

## FIFA and the “Chinese Question”, 1954-1980: an Exercise of Statutes

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**Abstract:** Mainly concentrating on FIFA internal documents the article analyses how the world football federation reacted to the People’s Republic of China’s claim to exclusive representation; this claim was a problem because the football association of the Republic of China (Taiwan) had been affiliated to FIFA in 1954. How did FIFA, despite its “one country – one association” rule, succeed to integrate permanently both Chinese football associations into its constituency?

It is argued that both FIFA’s statutes and the vicissitudes in the global political setting contributed to this success. After much debate and a contemporary withdrawal in 1958 the People’s Republic rejoined FIFA in 1979/80 although they had failed in ousting Taiwan from membership.

### Sport Encounters Politics: the Meaning of Statutes

By definition, an association or organization cannot get going without defining its general goals, its structure, its administration and its membership. Statutes serve these ends. Sometimes, the association and its members even refer to them as “constitution”, thus underlining their pivotal status. But statutes do much more. They are binding for the affiliated members. They inform the organization’s strive and dynamism. They create insiders and outsiders, those who enjoy the privileges of membership, communication, exchange, and intercourse between members and those who do not. Moreover – as shall be argued in this article – statutes are a means to pursue the association’s objectives. Their stipulations, interpretation, and handling thus inform about the organization’s politics. They are the basic tools for the organization’s self-assertion, and they become the more important the greater the challenge the statutes face from

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outside (or inside). In this respect, international or world sport organizations do not differ from any other political, social or cultural organization. However, there are two peculiarities to keep in mind: they strive for universalism and global reach and they regard their mission, international sport, as an apolitical affair.

The period of the Cold War meant a fundamental challenge to these ideals that had been first spelt out by the founding fathers of the international sport organizations at the dawn of the twentieth century. A case in point was the world football organization, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), and its struggling to come to terms with a new situation in world politics: the existence of two Chinese Football Associations, one of the Democratic People's Republic of China and one of the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the claims of both these associations to represent China's football players.

In the following I shall first discuss some basic aims and major provisions in FIFA's statutes which form the background of this struggle. Mainly concentrating on FIFA internal documents like the minutes of its Executive Committee and its Congresses between 1948 and 1980, I shall then follow up the struggle or – perhaps more adequate – the tug of war over the prescription of the statutes for guaranteeing the organization's sporting universalism between FIFA and the People's Republic of China from 1954 to 1980. After a short overview of China's affiliation to FIFA in 1931 and how it happened in 1954 that FIFA was willing to affiliate a second Chinese Football Association from the Republic of China (Taiwan), I shall analyse the different schemes to get rid of this 'abnormal' and – in Red China's view unbearable – situation; I shall also examine FIFA's manoeuvring in reaction to the claims and charges that were put forward by communist China and in their support. The third, concluding part, will resume the issue and ask how FIFA's statutes mattered in triggering off, prolonging, and solving the conflict over two Chinese football associations and the representation of China.

## FIFA's Statutes and Basic Aims

When the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded in 1904 it was a "child of its time". It stood for bourgeois internationalism in sport, and it propagated the belief that international football, following its own organizational drive and the Laws of the Game, was fundamentally and in principle apolitical.<sup>1</sup> As the statutes proclaimed, the organization's objective

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<sup>1</sup> See Christiane Eisenberg, "Der Weltfußballverband FIFA und das 20. Jahrhundert: Metamorphosen eines Prinzipienreiters", *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 54 (2006): forthcoming; Alfred Wahl, "La Fédération Internationale de Football-Association (1903-1930)", *Sports et Relations Internationales. Actes du Colloque de Metz-Verdun, 23-25 Septembre*

was to promote and control Association Football worldwide and foster friendly relations among the affiliated national associations. The organization itself was defined both as universal and exclusive: all national football associations should belong to FIFA and only FIFA could lay claims to being the representative of football worldwide.<sup>2</sup>

The main vehicle to reach these aims was article 1 of the statutes reiterated in 1927. It stipulated that the organization consisted of “the Associations recognized by FIFA as the Associations controlling Association Football in their respective countries, provided that only one Association be recognized in each country”.<sup>3</sup> FIFA like other international sporting associations (e.g. the International Olympic Committee, IOC) basically defined “country” as “state”. Nevertheless, and mainly for sport political reasons, there were exceptions to the rule. Thus in 1906 for the sake of integrating the pioneers of football into its ranks FIFA agreed to affiliate the four British Football Association of England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland,<sup>4</sup> and since 1937 “associations in a colony or dominion” could opt for directly joining FIFA whenever the “National football association of the mother country” had signalled its consent.<sup>5</sup> Though the term “country” and its definition provoked again and again lengthy controversies, FIFA stuck to this interpretation each time the Statutes were revised.<sup>6</sup>

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1993, eds. Pierre Arnaud and Alfred Wahl (Metz: Centre de Recherche Histoire et Civilisation de l'Université de Metz, 1994) 31-45.

<sup>2</sup> See Christiane Eisenberg, Pierre Lanfranchi, Tony Mason and Alfred Wahl, *100 Years of Football. The FIFA Centennial Book* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004) 56-77 and 271-293, esp. 60 (facsimile of FIFA's first “Statutes”, May 21, 1904).

<sup>3</sup> FIFA “Statutes” as of 1927, Article 1 “Name and Composition”, *FIFA Handbook*, ed. FIFA, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Amsterdam, 1927) 15-21, esp. 15.

<sup>4</sup> See Eisenberg et al., *100 Years of Football* 62-63, 272-274 and also below for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>5</sup> By 1937, Article 1 of the Statutes had been supplemented with the following lines: “The Associations members of the Federation recognize each other as the Associations controlling Association Football in their respective countries, other organizations being excluded. Associations in a colony or a dominion may in accordance with the National Association of the mother-country a) either remain a subordinate part of the National association or b) affiliate directly to the Federation. For countries placed under the protectorate of another country, the same principles as for dominions or colonies will be in force.” *FIFA Handbook*, ed. FIFA, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (Zurich, 1937) 1.

