

Permanent General Assembly of the National Olympic Committees. This organisation was opposed by Brundage and he refused to recognise this by the IOC. (Guttman 1984)

During this NOC General Assembly in Rome, it was decided to set up and appoint a Coordination and Study Committee, whose main task would be to work on the possibility of creating an association of NOCs from around the world. The NOCs decided by a majority to elect the Italian Giulio Onesti as President of this group, which was also made up of ten other members. Onesti asserted that the proposed association of NOCs was not seeking to compete with the IOC, but wanted to be the IOC's best supporter.

Faced with this delicate period, the IOC had to react. The IOC did not officially recognise the committee chaired by Onesti. At the Teheran Session in 1967, the IOC set up a sub-committee, better known as the Joint Commission, to promote contacts with the NOCs. This Commission was chaired by the Dane Ivar Emil Vind and accompanied by other members representing the NOCs from all over the world: "The Executive Board stresses that the only official body authorised to make contact with the National Olympic Committees was the IOC Joint Commission (set up after the Teheran Session) (...) The President of the Committee, Onesti, promised Brundage that the matter of this Committee would be definitively settled, since the reason for its creation (the study of the need for an association of the National Olympic Committees) had gone unheeded and most of the National Committees preferred direct contact with the IOC Secretariat".

The formation of an association of NOCs seemed difficult. In addition to creating an

association, the NOCs met to discuss common problems and, above all, to present the IOC with several resolutions that had been approved by the majority of the 89 NOCs present in Rome.

Brundage then sent several letters to Onesti, demonstrating the uselessness of an association or a permanent assembly of the NOCs. Despite this, the NOCs approved the deed of constitution of the Permanent General Assembly of the NOCs in Mexico City in 1968, in the presence of delegates from 79 NOCs from the five continents. The NOCs' PGA was therefore created on 1st October 1968 during the third general assembly of NOCs held on the occasion of the Games of the XIX Olympiad. The constitution of the NOCs' PGA had been prepared since 1965, when the first NOCs' GA was held in Rome in 1965, followed by the second in Teheran in 1967 and the third in Mexico City in 1968.

The NOCs' PGA was presented as a permanent forum for cooperation between the NOCs at international level and its aims were as follows:

- To serve the International Movement within the framework of the philosophical, spiritual and sporting principles defined by the IOC in full respect of the IOC's authority
- To promote the creation and strengthening of close collaborative links between the NOCs in full affirmation of their independence
- To establish a systematic exchange of information and experience between the NOCs and to set up cooperation and mutual assistance.
- To submit to the IOC suggestions and

projects aimed at developing or improving the international Olympic movement

- To strengthen the role played by the NOCs at national level in their respective countries.

Several months after the creation of the NOCs' PGA, in a circular written by Brundage, the latter addressed "serious reproaches to the NOCs' Permanent General Assembly (...) he accused its members of wanting to force the IOC's hand in order to obtain its recognition and of wanting to reform it. He also questioned the integrity of the IOC, accusing it of irregularities in its funding"<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, Brundage did not want a two-headed Olympic Movement, with the IOC on one side and an association of NOCs driven mainly by the Europeans on the other.

This led to numerous conflicts within the IOC itself, between the European members who wanted to encourage the creation of an association of NOCs on the one hand, and Brundage on the other. The following statement made by the Vice-President of the IOC in 1968, the Soviet Constantin Andrianov, clearly confirmed the differences within the Olympic family itself: "It would be a mistake to forget that without National Olympic Committees there would be no Olympic Movement, no Olympic Games and no IOC either. The IOC does not consider it essential to consult the NOCs on such important matters as the programme of the Olympic Games, the venue and the date of their celebration, etc. The NOCs are not consulted on these matters. The union of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Olympic Studies Centre, Library, Raymond Gafner (dir), 1995, *Un siècle du Comité International Olympique, L'idée – Les Présidents – L'œuvre*, Volume II, 307p.

