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Cooperation and conflict:

The case of the European Sports Conference in the 1970s and 1980s

It will never be forgotten, that the European Sports Conference was for over 20 years one of the few bridges that reached over the whole of Europe, and where despite all the difficulties that persisted because of the complete governmental dependence of the European sports federations a lot of bridges were built between human beings.¹

Introduction

These words of Walfried König, one of the West German protagonists of European sports cooperation in the 1990s, serve well to describe the role and, as we will see, especially the contemporary perception of the European Sports Conference (ESC) during the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, as indicated by König, the ESC was not the only European institution, where ‘East’ and ‘West’ met in sport during this period of the Cold War. Beside regular competitions and championships and the collaboration in the international and European federations such as UEFA,² there was a growing web of bilateral sport treaties between socialist and non-socialist countries spanning Europe which culminated in the 1970s.³

1 König, Walfried. Der zukünftige europäische Binnenmarkt und die Konsequenzen für den Sport. In *Der Sport im zusammenwachsenden Europa. Sportpolitische und sportfachliche Aspekte*, Walter Tokarski, Ludger Triphaus and Karen Petry (eds.), 20. Köln: Sport und Buch Strauß, 1993 [All translations from German to English by me].

2 Mittag, Jürgen. Europa und der Fußball. Die europäische Dimension des Vereinsfußballs vom Mitropa-Cup bis hin zur Champions League. In *Das Spiel mit dem Fußball. Interessen, Projektionen und Vereinnahmungen*, Jürgen Mittag and Jörg-Uwe Nieland (eds.), 155–176. Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007; Mittag, Jürgen and Jörg-Uwe Nieland. Auf der Suche nach Gesamteuropa – UEFA und EBU als Impulsgeber der Europäisierung des Sports. In *Freunde oder Feinde? Sportberichterstattung in Ost und West während des Kalten Krieges*, Christoph Bertlin and Evelyn Mertin (eds.), 208–229. Gütersloh: Medienfabrik Gütersloh, 2013; Vonnard, Philippe, Grégory Quin and Nicolas Bancel (eds.). *Building Europe with the Ball: Turning Points in the Europeanization of Football, 1905–1995*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016.

3 For example, in the 1970s the West German sports federation signed treaties with the responsible authorities from Yugoslavia (December 1973), the German Democratic Republic (May 1974),

The ESC was both a symbol of that growing cooperation as well as a motor for further contacts. Yet, this platform was exceptional, because it was the only forum of that kind where leading sports officials from the Western European non- (or semi-)governmental organizations (such as the West German Deutsche Sportbund, the Dutch Nederlandse Sport Federatie, the Österreichische Bundes-Sportorganisation (Austria), the French Comité National Olympique et Sportif, or the British Sports Council) conferred and discussed with top officials from the Eastern European sports departments (such as the Soviet Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, the East German DTSB, the Czechoslovakian ČSTV, or the Hungarian OTSH).

The example of the ESC shows that a history that focuses exclusively on conflict and confrontation in sport during the Cold War tends to miss an important facet: the numerous channels for communication, a web of bilateral sport relationships and even collective efforts in different sport-related domains that existed in that period. As David L. Andrews and Stephen Wagg put it:

Although sport is more regularly mobilized as a means of nurturing positive relations with allied nations, during the Cold War sport brought enemies together, and provided opportunities for initiating and developing diplomatic ties that would otherwise have been harder to instigate.⁴

Of course, these opportunities were not independent of the outside world. Rather, as we will see, it was a characteristic of the ESC that the will to communicate was hindered and sometimes overshadowed by the hardened East-West division. By stressing the ambiguous character of the ESC, this article follows recent debates about the role of international organizations and transnational forms of communication and exchange during the Cold War. In general, this line of research points out that international organizations and platforms were important

Romania (April 1975), the Soviet Union (March 1977), Bulgaria (August 1977), Poland (March 1978), Hungary (April 1978), China (June 1979) and Czechoslovakia (December 1979).