<sup>6</sup> Thus Article 10: “Admission” of the most recent FIFA Statutes which came in force on January 1, 2004 stipulates “Any Association which is responsible for organizing and supervising football in its country may become a member of FIFA. In this context, the expression ‘country’ shall refer to an independent state recognized by the international community. Subject to par. 5 and par. 6 below, only one Association shall be recognized in each country.” Art. 10, par. 5 refers to the four British associations, each of which is recognized as a separate member of FIFA. Art. 10, par. 6 provides that “An Association in a region which has not yet gained independence may, with the authorization of the Association in the country on which it is dependent, also apply for admission to FIFA.” *FIFA Statutes, Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes, Standing Orders of the Congress*, ed. FIFA (Zurich, 2003) 9.

In August 1960 when FIFA's general assembly, the Congress, assembled in Rome, the Executive Committee once again submitted such a resolution to Congress and saw it approved "with satisfaction" by the attending delegates: "Each constituted National Association is the supreme ruling body governing football in its country, and is consequently the sole body empowered to deal with problems concerning football in the international field."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore the Executive Committee proposed a resolution reiterating and reframing two basic guiding principles for FIFA's future actions: It asked Congress for approval

1. That only one Association in each country be recognized;
2. That a National Association must be open to all who practice football in that country whether amateur, 'non-amateur' or professional and without any racial, religious or political discrimination.

When put to vote, the resolution found an overwhelming majority; it was accepted by a vote of 52 to 10.<sup>8</sup>

The resolution tackled explosive issues. Its intricate political implications become evident in the light of past experience with communist sporting internationalism and current apprehensions about future developments. Supported by communist activists all over Europe Soviet Russia had organized international sporting (including football) competitions of its own in the interwar period that had celebrated proletarian solidarity and an allegedly non-capitalistic style.<sup>9</sup> After the war the USSR broke with its former isolationist line. It finally joined FIFA in November 1946 and encouraged its satellites to follow suit and to participate in international, formerly as 'bourgeois' denigrated sporting competitions and football tournaments.<sup>10</sup> This 'integrationist' turn, though it was warmly welcomed, confronted FIFA at the same time, however, with a new challenge, as the organization had now to come to terms with the fact that countries like Germany, China and Korea were divided and split

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<sup>7</sup> FIFA Congress, August 22, 1960 in Rome, Minutes, 2.

<sup>8</sup> FIFA Congress, 1960 in Rome 5. See also FIFA General Secretary's Report for 1960, 2.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Hajo Bernett, ed., *Der Sport im Kreuzfeuer der Kritik. Kritische Texte aus 100 Jahren deutscher Sportgeschichte* (Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann, 1982) 55-61; André Gounot, *Die Rote Sportinternationale 1921-1937. Kommunistische Massenpolitik im europäischen Arbeitersport. Schriften zur Arbeiterkultur* 38 (Münster etc.: Lit Verlag, 2002); James Riordan, *Soviet Sport Background to the Olympic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) 1-50, 109-129; James Riordan, *Sports, politics and communism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1991) 16-50 passim; Victor Peppard, and James Riordan, *Playing Politics: Soviet Sport Diplomacy to 1992* (Greenwich and London: Jai Press Inc, 1993) 1-48; James Riordan, "La politique sportive étrangère soviétique pendant l'entre-deux-guerres", *Sport et Relations Internationales (1900-1941)*, eds. Pierre Arnaud, and James Riordan (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998) 127-142; Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun. A History of Spectator Sports in the USSR* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 3-78 passim.

<sup>10</sup> The request for affiliation is reprinted in Eisenberg et al., *100 Years of Football* 177. See also Riordan, *Sport, politics and communism* 1-15, 52-101 passim, 126-147; Peppard and Riordan, *Playing Politics* 49-74, 95-114; Edelman, *Serious Fun* 79-154 passim; James Riordan, and Hart Cantelon, "L'Europe de l'est et URSS", *Histoire du Sport en Europe*, eds. James Riordan et al. (Paris etc.: Harmattan, 2004) 239-262.

up into two political units, one adhering to the communist and the other to the capitalist camp.

Given FIFA's goal of achieving universalism and its attempts to have a global reach, the period of the Cold War meant a fundamental challenge in other regards as well. FIFA had to defend its ideal of a clear-cut separation between sport and politics against the systemic politicisation of sport by the communist camp. In this effort, FIFA relied in general on its statutes, claiming their political neutrality. But, as I want to show with the following case study, the statutes themselves were open to interpretation and the prevailing interpretation depended very much on the actual political context and the particular tactical interests of FIFA to promote its main objective at any given moment: the globalisation of football and the worldwide spread of the Laws of the Game under its control. FIFA's handling of the "Chinese question" between 1949/54 and 1980 shows on the one hand how the organization struggled to live up to its principles, to promote its objectives and maintain a room of manoeuvre in spite of the great political divide and challenges of the Cold War. On the other hand it illustrates how FIFA was dependent on the vicissitudes of confrontation and détente in world politics.

## FIFA and the Two Chinas: Drama in Five Acts<sup>11</sup>

### Prelude: The Pre-War Setting

The Chinese Football Association was founded in 1924 and was affiliated with FIFA in 1931.<sup>12</sup> For a long period of time the most outstanding characteristic of FIFA's relations with China was the fact that the association had been founded in this distant part of the world and had asked to be affiliated, thus underlining FIFA's claim to represent the global football community. China entered the global football scene not until 1936 and for a second time in 1948, when its athletes participated at the Olympic football tournament in Berlin and London. Both times it was not the athletes' success but apparently their strangeness and unfamiliarity that caused interest and produced curiosity.<sup>13</sup> Things changed

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<sup>11</sup> The following account is based on the relevant records of FIFA's Executive Committee, Emergency Committee, General Secretary and Congress Acts held in the organization's historical archives in Zurich. I am grateful to Jérôme Champagne for free access to the files.

<sup>12</sup> On FIFA's website one finds the following quite interesting information under the entry "Affiliated National Associations" that offers links to each of them: Football Association of the People's Republic of China, founded in 1924, affiliated in 1931; Chinese Taipei FA founded in 1924, affiliated in 1954.