National Olympic Committees within the framework of an association would contribute to improving contacts with them and would favour the exchange of information and mutual experience, as well as more effective activities for the international Olympic Movement in general (...) We propose that: The IOC encourage the creation of a union of the National Olympic Committees, because such an organisation would contribute to the solution of Olympic problems and to the exchange of work experience and mutual information”<sup>2</sup>.

But finally, some NOCs were also reluctant to create an NOC institution in the form of an association for fear of losing their Olympic sovereignty.

Objections to the formation of an association of NOCs therefore have two main origins. Firstly, there was the fear that the NOCs would lose their individual right to establish direct contact with the IOC. There is nothing in the draft constitution or in the proposals for the formation of an NOC association to justify this fear. This was clearly expressed in Onesti’s letter to Brundage, dated 1 April 1967, in response to the remark in the President’s circular letter that some NOCs “prefer to maintain direct contact and negotiate personally with the IOC and would never allow an organisation to speak on their behalf”. Yet the association project has no intention of absorbing or replacing the powers of representation sent to the IOC by each Olympic Committee. In fact, it would be

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2 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre ,Annexe No 12, Propositions de Monsieur C. Andrianov, Vice-président du C.I.O, « Pour une amélioration des activités du CIO à l’avenir », Ordre du jour de la 66e Session du CIO Hôtel de Ville, Grenoble, du 1er au 5 février 1968.

completely incapable of doing so”<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, there was the fear that in an association of NOCs, the largest NOCs could be drowned out by the smallest, which would cause them to lose their predominance and the privileges they currently enjoy. This explains the genesis of a minority draft constitution which proposes a relatively flexible form of association of the NOCs (this is the case of the British draft in particular). The association of NOCs would be based on a voting system in which each NOC would have one vote, so that each NOC would have an equal vote.

If the creation of an association of NOCs were to lead to the disappearance of all the unfair advantages and privileges, if any, currently enjoyed by the largest and supposedly most important NOCs, then it is the community that benefits, and the MO deserves to promote the establishment of closer relations between NOCs, the exchange of information and experience relating to their practical activity, and mutual assistance, thus contributing to the development of the MO and amateur sport”<sup>4</sup>.

This organism was therefore not recognised by the IOC. However, the NOCs’ PGA played an important role in the debates within the IOC Executive Board. During the IOC Executive Board meetings in Munich and Luxembourg in September 1971, President Brundage declared that he was not opposed to the NOCs meeting in an annual meeting, “but that he was opposed to IOC members taking

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3 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, V.A Sugathadasa, letter from the NOC of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), 25 March 1968, Memorandum on the formation of an association of national Olympic committees By the NOC of Ceylon)

4 Ibid

part in an organisation of this kind, since the NOCs would then conclude that they had the support of the IOC. He disapproved of the fact that this organisation was permanent”<sup>5</sup>. Brundage attended the first General Assembly of the NOCs in 1965 in Rome, where he gave an opening speech. For Andrianov, the PGA could become a subsidiary organisation, but one run by the IOC with the aim of helping the NOCs. Many EC members were in favour of an institution to improve relations between the NOCs and the IOC, but not in the form of an NOC PGA, and even less in the form of a permanent institution. For some EC members, if the IOC did not support the PGA, many NOCs would leave the PGA. President Brundage went even further, stating “his intention to recommend that any IOC member associated with the PGA resign”<sup>6</sup>.

A very important point was emphasised by Andrianov at this EB: he stated that the main party responsible for the creation of this NOC PGA was the IOC. Indeed, the various meetings and dialogues between the IOC and the NOCs had not been satisfactory. In the past, the NOCs have often criticised the IOC for not relying enough on them in its missions. They expected a more constructive collaboration from the IOC. The PGA seemed to offer the NOCs many positive results. For example, it enabled them to work together and prepare resolutions for the IOC. Andrianov was one of those members who are in favour of the PGA, but he would like such a body to be under the control of the IOC and not alongside it. In addition, many criticisms were

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5 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Procès-Verbaux des réunions de la Commission Exécutive de Munich 9 septembre 1971 et de Luxembourg 12-17 septembre 1971

6 Ibid

made of Onesti during the IOC Executive Commissions, notably by the Dutchman Van Karnebeek who, according to him, “Onesti, IOC member for Italy and member of the IOC commissions, should be asked to work for the IOC and not for the P.G.A.”<sup>7</sup>.