⁴ Andrews, David L. and Stephen Wagg. Introduction: War Minus the Shooting? In *East Plays West. Sport and the Cold War*, David L. Andrews and Stephen Wagg (eds.), 1–10. London, New York: Routledge, 2007, here 4. For further case studies see also Dichter, Heather L. and Andrew L. Johns (eds.). *Diplomatic Games. Sport, Statecraft and International Relations since 1945*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2014; Bertling, Christoph and Evelyn Mertin (eds.). *Freunde oder Feinde? Sportberichterstattung in Ost und West während des Kalten Krieges*. Gütersloh: Medienfabrik Gütersloh, 2013.

sites of bloc confrontation, while at the same time enabling identification and pursuit of common interests and initiatives.⁵

To add another analytical concept to these studies, this article proposes to interpret the ESC as a special case of ‘Europeanization’ that reached over and beyond the Iron Curtain. Within the tradition of political science, the concept of Europeanization has been used to describe processes whereby supranational European policies or laws gain influence on national policy or jurisdiction, as in sport for example in the case of the “Bosman ruling” from 1995.⁶ In a certain shift of perspective, other scholars have argued that everyday forms and practices of social exchange should be integrated to a higher degree into the concept of Europeanization.⁷ In sports sociology as well as in sports history, this “culturalist” notion of Europeanization has been absorbed and tested, especially for football.⁸ Alexander Brand and Arne Niemann have pointed out that the role of “transboundary networks or actors, whose interests and perceptions are either aggregated or amalgamated within these networks and institutions” is crucial.⁹

5 See for example Suri, Jeremi. Conflict and Co-operation in the Cold War: New Directions in Contemporary Historical Research. *Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (2011): 5–9; Kott, Sandrine. Par-delà la guerre froide. Les organisations internationales et les circulations Est-Ouest (1947–1973). *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 109 (2011): 142–154; Autio-Sarasma, Sari and Katalin Miklóssy (eds.). *Reassessing Cold War Europe*. New York: Routledge, 2011. An important reference for the role of international organizations in the twentieth century in general is the work of Akira Iriye, for example Iriye, Akira. *Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

6 See for example Featherstone, Kevin and Claudio M. Radaelli (eds.). *The Politics of Europeanization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

7 See for example Delanty, Gerard and Chris Rutherford. *Rethinking Europe. Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*. London: Routledge, 2005; Bornemann, John and Nick Fowler. Europeanization. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (2007): 487–514.

8 Mittag, Jürgen and Benjamin Legrand. Towards a Europeanization of Football? Historical Phases in the Evolution of the UEFA European Football Championship. *Soccer and Society* 11 (2010): 709–722; Roche, Maurice. Cultural Europeanization and the “Cosmopolitan Condition”: EU Regulation and European Sport. In *Cosmopolitanism and Europe*, Chris Rumford (ed.), 126–141. London: Liverpool University Press, 2007; Bancel, Nicolas, Grégory Quin and Philippe Vonnard. Introduction. Studying the Europeanization of Football in a Long Term Perspective. In *Building Europe with the Ball*, 1–18.

9 Brand, Alexander and Arne Niemann. Europeanization in the Societal/Trans-national Realm: What European Integration Studies Can Get Out of Analysing Football. *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 3 (2007): 182–201, here 185. See also Levermore, Roger and Peter Milward. Official Policies and Informal Transversal Networks: Creating “Pan-European Identifications” Through Sport? *The Sociological Review* 55 (2007): 144–164; Ther, Philipp. Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks. Toward a Transnational History of Europe. In *Comparative*