<sup>13</sup> See Hai Ren, "China and the Olympic movement", *Sport and Physical Education in China*, eds. James Riordan, and Robin Jones (London and New York: ISCPEs, 1999) 202-213, esp. 1-2; Official website of the Chinese Olympic Committee, *10th-15th Olympic Games: 1936-1952*, online, internet, 25 Feb 2005, available

dramatically after Mao Zedong had proclaimed the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949,<sup>14</sup> particularly as the claim to represent all China encountered protracted resistance from the defeated camp, the Republic of China (Taiwan). The Republic of China saw itself supported by the United States and its western allies. The division along political and ideological lines translated itself into sports. Was FIFA to hold on to its original member that now happened to be seated in Communist China and thus support Mao's claims or would the organization reject those claims and thus align itself with the position of the West? Or was there a "third path" that allowed to avoid getting stigmatised as one-sided and thus "political"? FIFA's general goals and statutes offered a variety of orientation marks in this situation. How did the organization proceed in view of competing interests and on what grounds?

Furthermore, FIFA was conceived as a democratic organization with equal rights for all affiliated national football associations (one country – one vote). Policy decisions of the kind under scrutiny, though perhaps designed by few men in FIFA's governing body and administration, ultimately needed the support of the majority in FIFA's general assembly, the Congress, for coming into effect. Given these circumstances, the question how FIFA discussed the issues at stake and if it was successful in its efforts to maintain its apolitical character is most revealing for the self-definition and dynamism of that organization.

### Act 1: The Affiliation of "The National Amateur Athletic Federation", Taiwan, 1954

President Jules Rimet, a Frenchman who had presided over FIFA's fate since 1921 and stayed in office until mid-1954, had his part in preparing the ground for a prolonged and sustained conflict that was to occupy the organization from 1953 onwards. In 1948 and 1952 Chinese delegates had attended the FIFA Congresses, and they attended again in 1953 when an Extraordinary Congress was called to discuss a "new constitution". Apparently it was Rimet, who in the pursuit of FIFA's universal claims, reminded the members of the Executive Committee in early November 1953 that for the moment only the "All China Athletic Federation – Peking" was affiliated with FIFA. He informed his col-

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<http://en.olympic.cn/games/summer/2004-03-27/121663>. On the contrary, it was not before 1954 that a Chinese team took part at a World Cup (preliminary and qualifying rounds), Robin Jones, "The emergence of professional sport: The case of soccer", eds. Riordan and Jones, *Sport and Physical Education in China* 185-201. See also Dong Jinxia, and J.A. Mangan, "Football in the New China: Political Statement, Entrepreneurial Enticement and Patriotic Passion", *Soccer and Society* 2.3 (2001): 79-100.

<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the confrontation between the rival Nationalist and Communist political camps between 1927 and 1949 and the developments after Mao's proclamation of the People's Republic of China see Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 273-278, 282-291, 294-297 and 327.

leagues that he had invited “The National Amateur Athletic Federation”, located in Taiwan to apply for membership with FIFA.<sup>15</sup>

In a certain way, this invitation reflected recent developments in world and geo-politics. After the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 it was the “Republic of China” (Taiwan) claiming China’s rights and obligations under international law. This country assumed to represent China in the United Nations and was accorded the seat as permanent member in the UN Security Council along with the United States, France, the USSR, and the United Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Rimet’s initiative meant that FIFA, apparently quite belatedly, intended to adjust its constituency in accordance with the dominant western Cold War interpretation of the international status of the “Republic of China” (Taiwan) at the expense of Mao’s victorious revolutionary communist state in mainland China.

By June 1954 all the necessary information had reached Zurich so that the “admission” of the Taiwan Federation together with three other Asian applicants – Cambodia, Hong-Kong, “Malaya” (since 1963 part of Malaysia) – could be put on the agenda of the Congress to be held on June 21, 1954 in Berne. Rimet who was presiding over this part of the Congress was sensible enough to propose to vote on each application separately. While the 52 associations attending the Congress did not hesitate to welcome the affiliation of Cambodia, Hong-Kong and Malaya, the proposed admission of “The China National Amateur Athletic Federation, Taiwan” provoked the firm objection of one affiliated national association. Referring to the provisions of art. 1, para. 1 of the statutes (one country – one national association, HH), the delegate of the People’s Republic of China, Mr Li Mun-hwa, declared that he was opposed to the admission of the Taiwan-based Federation. In his view “only the ‘All China Athletic Federation’ was entitled to represent the Democratic Republic of China to which Taiwan belongs”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> FIFA Executive Committee (in the following = ExCo), meeting, Nov. 12-13, 1953 in Paris, Minutes (French version), 1-2. According to this document the National Amateur Athletic Federation of Taiwan had been in existence since 1936.

<sup>16</sup> See *Yearbook of the United Nations: Special Edition: UN Fiftieth Anniversary 1945-1995*, ed. UN Department of Public Information (The Hague etc.: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1995) 18-19, 27. The Republic of China “in recognition of its long-standing fight against aggression, was accorded the honor of being the first to sign the Charter of the United Nations after its approval on June 25, 1945, and it was also the first government to deposit the instruments of ratification with the Government of the United States on September 28, 1945 (*Yearbook of the United Nations* 27). See also Günther Unser, *Die UNO*, 7<sup>th</sup> rev. ed. (Munich: DTV Beck, 2004) 99; Martina Ira Glassner, ed., *The United Nations at Work* (Praeger: Westport Conn, 1998) 161-70 and for the geo-political background Buckley Ebrey, *China* 285-286, 296-297, 327; Warren I. Cohen, “America in the Age of Soviet Power”, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 49-102; Richard Crockatt, *The Fifty Years War. The United States and the Soviet Union in world politics, 1941-1991* (London: Routledge, 1995) 67-78.

<sup>17</sup> FIFA Congress, June 21-22, 1954 in Berne, Minutes, 5-7 (roll call) and 11-12 (Admission National Associations), esp. 12 (quote).