Another criticism leveled at Onesti and the AGP was its headquarters and funding. Nigeria’s Sir Ade Ademóla proposed that the AGP’s headquarters no longer be in Rome, but relocated to Lausanne. Perhaps it upset the IOC that an Olympic institution, which brings together the NOCs and which does not fall within the remit of the IOC, should have its headquarters in Rome on the premises of CONI? Can it be a competing institution?

Lord Killanin pointed out that CONI is the richest NOC in Europe. The IOC, and Brundage in particular, had on several occasions, in correspondence, criticised the NOCs’ PGA for its funding, as almost all the running costs are covered by CONI. This issue of CONI’s financial power needed to be developed as it constituted a threat to the IOC.

This first subsection enabled us to understand both the Olympic context and the desire to create an association of European NOCs. It is therefore in this dual context, in this very special soil that is conducive to initiatives, that this association of European NOCs will be born and take root.

### **In this context, is an association of Europe’s NOCs possible?**

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7 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Procès-Verbaux des réunions de la Commission Exécutive de Munich 9 septembre 1971 et de Luxembourg 12-17 septembre 1971



The creation of an association of NOCs from around the world is proving complicated to implement, but an association of European NOCs it is possible ?

Despite everything, the European NOCs were going to try to unite. It was with this in mind that Count Jean de Beaumont, then President of the French Olympic Committee, together with Alain Danet, took the initiative of bringing together all the European NOCs at a General Assembly held in Versailles on 7 and 8 September 1968. At this first European Olympic meeting, 22 European NOCs were present, making this future Olympic Europe the largest of its time. In fact, this Olympic Europe stretched from the Atlantic to the Urals, via the countries of Eastern Europe. The Europeans within the Olympic Movement had too often shown their differences, and it was now time to speak with one voice to face up to the new powers that were reshuffling the cards in the "Olympic system" (Chappelet, 1991).

Jean de Beaumont, who became the first President of the General Assembly of the NOCs of Europe, obtained the very strong support of several European Olympic leaders, particularly from French-speaking Europe, as well as support from States that were very committed to European integration at the time, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, Italy and Luxembourg. Like Onesi's initiative, the Swiss Raymond Gafner and Jean Weymann and the Belgian Raoul Mollet supported the idea of uniting the European NOCs in an association. These musketeers of European Olympism were to take the reins in the early, laborious years of what would later become the Association of the NOCs of Europe.

This initial contact was the start of friendly cooperation. The European NOCs present reaffirmed their tradition while affirming their attachment to the Olympic ideal, which "found its cradle, its creator and its driving force in France". The European NOCs welcomed the useful dialogue that had just begun between themselves on the one hand and between them and the International Sports Federations on the other"<sup>8</sup>. The European NOCs have agreed to meet annually: "Deeply attached to the Olympic ideal and respecting the authority of the International Olympic Committee, the European NOCs propose to contribute through their friendly cooperation to the growing development of the Olympic Movement based on friendship, fraternity and love of universal peace and constituting an effective guarantee of a better future for young people throughout the world"<sup>9</sup>. The Olympic values represented a unifying element on which all the European NOCs agree.

A working group of the European NOCs was soon set up. This idea was put forward by President Jean de Beaumont, who submitted to the Assembly a project for the creation of a body called the "working group", whose mission would be to disseminate European sport. The aim of this group would be to ensure the proper management of the future organisation of the European NOCs, to centralise documents, to study the work of the IOC commissions, to prepare working documents, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Réunion des Comités Olympiques Européens et des présidents des FI 8 septembre 1968 Versailles (Palais des Congrès)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

On the proposal of Alain Danet<sup>10</sup> several names were put forward, and the members present at the new meeting of the NOCs in Mexico in 1968 decided to set up a working group of European National Olympic Committees under the chairmanship of the Comte de Beaumont.