A useful analytical definition of Europeanization has been proposed by the German historians Ulrike von Hirschhausen and Kiran Klaus Patel, stating that it comprehends “a variety of political, social, economic and cultural processes that promote (or modify) a sustainable strengthening of intra-European connections and similarities through acts of emulation, exchange and entanglement and that have been experienced and labelled as ‘European’ in the course of history”. However, they stress that: Europeanization is not limited to integrative elements such as these, but also encompasses parallel processes of delimitation and ‘othering’, as well as fragmentation and conflict. It is the sum of these transnational processes that constitutes Europeanization.¹⁰

As expressed in this quotation, the concept of Europeanization does not refer to a “success story” of peaceful collaboration and steadily ongoing integration, but includes fractures, inconsistencies and resistance. In our special case of the ESC, conflict, failed attempts to reach a higher degree of institutionalization and the emphasis on being different (to the Eastern or Western counterpart) framed the specific form of Cold War Europeanization.

In this article, I will try to give both a first historical sketch of the ESC as well as an analytical interpretation, placing it more deeply within the conceptual framework of Europeanization in sport. In order to do so, I will first briefly retrieve some basic aspects of the ESC in the next section. This seems necessary as an introduction since there exists virtually no scholarship about the ESC. In the following, I will then describe the development of the ESC during the 1970s and give a short review of its further development in the 1980s.

As for sources, my historical assessment of the ESC relies on the published records of the conferences, unpublished archive material from the German Olympic Sports Federation (DOSB) and contemporary press coverage (mainly examples from West Germany).¹¹ Of course, this is an important, albeit necessary restriction, creating a predominantly West German perspective of the ESC. Further research in the future will have to complement and correct this evaluation by integrating source material from other participating countries.

and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), 204–225. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.

10 Hirschhausen, Ulrike von and Kiran Klaus Patel. *Europeanization in History: An Introduction*. In *Europeanization in the Twentieth Century. Historical Approaches*, Martin Conway and Kiran Klaus Patel (eds.), 1–18, here 2. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

11 I have to thank Ulrich Schulze Forsthövel and his colleague Sigrid Jürgens from the DOSB for their help and the preparation of archive material.

The European Sports Conference in brief

Of course, cooperation, mutual exchange, but also conflicts in sport have a long history in Europe.¹² After 1945, this history cannot be written without taking into account the context of the Cold War. While in different sports, little by little, federations on a European level were formed, the situation on the top level of sports associations was marked by a sharp separation between East and West: the socialist countries collaborated closely on different levels under the lead of the USSR,¹³ the sports representatives of the Western European countries from the 1960s met in the informal “NGO Club” and the Committee for Out-of-School Education of the Council of Europe.¹⁴ First ideas to launch a series of sports conferences in which *all* European countries could participate evolved precisely during these meetings of the NGO Club of the Western European sports organizations under the aegis of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg during the second half of the 1960s.

In 1967, the Comité de liaison, which prepared the consultations between the sports NGOs and the Committee for Out-of-School Education of the Council of Europe, stated that the cooperation between Western NGOs and the Council of Europe should not lead to the constitution of a “bloc”. According to its memorandum, sports organizations throughout the whole of Europe were confronted by similar questions and problems. Therefore, a conference for “l’Europe géogra-

12 For the first three decades of the twentieth century, see for example Tomlinson, Alan and Christopher Young. Sport in Modern European History: Trajectories, Constellations, Conjunctions. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24 (2011): 409–427.

13 See Kobierecki, Michał Marcin. Sport as a Tool for Strengthening a Political Alliance: The Case of the Eastern Bloc during the Cold War. *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* 12 (2016): 7–24.