It is difficult to know whether Jules Rimet was apprehensive about the imminent conflict or even willing to run the risk of provoking a conflict by inviting Taiwan's application for membership in the first place. His immediate reaction, however, suggests that he sought to foster FIFA's stated goal of achieving the "unity of world football"<sup>18</sup> with this step. As the debate unfolded, the President immediately took the floor and "recalled that it was tradition of FIFA not to allow political questions to be discussed at its debates. In accordance with the Statutes the Affiliation of the China National Amateur Federation was quite in order. This was a Federation which had jurisdiction over a determined territory in a country and which had sovereignty over this territory. No other questions could be discussed here. We have to remain in the sphere of football".<sup>19</sup> A majority of the Congress delegates supported the President's position. They approved the affiliation of the China National Amateur Federation by 31 votes (out of 52 associations that were represented in the Congress Hall).<sup>20</sup>

The next point of controversy arose when it came to the installation of the five vice-presidents and the nine ordinary members who along with the president were to sit on the Executive Committee, FIFA's governing board. According to the new "constitution" adopted in Paris (November 1953), Congress had to adopt the nomination of the members of the Executive Committee who were proposed by groups of national associations. Such groups already were in existence in Europe and the Americas. It was not clear, however, whether the necessary organizations for proceeding with the nomination had already been founded in Africa and Asia; these continents had one representative each to sit on the Executive Committee.<sup>21</sup>

According to Rimet the Executive Committee had been informed in due time before the opening of the Congress that in Asia there existed such an organization since the recent founding of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on May 5, 1954. The first meeting of the AFC had been attended by 12 of the 24 affiliated Asian associations, and it had nominated Jack Skinner from the Hong Kong Football Association as future member of FIFA's Executive Committee.<sup>22</sup> But this view was not shared by the delegate of the People's Republic of China. "Mr. Chang Lien-hwa (People's Republic of China) stated that not more than the half of the Asian Football Associations took part in the meeting held at Manila on the occasion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asian Games." He then rejected the claim that the AFC was indeed the representative of the Asian associations. His critique emphasized that "The All China Athletic Federation had

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<sup>18</sup> Rimet, Opening Speech, FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 3.

<sup>19</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 12.

<sup>20</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 12.

<sup>21</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 17-22 passim.

<sup>22</sup> See ExCo, meeting, June 12-13, 1954 in Berne, Notes on the Agenda (French version), 5-6; Minutes (French version). 3; see also FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 21.

neither been consulted nor invited to the meeting at Manila”. Consequently he and his organization refused to recognize the AFC and the member of the new Executive Committee it had designated, and they insisted on replacing Jack Skinner with their own candidate for this prestigious post, the President of the All Indian Football Federation.<sup>23</sup>

Again, Jules Rimet intervened. He cut off any further discussion, stressing that the matter had already been settled by Congress a few minutes ago. However, in a more diplomatic tone, Rimet benevolently indicated the future scope of action in line with the statutes of 1953: “If the representatives of the Asian Associations felt that modifications were necessary they could convene a meeting of the Asian Confederation and submit their decision to the next Congress of the Federation.”<sup>24</sup>

## Act 2: Red China’s Claims and FIFA’s Resistance, 1956-1958

Rimet might have intended this as a lesson in FIFA’s internationalism and its putatively apolitical objective of advancing the “unity of world football”, the “unity of its international organization” and the “universality of the Laws of the Game” (Rimet).<sup>25</sup> However, it was not understood in these terms by the delegates representing the People’s Republic of China. The Lisbon Congress, held in June 1956 was confronted with the proposal of the All Athletic Federation, Peking to exclude the China National Amateur Athletic Federation, Taiwan from FIFA. The delegates of the 57 affiliated national associations attending the Congress did not enter into any discussion of this proposal. Apparently they had no objections with the wording of the minutes of this Congress which stated: “As the motives of this proposal were of a political nature, the proposition was rejected.”<sup>26</sup>

This rejection did not prevent a second try at the next FIFA Congress in June 1958. In spite of the sunny weather in Stockholm, the Congress was marked by a rather frosty atmosphere. The tone was set when the delegates of 62 affiliated associations attending the Congress were asked to confirm the minutes of the Lisbon Congress in 1956. Apparently the delegate of the All China Athletic Federation, Peking wanted to use this agenda item for a general statement of Popular China’s claim to exclusive representation. His attempt “to speak about some political aspect” was cut short. Immediately, FIFA’s president, Arthur Drewry, an Englishman who had been elected in June 1956 and

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<sup>23</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 22.

<sup>24</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 22.

<sup>25</sup> FIFA Congress, 1954 in Berne 3 and 4.

<sup>26</sup> FIFA Congress, June 9-10, 1956 in Lisbon, Minutes, 4; see also ExCo, meeting, June 6-7, 1956 in Lisbon, Report on the Agenda, 11 and Minutes, 13. By the way, FIFA’s statutes precluded sanctions, or even the expulsion of an affiliated association that respected the Federation’s statutes and regulations.

stayed in office until his death in March 1961, intervened and asked the delegate “to desist and to resume his seat”.<sup>27</sup>

The confrontation between West and East continued when the Congress turned to item 10, point 3 on the agenda, the renewed request put forward by the delegates of All China Athletic Federation, Peking, to exclude the National Amateur Athletic Federation, Taiwan. This time comments on the proposal to exclude the Taiwanese organization were admitted, and Mr Chang Lienhua was joined in his support for the proposal by the delegate of the USSR, Mr V. Antipenok. Needless to say, the delegate of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation Taiwan, Mr Lee Wai-Tong, recommended rejecting the proposal. Apparently, FIFA’s President and other members of the Executive Committee were also prepared to meet the renewed challenge. Drewry dryly stated that “the Executive Committee did not recommend the exclusion of the China National Amateur Athletic Federation, Taiwan” and then proceeded to the vote. Just as two years earlier, the proposal was rejected by a majority. This time 41 of the 62 national associations attending the Congress voted no.<sup>28</sup>

### Act 3: Red China’s Withdrawal and FIFA’s First Search for a Compromise, 1958/1959

The solid majority that allowed Rimet and others a sense of relief in 1954, 1956 and again in 1958 did not last for long. Indeed, the outcome of the Lisbon negotiations caused a problem for FIFA, as Peking was not willing to give in and did not accept this majority vote. On July 8, 1958 the All China Athletic Federation – Peking – notified its withdrawal as a member of FIFA, a step “which was accompanied by a circular addressed to the member-Associations of FIFA”.<sup>29</sup> Article 40 of the Statutes, however, had foreseen rash acts on the part of affiliated associations and stipulated that – once a withdrawal had been announced – it had to be confirmed three months after the organization had received the first letter of intent by registered mail, stipulating the intention of a member association to leave the organization.<sup>30</sup> FIFA’s general secretary indicated this formality to the Chinese Federation in a letter of July 28, but in return received a letter in which the Chinese “declared that they had officially withdrawn on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1958 and that they refuse to accept any documents or material from FIFA”. In a second letter of August 6, 1958 the Federation

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<sup>27</sup> FIFA Congress, June 5, 1958 in Stockholm, Minutes 2.