This first working group was composed of : Jean Waymann (Switzerland), Raimundo Saporta (Spain), Epaminondas Petrialas (Greece), Igor Kazanski (USSR), Nebojsa Popovic (Yugoslavia) and an observer, Sten Svensson (Sweden). Four alternates are also appointed: Helmuth Behrent (GDR), Iolanda Balas (Romania), Claude Collard (France) et Emmanuel Bosak (Czechoslovakia)<sup>11</sup>. The President proposed that Nadia Lekarska (Bulgaria) take part in the working group on the women's sports plan, which she immediately accepted.

This future association of European NOCs would then have the task of safeguarding and developing the Olympic movement and Olympism, encouraging greater cooperation and collaboration between the NOCs, developing European Solidarity, studying the possibility of creating European Games or Youth Games, defending the interests of the NOCs, etc.<sup>12</sup> The promoters of this future European Olympic Association have

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10 Alain Danet was then Honorary Secretary General of the French Olympic Committee and appointed secretary of this first meeting of the European NOCs in Versailles.

11 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Réunion du groupe de travail des comités nationaux olympiques européens, Mexico, 21 octobre 1968

12 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Lettre / Circulaire envoyée à tous les CNOE par le Comte Jean de Beaumont et Jean Weymann, Envoyée le 28 novembre 1969

already taken the initiative in the face of possible criticism, stating that it is “in no way a question of alienation, but of collaboration, mutual understanding and coordination of our means of action, with each NOC in Europe retaining, as it should, according to the very terms of the Olympic Charter, its right and freedom to express itself directly to the IOC”<sup>13</sup>. After the first few meetings, the results were fairly satisfactory, with Europeans agreeing to meet and exchange views on an annual basis. Very quickly, the debate on the form this union should take occupied a large part of the discussions, as did the opposition.



ASSOCIATION DES COMITES NATIONAUX  
OLYMPIQUES D'EUROPE  
ASSOCIATION OF THE EUROPEAN  
NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES

Figure 1 - AENOC logo  
Source : IOC Olympic Study Centre archives, AENOC Statutes, 1975

What form would this future union of Europe's NOCs take?

In Versailles, then in Mexico City, and more particularly in Dubrovnik in 1969, the NOCs expressed the wish to regroup. Jean de Beaumont and Jean Weymann, who were respectively President and Secretary General of the General Assembly of the NOCs, realised that it was time to move forward and put an end to this provisional situation, which had lasted far too long. They therefore

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13 Ibid



decided to propose to all the NOCs that a definitive institution be created, with its possible missions and aims.

One of the aims of creating a grouping of European NOCs was to “make Europe’s voice heard more firmly within the Olympic movement”, as Jean de Beaumont put it. But the missions, goals and structure that this union of NOCs should take on were the subject of debate, and above all highlighted the differences between the Europeans.

Luc Silance, Secretary General of the Belgian Olympic Committee at the time, made a very precise speech at the NOCs’ General Assembly in Munich in 1970. He defended the need to create an association of European NOCs. In his view, the continent’s NOCs had never been able to form a European group within the Olympic Movement. The first meetings of the NOCs showed that, despite everything, the views of the European NOCs were, in many cases, identical, but that they were not organised. Luc Silance promoted the recognition of the Permanent General Assembly of the National Olympic Committees, “I think that the Association of European Committees should be a pressure group to show the IOC that the Europeans, who have always been at the origin and basis of the Olympic movement, wish to support the action of the PGA of the NOCs, wish to see the rules for admission to the Olympic Games changed, wish to see an Olympic Congress organised. All this is a short-term mission (...) which should be achieved rapidly by the constitution of a common organism”<sup>14</sup>.

Solidarity between the NOCs throughout the

world, and in particular the European NOCs, had to be put in place. To be organised, this solidarity had to find a place where it could materialise, and this place “is the meeting place of all the European committees, so we need a body where we can all come together”<sup>15</sup>.