14 The “NGO Club” was formed in the 1960s by the sports associations of the Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and the Federal Republic of Germany and was quickly enlarged to include other Western European countries. In the early 1990s, it would become the European Non-Governmental Sports Organization (ENGSO). The Council of Europe was created in 1949. Based on the European Cultural Convention (1954), it began to take sport into its field of activity as an inter-governmental organization in 1960. For the Council of Europe in general, see Wassenberg, Birte. *History of the Council of Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2013. For its activities in sport, see König, Walfried and Matthias Gütt. Der Europarat und sein Beitrag zur Sportentwicklung. In *Handbuch Sportpolitik*, Walter Tokarski and Karen Petry (eds.), 80–97. Schorndorf: Hofmann, 2010; Scholl, Stefan. Die Europäische Sport für Alle-Charta (1975/76) in ihrem historischen Entstehungskontext. *Themenportal Europäische Geschichte*, 2016. <http://www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/artikel-3929>; Scholl, Stefan. Sportwissen im Europarat: Überlegungen zur historischen Analyse (1960er–1990er Jahre). In *Europäische Sportpolitik. Zugänge – Akteure – Problemfelder*, Jürgen Mittag (ed.). Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017: in press.

phique” should be prepared.¹⁵ Beside the influence of overall contemporary preferences to reach change through rapprochement, more sport-specific reasons played a role, for example the rapid development of European championships, broadly discussed plans to organize European Olympic Games as well as other commonly faced developments in sport, such as the problem of doping, the growing influence of economic interests and plans to develop Sport for All programmes. It was quickly agreed, though, that the Council of Europe should not be involved because of its exclusively “Western” scope. Rather, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seemed the appropriate umbrella organization to host the event. A Swedish-Dutch working group under the lead of Bo Bengtson was entrusted with the task of contacting Eastern sports organizations in 1968.¹⁶

Although those organizations were interested in the idea, it took three more years to realize, because of a certain reluctance on the part of UNESCO and difficulties of finding a host country. Finally, Austria complied with the organization and proposed the project to representatives from the USSR, Yugoslavia and Hungary in early 1972.¹⁷ A preparation committee consisting of representatives from Sweden, France, West Germany, Austria, the Soviet Union and Hungary was set up and agreed in November 1972 to hold the first European Sports Conference in May 1973 in Vienna, chosen because of Austria’s neutral position in the Cold War after the State Treaty of 1955.¹⁸ From then on, the ESC met on a regular two-year basis:

15 Council of Europe. CCC/EES (67) 23 rév. “Rapport de la réunion de l’Organe de liaison ayant eu lieu à Strasbourg, les 23 et 24 octobre 1967”, 2.

16 Dritte Beratung des Europarates mit den freien Sportorganisationen der Mitgliedsländer am 25–26 April 1968. Archives of the DOSB, Folder “Liaison Committee, Castejon, 1972”.

17 Solf, O. I. Bericht über die VII. Sport-NGO-Konsultation beim Europarat in Straßburg, 27–28 April 1972, Frankfurt am Main, 4.5.1972, 5–6. Archives of the DOSB, Folder “Liaison Committee, Castejon, 1972”.

18 For the role of Austria in the Cold War see: Suppan, Arnold and Wolfgang Mueller (eds.). *“Peaceful Coexistence” or “Iron Curtain”. Austria, Neutrality, and Eastern Europe in the Cold War and Détente, 1955–1989*. Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009; Steininger, Rolf. *Austria, Germany and the Cold War. From the Anschluss to the State Treaty, 1938–1955*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2009.

Table 1. The meetings of the European Sports Conference in chronological order

Number	Year	City
I.	1973	Vienna (Austria)
II.	1975	Dresden (German Democratic Republic)
III.	1977	Copenhagen (Denmark)
IV.	1979	Berchtesgaden (Federal Republic of Germany)
V.	1981	Warsaw (Poland)
VI.	1983	Belgrade (Yugoslavia)
VII.	1985	Cardiff (Wales)
VIII.	1987	Athens (Greece)
IX.	1989	Sofia (Bulgaria)
X.	1991	Oslo (Norway)
XI.	1993	Bratislava (Slovakia)
XII.	1995	Vienna/Budapest (Austria/Hungary)
XIII.	1997	Amsterdam (Netherlands)
XIV.	1999	Malta
XV.	2001	Thalinn (Estonia)
XVI.	2003	Dubrovnik (Croatia)