<sup>28</sup> FIFA Congress, 1958 in Stockholm 4; see also ExCo, meeting, February 12-13, 1958 in Zurich, Minutes, 10.

<sup>29</sup> See Emergency Committee, meeting, Jan. 6, 1959 in Barcelona. Items submitted to the Emergency Committee for its information, No. 15 “Withdrawal of the All China Athletic Federation, Dec. 17, 1958”; ExCo, meeting, April 24-25, 1959 in London, Notes on the Agenda, 10; ExCo, meeting, Oct. 27-28, 1959 in Zurich, Notes on the Agenda, 4 (quote).

<sup>30</sup> See Emergency Committee, Jan. 6, 1959, Items, No. 15; ExCo, meeting, April 24-25, 1958, 8.

repeated the date of its official withdrawal and informed FIFA “that they do no longer consider themselves bound by the Statutes of FIFA”. To emphasize the wording, a symbolic act accompanied this exchange: the Federation returned FIFA’s letter of July 28.<sup>31</sup>

Apparently the two letters from Peking did not meet the statutory code of standards for definitely removing Red China’s footballers from FIFA’s membership list. At least FIFA’s general secretary Gassmann, President Drewry and the other members of the Executive Committee were of the opinion that the requested formal confirmation had not yet been received in Zurich by April 24, 1959. In the spring of 1959, this neglect on the part of the Chinese Federation prompted the Executive Committee to become active again and the range of the ensuing activities seems to indicate that, when rejecting China’s request for the expulsion of Taiwan, it never had the intention of forcing the All China Athletic Federation, Peking into withdrawal but rather to oblige it to respect FIFA’s statutes and regulations.<sup>32</sup>

Because the confirmation by registered mail was missing, the Executive Committee insisted on its interpretation and claimed that the Chinese Federation “must be considered as being still a member”. More steps were to follow. The “Bureau” – it was announced on April 24, 1959 – “will take unofficial steps with the All China Athletic Federation to try to induce them to remain a member”.<sup>33</sup> And indeed, the “Bureau” decided to call upon FIFA’s Soviet Russian Vice-President, Victor Granatkin, to act as intermediary. It asked him to find out during his forthcoming meetings with representatives of the All China Athletic Federation “whether they maintain their withdrawal”.<sup>34</sup>

At its next meeting in late October 1959 the Executive Committee put the review of the matter on its agenda. When reporting to his colleagues in the Executive Committee, Victor Granatkin could not offer much encouraging news even had he wanted to. In the first place he underlined that the Chinese Federation had not changed its attitude and was not able to do so for reasons that were of the highest priority and transcended the narrowly defined authority of sporting organizations. In accord with the position of its government, the Chinese Federation would only be willing to rescind its withdrawal from FIFA after the definitive expulsion of the Taiwanese Association. Granatkin pointed to China’s legitimate claim to exclusive representation and China’s 600 million inhabitants compared to a population of approximately 8 millions in Taiwan. These were additional arguments in support of his recommendation that FIFA “consider the ‘Pan Chinese Federation’ as the only Chinese organism and – as a consequence – include on the agenda of the next congress an item: ‘Expul-

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<sup>31</sup> ExCo, meeting, October 27-28, 1959, Notes on the Agenda, 4.

<sup>32</sup> ExCo, meeting, April 24-25, 1959 in London, Notes on the Agenda, 10.

<sup>33</sup> ExCo, meeting, April 24, 1959 in London, Minutes, 8.

<sup>34</sup> ExCo, meeting, October 27, 1959, FIFA House Zurich, Minutes (English), 5.

sion of the National Federation of Formosa”<sup>35</sup>. However, he finished his speech on a more diplomatic line by indicating his willingness to admit: “Je vois la complexité que présente la solution de cette problème, d’autant plus que nous devons agir que conformément aux statuts. Si l’on interroge les statuts, on n’y trouve pas de réponse et nulle part dans les statuts cette situation n’est prévue. Par conséquent nous nous voyons obligés à prendre une décision en nous inspirant du prestige de la FIFA, de son importance internationale.”<sup>36</sup>

The statement provoked a long and controversial debate among Granatkin’s colleagues in the Executive Committee. Though they were by no means willing to give in, they tried hard to find new approaches to settle the affair, like following the lead of the IOC and asking the Taiwan Association to change its name and apply it to its territory. It was of foremost importance, they felt, not to hasten any decision in this complicated matter, to win time and to see to it that those national associations that might be obliged by their respective governments to play matches in China should ask in time for FIFA’s special permission to proceed.<sup>37</sup>

#### Act 4: Interventions in Favour of Red China, 1960

By now there was no question that the process to find and negotiate a solution in compliance with FIFA’s ideals and statutes would be thorny and lengthy. The next act in the tug of war over Peking’s claim to exclusive representation opened in August 1960. At the Congress in Rome it was now up to the Bulgarian Football Association to request Congress to vote for the expulsion of the Republic of China Amateur Athletic Federation, Taiwan “in conformity with the provisions of art. 41, para. 1, lit. c. of the Statutes of the FIFA”. And once again the Executive Committee, formally regretting “the absence of delegates from the All China Athletic Federation of Peking”, prevailed with its interpretation of the statutes. After a short discussion in the course of which Ernst Thommen of Switzerland, FIFA’s senior Vice-President who was in the chair of this Congress, reminded those present “that the situation of the Federation of Taiwan was the same as for the two Germanies and the two Koreas”. The Bulgarian proposal was rejected by an overwhelming majority of 45 votes to 8 (Congress attended by 69 members).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> ExCo, meeting, 1959 Zurich 5-6, and Minutes (German-French), 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> ExCo, meeting, 1959 Zurich, Minutes (German-French) 9. English translation HH: “I understand the complexity of finding a solution for this problem. And this is all the more the case because we have to act according to the Statutes. But if we look at the Statutes, we don’t find an answer to this question; the Statutes just have not foreseen that such a question might arise. We are thus obliged to come to a decision in due regard to FIFA’s prestige and its international importance.”