Luc Silance’s speech caused quite a stir, particularly with regard to the idea that Europe is at the centre of the Olympic Movement, of Olympism, and that the future of Olympism must pass through Europe. For example, Johann Chr. Schonheyder, representative of the Norwegian NOC, disagreed with the form of this association: “We believe that the very basis of the Olympic movement is the fact that it is a worldwide movement and not one divided into sectors. Consequently, we believe it would be a mistake to set up a European association”<sup>16</sup>. In his opinion, it is essential for the European NOCs to come together, but not in the form of an association in the strict sense. This idea was shared by other European NOCs, a flexible organisation with working groups and possibly a President and a Secretary who would have the power to convene an annual meeting or conference of the NOCs to discuss European issues. The current format was appropriate. For Dr Van des Ploeg, from the Netherlands NOC, there was a recurring argument that challenged him and called for debate: Europe’s historic place in the Olympic Movement. In his opinion, “we shouldn’t rely too much on historical considerations, but rather look at European problems. If we emphasise our origins too much, the rest of the world will

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14 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, PV de la réunion des CNOE à Munich, Hôtel Arabella, les 14 et 15 février 1970

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15 Ibid

16 Ibid

think we're a bunch of colonialists"<sup>17</sup>. The European NOCs were therefore faced with a dual challenge: on the one hand, they had to establish a strong European voice within the Olympic Movement, while at the same time continuing to promote the latter as a worldwide, universal movement. The British, Scandinavian and Dutch NOCs were in favor of flexible cooperation. Creating a permanent organization could duplicate the work of existing organizations. In view of this still very fragile European Olympic unity, the Swiss Olympic Committee asserted its role as mediator and conciliator by asserting that it is necessary to find common goals and objectives that unite Europeans, as it was "better to take small steps together, than to want to take a big step that separates us"<sup>18</sup>.

<i><b>In favor</b></i>	<i><b>Against</b></i>
. Many dangers threaten Olympism. Are we going to stand by and watch them rise?	. Do we need to create a new 'block' on top of the existing ones?
. At the Varna Congress, the disorganised and ill-prepared NOCs found themselves in a very poor position when faced with the IOC and the IFs.	. Should there be an extra layer between an NOC and the IOC?
. What's the point of meeting occasionally just to talk?	. Europeans are already in such a strong position - look at the composition of the IOC Executive.
. Increasingly, governments are showing an interest in the Olympic and sporting movement.	. Europe's NOCs get on well and are happy with the "phone call theory".
. The CNOEs must be able to work together while retaining their independence.	

Figure 2 - Extracts from several arguments in favor of and against a union of the NOCs of Europe

Content source: Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, *Projet de rapport général / Raoul Mollet / Comité Nationaux Olympiques d'Europe* :Bruxelles, le 31 janvier 1974

### Turning points in the genesis of AENOC

A new turning point came at the 4th General Meeting of the CNOE in Monte Carlo in 1973. In fact, a new stage was reached in the consolidation of this union: "by constituting a board representative of European trends, small enough to be constructive and large enough to be authoritative, our overall position, in Varna or elsewhere, will be more valuable than our 32 isolated votes" (Prince of Monaco Jacques de Millo, 1973).

The need to bring the European NOCs together was reiterated, as a gesture of European solidarity. Europe has also been facing a challenge for several years: to come together to develop a European way of thinking.

Count Jean de Beaumont made this symbolic statement in Monte-Carlo: "For the first time, it can be said that it is no longer the Europe of the Six, nor the Europe of the Nine, but the Europe of the Thirty that is meeting today and proving its vitality with regard to our ideas"<sup>19</sup>.

Following a report by Mollet on the possible creation of an association of European NOCs, the assembly decided to form a working group made up of eight members and a chairman in the person of Raoul Mollet. The representativeness of the participants in the NOCs' "Projects and Studies" working group symbolised the collective awareness of the group's leaders at the Monaco meeting in May 1973. This new action "may constitute an important step towards the development of a renewed sports policy resolutely focused on the future. Europe has very often been a

17 Ibid

18 Ibid

19 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, *Assemblée Générale de l'ACNOE, réunion à Monte-Carlo, les 4 et 5 mai 1973*

beacon and a catalyst. We must strive to create a new spirit and approach problems from a progressive and global perspective” (Mollet, 1973).