<sup>37</sup> ExCo, meeting, 1959 Zurich, Minutes (English), 5-7, and Minutes (German-French), 10-14.

<sup>38</sup> FIFA Congress, August 22-23, 1960 in Rome, Minutes, 4. – After the Second World War both the German and the Japanese football associations were excluded from FIFA. The

## Act 5: Confrontations in a Changing Global Setting, 1974-1976

The matter itself, however, was by no means settled. The relationship to the People's Republic of China continued to constitute a serious challenge to FIFA, repeatedly raising questions about the administration and interpretation of its statutes. In June 1974, some two and a half years after the General Assembly of the United Nations had decided by majority vote to recognize the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate representative of China and to oust Taiwan in favour of Beijing's Communist government duties,<sup>39</sup> and roughly three years after the re-opening of Sino-U.S. relations initiated by U.S. President Nixon<sup>40</sup>, the issue was back on the agenda of FIFA's Congress to be held in Frankfurt on the Main.<sup>41</sup> By this time, due to FIFA's successful integration of new independent states in Africa (38 affiliated associations) and Asia (34 affiliated associations) into its orbit, the composition of its constituency had dramatically changed. Indeed, 1974 marked a turning point both in FIFA's history and its struggle to come to terms with the "Chinese question". First, the Congress delegates convened at Frankfurt did not renew the mandate of the British president Stanley Rous, a former general secretary of the English Football Association, after almost thirteen years of presidency. For the first time they elected a non-European president, the Brazilian entrepreneur and football manager João Havelange who had toured the Asian, African and Latin-American affiliated associations and promised generous financial and technical development aid in case of a successful candidacy. Second, the Non-European, in particular the African and Arab members emancipated themselves from the European tutelage not only by voting for Havelange, but also by using FIFA's general assembly as a forum to articulate their demands and (political) alignments and to promote their goals in a more pressing manner than ever before. Thus, in 1974, it was no longer a European country of the Eastern block that

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Federal Republic of Germany (Deutscher Fussball-Bund, founded in 1949) was affiliated in September 1950; the German Democratic Republic (Deutscher Sportausschuss, Fussball-sektion der DDR) was admitted provisionally in Oct. 1951, and formally affiliated in July 1952. – The Korean national football association was founded in 1928. The Republic of Korea was affiliated in 1948; Korea DPR, a national football association was founded in 1945, it was affiliated in 1958.

<sup>39</sup> See Cohen, "America" 188; Unser 99, 175, 437. The General Assembly's decision dated from October 25, 1971, roughly a month later, on November 23, 1971 the People's Republic of China took part for the first time at the deliberations of the UN Security Council. It is, however, important to note that – as Unser points out – Taiwan was not excluded in conformity with the UN Charter; rather the majority decision enacted the replacement of Taipeh by the People's Republic of China (175).

<sup>40</sup> See *TIME Almanac 2003* (Boston: Family Education Network, 2002) 749; Cohen, "America" 187-191; Crockatt 229, 246-250. In July 1971 U.S. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger had secretly visited Beijing and reached an agreement whereby Nixon would visit China in early 1972.

<sup>41</sup> FIFA Congress, June 11, 1974 in Frankfurt on the Main, Agenda – Enclosures – Minutes. For FIFA's constituency and the associations attending Congress, see Minutes 1-4.

took the lead to defend China's cause but the Kuwait Football Association and the African Football Confederation.

Kuwait proposed "a) that the membership of the FA of China National in the FIFA shall be cancelled" and "b) that the FA of the People's Republic of China shall be called upon to resume its membership in the FIFA".<sup>42</sup> The ad hoc amendment, submitted by the President of the African Football Confederation sought to enforce this proposal by referring the delegates to the statutes. In fact it suggested that FIFA, if it continued Taiwan's membership, was indeed acting in a highly political manner that violated its own statutes. The organization was interfering in the internal political affairs of a country, because Taiwan, "by international decision" – a clear reference to the UN reversal of October 1971 – "has been recognized as a province of Chinese territory" and that there was legally only one China. FIFA, however, was obliged by its statutes to recognize only one national association effectively controlling football in a country or national territory.<sup>43</sup>

Neither the proposal nor its amendment carried. A decisive element in bringing about this outcome was Executive Committee's previous intervention which majority the proponents would need. Though its interpretation of the Statutes that a 75 % majority was necessary in voting on this motion and its addenda was not uncontroversial, it was adopted by Congress after a lengthy discussion with a majority of 67 against 50 votes.<sup>44</sup> Thus, a 75 % majority was necessary (91 out of 122 votes), and the measures favouring the People's Republic of China garnered only 58 (amendment) and 59 votes (Kuwait proposal) respectively.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the Congress vote in 1974 indicated that the proponents of a clear cut solution in favour of the unconditional re-admission of the People's Republic of China *and* the expulsion of Taiwan had made ground. However, it took six more years before FIFA was able to find a solution that allowed the opposing camps to reach a compromise. Before detailing the compromise accepted by Congress in 1980, it is, however, wise to review the chronology of events and to briefly recapitulate how the situation had evolved by 1976 and 1978.

In July 1976 there were 108 affiliated associations attending the Congress in Montreal. In conformity with the proposal the Executive Committee had decided to put on this year's agenda, Congress agreed to the readmission of the "Democratic People's Republic China Beijing" without opposition. The African associations were not inclined to leave things there. However, their ad hoc proposal that the expulsion of Taiwan be added to the agenda did not find ma-

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<sup>42</sup> FIFA Congress, June 11, 1974 in Frankfurt on the Main, Enclosure No. 4, Item X of the Agenda, "National Associations – Membership". "Proposal submitted by the Kuwait Football Association for inclusion in the agenda of the FIFA Congress scheduled to be held in Munich in June 1974" (English version), 2-3, here 3.

<sup>43</sup> FIFA Congress, 1974 in Frankfurt on the Main, Minutes 5.

<sup>44</sup> FIFA Congress, 1974 in Frankfurt on the Main, Minutes 5.

<sup>45</sup> FIFA Congress, 1974 in Frankfurt on the Main, Minutes 8.

jority support. At the same time, the contour of a possible line of compromise took shape when the English delegate, Sir Harold Thompson, first remarked that “he failed to understand why two Chinas could not be considered, in view of the fact that two Koreas, two Vietnams and two Germanies are FIFA members”, but then conceded to the other side, that “in view of the present situation, he felt that Taiwan should be asked to change its name.”<sup>46</sup>

Apparently, it required some time to gain the necessary support for this recommendation of a “linguistic turn” as a key element to an integrationist solution. The People’s Republic of China stuck to its conditions for re-entry, that is, its exclusive right to represent China and thus the ‘expulsion’ of Taiwan. And all those national football associations that sympathized with Mao’s China saw the sole responsibility for FIFA’s further continued troubled relationship in Taiwan’s ongoing membership with the world soccer organization.

### Grand Finale 1978/80: a Conditional Surrender and a Triumph

In May 1978 when the next FIFA congress met in Buenos Aires, 109 of the 146 affiliated national associations were represented. The assembled members devoted most of their time to discussing the Iranian proposal “requesting the cancellation of the FIFA membership of the Republic of China F.A. Taiwan and the re-admission of the DPR China F.A. Peking”.<sup>47</sup> Though even the English delegate, Sir Harold Thompson, now admitted “that it would definitely be in the interests of FIFA if the People’s Republic of China were to rejoin the football fraternity” and therefore was willing to accept a decision “to cancel or annul the membership of Taiwan” (adding “they would of course have the

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<sup>46</sup> FIFA Congress, July 16, 1976 in Montreal, Agenda, 4, Item IX.a. National Association – Membership: “Re-admission: Football Association of the People’s Republic of China, Peking”; Minutes. 5-6, esp. 5 (quote). Most speakers commenting on the African ad hoc proposal “to expel Taiwan”, among them President Havelange, other ExCo members, general secretary Dr Kaeser and delegates from Latin America, doubted that the proposal could be put to a vote immediately as it had not been communicated in due time in order to be included into the Congress agenda. Before it could be put to a vote, the provisions of the statutes obliged the Congress first to vote by 3/4 majority that this new item, “the expulsion of Taiwan”, should be added to the agenda. A rather tumultuous debate developed in which some delegates pretended not to understand the issue on which they were voting. The final round ended in a triumph for all those who resisted to “the exclusion of another Affiliated Association which had in no way contravened the Statutes or Regulations of FIFA”, as Guatemala’s delegate J.L. Castillo phrased his objection (FIFA Congress, 1976 in Montreal, Minutes 5). When the delegates were finally asked to cast their votes, there were only 5 of them who “voted in favour of placing the proposal to expel Taiwan on the Agenda and 51 delegates voted against” (FIFA Congress, 1976 in Montreal, Minutes 6).

<sup>47</sup> FIFA Congress, May 30, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Agenda, 4, X.b “National Association – Membership”. “To examine Iran’s proposal requesting the expulsion of the Republic of China FA, Taiwan, and re-admission of the DPR China FA, Peking (see Appendix No. 4 – blue); Appendix: Iranian Football Federation to FIFA, President’s office, Dec. 19, 1977, Proposal ....; Minutes, 2-4 (Roll Call), 6-11 (debate of the Iranian proposal).

chance to re-affiliate at a later date when the circumstances would have to be reconsidered on their merits”<sup>48</sup>, there were nevertheless still some delegates who did not support this line of argument. They insisted, like the Uruguayan delegate, that “it was inadmissible that an Association which was requesting to become a member of FIFA should make the condition that any other member whatsoever be deprived of membership”.<sup>49</sup> Others feared (like the delegates from Fuji) that “a precedent would be created and a sense of insecurity would prevail”<sup>50</sup> or they stressed (like the delegates of the US Soccer Federation) that their “Association would also be more than happy to see the People’s Republic of China rejoin the FIFA but not at Taiwan’s expense”.<sup>51</sup> And last but not least, the Argentinean delegates insisted that – given the purely political nature of the question – “to take a decision of this nature would be to violate all FIFA’s basic principles and ideals”.<sup>52</sup> The debate was by FIFA standards truly extraordinary by its length of several hours, its intensity and the quality of arguments that were advanced in a vivid exchange of pros and cons detailing the particulars and implications of the Iranian proposal by the 20 delegates from all continents.

It was the masterly handling of the provisions of the statutes which paved the way for a compromise at the end of this intense controversy. The solution consisted in postponing the vote on the expulsion of Taiwan (which would have required a 75 % majority of votes). Instead, the Brazilian amendment was put to vote, and, as a majority of delegates supported it (57 votes for, 47 votes against), “the Executive Committee was entrusted to make a decision on this issue”.<sup>53</sup>

In the light of the following events, this decision of the Buenos Aires Congress in 1978 proved to be a very wise and even foresighted one. By October 13, 1979, the Executive Committee was able to announce the success of its negotiations in this tricky business. Indeed it had come to a solution that no one could have foreseen. After an absence of 22 years, the Football Association of the People’s Republic of China agreed to rejoin FIFA. Due to a diplomatic offensive undertaken by President Havelange and General Secretary Käser during and following the August 1979 World Youth Tournament in Japan (which included a trip to Beijing), it was possible to cut the Gordian knot and win both Chinese sides for an integrationist approach. Thus it would be possible, the Executive Committee announced,

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<sup>48</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 7.

<sup>49</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 7.

<sup>50</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 8.

<sup>51</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 8.

<sup>52</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 8.

<sup>53</sup> FIFA Congress, 1978 in Buenos Aires, Minutes 10-11.