The 1974 General Assembly of the NOCs in Paris was a landmark in the construction of an association of NOCs, and everything came together to launch the creation of a new Olympic institution.

The date and venue were historically and Olympically symbolic: this GA took place in Paris and began on 23 June 1974, exactly 80 years to the day after Pierre de Coubertin’s speech in the Sorbonne’s great amphitheatre, which renewed the Olympic Games and at the same time created the IOC. The vast majority of the members present were in favour of creating a structure. 27 NOCs voted in favour of the creation of new structures<sup>20</sup>. A permanent structure was then set up around an NOC bureau, comprising a President, a Secretary General, a Vice-President and 4 members. The statutes were worked on so that at the next General Assembly in 1975 (in Lisbon), they could be accepted to officially create the Association of National Olympic Committees of Europe. The members of this Board, which would run the future organisation, would have to “reflect the different currents of thought that animate Europe and have an inclusive, universal structure that encompasses all the NOCs; all Europeans must recognise themselves in this structure” (Collard, 1974).

Following the vote by the Board of the European NOCs, 3 candidates were put forward for the presidency of the Bureau: Count Jean de Beaumont (France), Bo

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20 Result of secret ballot: 21 votes in favour and 6 against

Bengtson (Sweden) and D. Prokhorov (USSR). Prokhorov “believes that the history of Olympism owes a great deal to France. It would be very unfair, in fact, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Olympism, to consider any candidacy other than that of a representative of France, and it would be a mistake not to support the candidacy of the Comte de Beaumont as President of the Board”.

He therefore withdrew his candidacy in favour of Jean de Beaumont. The latter was elected over Bengtson and officially became AENOC’s first president, even though he had already held the position since 1968<sup>21</sup>. Prokhorov will be elected Vice-Chairman and the Swiss Jean Weymann General Secretary. The 4 members of the Board will be : Bo Bengtson (Sweden), Lisa Manoliu (Romania), Janusz Piewcevicz (Poland) and Dr Peter Ritter (Liechtenstein).

It is also at this Assembly that Collard and Danet would defend one of the primary missions of the future AENOC: “Everyday Olympism”.

Through the values conveyed by Olympism, sport would enable Europe’s youth to create a future for themselves, both individually and above all collectively. The NOCs therefore had to work to promote Olympism among young people in their countries.

Claude Collard asserted that the union of the European NOCs would help to promote Olympism on the continent as “a powerful means of training young people and of the ongoing education of humanity”. Claude Collard chose this date, 23 June 1974, at the NOCs’ General Assembly in Paris, to give a

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21 Result of the vote for the AENOC presidency: 27 NOCs voting. 14 votes for Jean de Beaumont. 10 votes for Bengtson and 3 blank votes.

very solemn opening speech, highlighting Coubertin's legacy but also the dangers threatening Olympism, while calling for the creation of a European Olympic institution.

Claude Collard wished to see a valid structure for the European NOCs. This structure, "I want it to be flexible enough for everyone to feel free, but precise enough to be effective and to carry out all the tasks that await us"<sup>22</sup>. We needed to find issues that bring Europeans together, not divide them. The case of the European Games project was a subject that has divided the European NOCs and was perhaps one of the reasons for the stagnation of the Assembly since its creation, proposed by the French Olympic Committee in 1968.

However, the broadening of the debates and the setting up of the working group chaired by Raoul Mollet on much broader subjects has enabled great progress to be made since 1973. The union of the NOCs of Europe could help to ensure that Olympism resumes its forward march. "We do not have the arrogance to claim that it will solve all the problems of our time, but we are certain that it can contribute to the essential task of shaping the balanced human being of tomorrow"<sup>23</sup>.