1. To maintain the membership of the Football Association located in Taipei on the condition that it changes its name in ‘The Chinese Taipei Football Association’ and consequently does not use any symbols of the former ‘Republic of China’
2. To re-admit the ‘Football Association of the People’s Republic of China’ in accordance with Article 3 of the Statutes of FIFA”.<sup>54</sup>

The new formula had already been circulated by the Executive Committee as its decision to the affiliated associations by October 1979.<sup>55</sup> In the event it was binding, and it did not allow for any further discussion. Notwithstanding the declaration that it was “perfectly aware of the fact that the decision concerning the symbols poses some problems for the Chinese Taipei F.A.”, the Executive Committee was convinced that “the advantages of the FIFA decision surpass by far any possible inconveniences”.<sup>56</sup>

The Committee could have pointed out (but in fact did not) that its “formula” was at this time by no means unique, as the IOC after lengthy negotiations and two visits to Red China finally opted for the same solution at the end of October 1979.<sup>57</sup> When the delegates of 103 affiliated national associations assembled for FIFA’s 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress in Zurich on July 7, 1980, the “formula” was on the agenda, and it was approved in the presence of two delegates from the People’s Republic of China who attended it. The critical comment of the delegate from Taiwan was no longer relevant. The only concession President Havelange was willing to admit in this hour of triumph was that it should be noted in the minutes.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> FIFA Congress, July 7, 1980 in Zurich, Report concerning the period from June 1978 to March 1980, 2 (quote); see also 4.

<sup>55</sup> See FIFA Congress, 1980 in Zurich. The affiliated associations were informed of these decisions in FIFA’s official bulletin *FIFA NEWS* 189 (October 1979): 589-590.

<sup>56</sup> FIFA Congress, 1980 in Zurich, Report 5.

<sup>57</sup> See Official Website of the Chinese Olympic Committee, *Reinstatement in the Olympic Movement*, online, internet, 25 Feb 2005, available [http://en.olympic.cn/china\\_oly/history/2004-03-27/1218](http://en.olympic.cn/china_oly/history/2004-03-27/1218) (as of); Björn Conrad, “China im Zeichen der fünf Ringe: Ein Überblick über die chinesische Olympiageschichte von 1896 bis 2004”, *China Analysis* 40 (Nov. 2004): 12-13; online, internet, 5 March 2005, available [www.chinapolitik.de](http://www.chinapolitik.de). The visits to China PR by IOC President Lord M.M. Killanin and Vice-President J.A. Samaranch took place respectively in September 1977 and April 1978. The IOC members voted on the resolution proposed by the IOC Executive Board by mail at the end of October 1979. 62 cast their votes for, 17 against the resolution, and 2 abstained. After the vote, China PR was reinstated in the IOC as the representative of the Olympic Movement in China after 21 years of self-imposed absence, while the Olympic committee of Taiwan was transformed into the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee and had to change its symbols (flag, anthem and emblem) in correspondence with its reduced scope of representation.

<sup>58</sup> FIFA Congress 1980 in Zurich, Minutes (German version) 2 (Roll Call) and 4-5.

## Sport Politics versus High Politics: Statutes as Liabilities and Assets

FIFA's handling of its statutes in the case of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan illustrates the organization's embeddedness in world politics. The confrontation of East and West across the Cold War divide brought with it the intense politicisation of sports competition. FIFA intended to meet this challenge by stressing the political neutrality of its ideals, the unremitting quest for promoting sporting internationalism through soccer's global organization and integration in one set of unique "laws".

The legacy of FIFA's founding fathers consisted in their reliance on nationhood and nation states as powerful agents and the political conviction that internationalism depended on the cooperation and integration of nation states. The statutes thus proclaimed that only national associations whose control over the game and sporting sovereignty applied to an integral national territory should be admitted to membership and that all members should have equal rights and each of them one vote. However, in the case of the four British football associations FIFA established a precedent. England's pioneering role in football apart, a compromise was instituted between the "raison d'Etat" and the "raison of nations", as the British made their affiliation in 1906 dependent on the fact that FIFA accepted them as four independent sporting nations.<sup>59</sup> This constituted a breach and fostered the notion of a "sporting geography" that did not and had not to abide by the rules of "political geography".<sup>60</sup> Sporting nations could develop and exist inside of a politically unified Empire or even inside of a nation state. The language of FIFA's statutes was, so to speak, open for these peculiarities and fuzzy dynamics, the building of sporting nations, as it carefully avoided the term "sovereign state" or "state territory" and preferred to talk of "country" when defining the spatial reach and exclusive sporting control FIFA required of its members, the so-called national associations.

However, in spite of its compromising attitude, FIFA got into deep trouble when nation states split up due to the block confrontation after the Second World War. The division followed political, not sporting, lines. FIFA's claims to be apolitical and to seek nothing more but the world unity of national soccer associations and soccer enthusiasts proved to be disingenuous in this climate.

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<sup>59</sup> See H.G. Moorhouse, "One State, Several Countries: Soccer and Nationality in a 'United Kingdom'", *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (1995): 55-74; Eisenberg et al., *100 Years of Football* 62 and 64.

<sup>60</sup> Experimenting with these concepts and ideas was not limited to FIFA. Pierre de Coubertin and his IOC confronted the same problems and sought solutions, and it was Pierre de Coubertin who contrasted the term "sporting geography" with "political geography" in 1911, see Hans-Dieter Krebs, "The Gentle Power of Coubertin's 'Sporting Geography'", *Olympic Review* (Aug./Sept. 2002): 5-8; online, internet, 5 March 2005, available [http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/olympic\\_news/review\\_uk.asp?period=08/01/2002;;09/30/2002](http://www.olympic.org/uk/news/olympic_news/review_uk.asp?period=08/01/2002;;09/30/2002).

FIFA's interpretation of its statutes and its use of the organization's provisions were transformed into highly sophisticated tools. The result was rather paradoxical. FIFA's claim to political neutrality and universalism "for the good of the game" went along with a highly politicised interpretation and handling of its statutes. Apparently the reading of the statutes evolved over time. It depended both on the broader political context, the political affiliations of FIFA's governing body and the composition of its constituency. In the process, FIFA's statutes did not lose their proclaimed political neutrality; rather, they proved to be an important instrument for pursuing (sport) political objectives.