22 Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, 5ème AG des CNOE à Paris, les 23, 24, 25 juin 1974

23 Ibid

<b>Name</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Theme of the working group led by the person in question</b>
Nicolaï Andonov	Bulgaria	<i>Study on European "unity in diversity" committees</i>
Alain DANET	France	<i>Promoting the future of Olympism</i>
Walther Tröger	FRG	<i>Financial support for amateur sport</i>
Bo Bengtson	Sweden	<i>Helping to rationalise the Olympic Games</i>
Peter Ritter	Liechtenstein	<i>Sports embassies in Europe (focus on youth)</i>
Günther Heinze	GDR	<i>Possible contribution of the NOCs to the "Olympic Solidarity" project</i>
Janusz Piewcewicz	Poland	<i>Possible contribution to "Sport in leisure time"</i>
Lia Manoliu	Romania	<i>Development of high-level competitive sport</i>

Figure 3 - Presentation of the eight working groups of the Projects and Studies Commission, chaired by Raoul Mollet (Belgium)

Content sources: Archives of the IOC Olympic Study Centre, Groupe de travail Vittel, 1 et 2 septembre 1973, Commission « projet et études », Exposé préliminaire

## **Olympism as a tool for European construction**

At a time when Europe is looking for common denominators to unite and build a continent of peace, can Olympism become a tool to unite the Old Continent ? By creating a continental Olympic organisation whose main aim would be to promote the Olympic ideas of friendship and collaboration between peoples, this project aims to consolidate peace in Europe. The Olympic spirit has always been the bearer of humanist values. The aim of an Association of European NOCs is clearly stated by the Swiss Raymond Gafner, European cooperation is vital for the continent and Olympism can be a means of serving this cooperation. This statement by the President of the COS defines his position: "In the relentless competition of the modern world, and in the face of the great political and economic blocs, European cooperation is an indisputable necessity (...) The duty of Olympic sport, nourished by the generous and prophetic thought of Baron de Coubertin, is undoubtedly to place its power and influence at the service of the noble causes of our time. European cooperation is one such cause"<sup>24</sup>. The audience for sport and Olympism can highlight European cooperation. Such an initiative to unite the European NOCs would also make it possible to fulfill one of the main missions of the NOCs as defined in the Olympic Charter: the promotion of the Olympic ideal.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up this slow process of setting up a

European Olympic institution, we can define the Versailles GA in 1968 as the founding meeting. Then, from 1968 to 1975, the NOCs questioned and opposed the form that this union should take. On the one hand, there were those in favour of a traditional association, with statutes, elected members, working groups and so on. This position was supported in particular by the NOCs of the West, such as France, Belgium, Switzerland and the FRG. On the other hand, the British and Scandinavian NOCs were more in favour of creating a flexible and open union, i.e. simple annual meetings with a consultative nature, exchanges and few constraints. In 1973, the first "Studies and Projects" working group, made up of 8 commissions, was set up under the chairmanship of the highly influential Raoul Mollet. Following the 1974 General Assembly in Paris, the European NOCs (finally) came to an agreement and the statutes were adopted a year later during the 6th General Assembly of the NOCs in Lisbon on 16 and 17 October 1975. The General Assembly of the NOCs then officially became AECNO following the vote on its statutes.

The aim of this article is to briefly present the genesis of the Association of the NOCs of Europe from 1965 to 1975. First of all, we looked at the relationship between the IOC and the NOCs through Onesti's initiative to bring all the NOCs together in an association in 1965. Then, three years later, the Europeans, with Jean de Beaumont, took the same initiative, but on a continental scale. This article deals only with the main elements of AENOC genesis, without going into the interplay of players and the many issues (official and unofficial) that have organisation of European NOCs this institution. All these other elements will be dealt with in other

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<sup>24</sup> French National Archives, R.Gafner, 1968, Exposé sur les Jeux Européens, page 2.



publications, and in particular in my thesis. This laborious institutionalisation of the CNOE is largely the result of multiple issues and different and divergent interests.

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