Participation in the ESC started with groups of two to five delegates from 26 nations in 1973, plus representatives from UNESCO, the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE) and the IOC, then stayed relatively stable at around 30 countries and around 100 participants per conference. A non-exhaustive list of persons that attended at least at four conferences shows that the ESC really brought together some of the leading sports officials of that period, that is either ministers responsible for sport or presidents and heads of international relations of sports associations.¹⁹ Countries such as Great Britain, Italy, France, Belgium, Spain or Greece, which are not listed here, had either small or frequently changing delegations; in some cases this shows their relative disinterest in the ESC, in other cases it was due to changes in the organizational structures of the sports federations.

¹⁹ Among them were: Helmut Dembscher and Felix Nepotilek (Austria), Trendafil Martinksi (Bulgaria), Ernest Demtrovic and Antonín Himl (Czechoslovakia), Kurt Moeller and Emmanuel Rose (Denmark), Mauri Oksanen (Finland), Robert Pringarbe (France), Willi Weyer and Karl-Heinz Gieseler (Federal Republic of Germany), Manfred Ewald and Günther Heinze (German Democratic Republic), Tibor Gál (Hungary), Barry Holohan (Ireland), Hannes Sigurdsson (Iceland), Milan Ercegan (Yugoslavia), Nicolaas Vlot and Wim de Heer (Netherlands), O. J. Bangstad and Thor Hernes (Norway), Boleslav Kapitan and Zygmunt Szulc (Poland), Alfonso dos Santos (Portugal), Ion Siclovan and Lia Manoliu (Rumania), Bo Bengtson and Bengt Sevelius (Sweden), Ferdinand Imesch (Switzerland), Sergej Pawlow and Dimitri Prochorow (USSR).

The different sessions of the ESC were thematically planned by an international preparatory committee, consisting of seven to eight delegates meeting three to four times prior to the conference. Special attention was paid to a balanced East-West relationship in this committee. In Copenhagen in 1977 it was agreed that countries should leave the preparatory committee after three years in order to guarantee a rotation.

The final organization and funding lay in the hands of the hosting country. Usually, the conferences lasted three or four days and included thematic sessions and a social programme, often consisting of dinners, folkloristic elements and sports performances. This seemingly marginal activity was actually very important, because it created time and occasion for informal meeting and discussion outside of the plenum in a more relaxed atmosphere. Regarding funding, the hosting organization was responsible for financial resources. For example, the first conference in Vienna was financed by the Austrian Ministry of Education and Art and the City Council of Vienna itself.²⁰ For Berchtesgaden in 1979, the West German sports federation estimated a sum of 1 million Deutsche Marks. The federal government provided half of it, other parts came from the *Land* of Bavaria, the sports federation itself and the region of Berchtesgaden. The public relations organization Pro Sport Press Service in Munich received 45 per cent of this sum.²¹ This was heavily criticized by the Social Democrats in the parliament.²² The 1981 conference in Warsaw apparently received sponsoring from Coca-Cola and Adidas, because the organizers could not raise enough money for the expenses by themselves.²³ In both cases, the participants had to pay additional fees for hotel rooms and travel costs.

Journalists too were invited to the ESC. Very often, information and press material was distributed to them in advance in the form of official bulletins. In general, it seems that the bulk of journalists came from the country that organized the conference. For example, only nine out of the 27 participating countries sent journalists to Berchtesgaden in 1979.²⁴ In Dresden (1975) there was a dispropor-

20 Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 Mai 1973 in Wien, Record, 2. [The bibliographical data of the written records of the ESC are only fragmentary. Usually, no publisher, publishing house or year of publication is indicated. For this article, I used the exemplars deposited in the library of the *Deutsche Sporthochschule* in Cologne, Germany.]

21 Gieseler, Karl-Heinz. Die Europäische Sportkonferenz. Fakten und Folgerungen. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.2.43 “IV. ESK 1979”.

22 Günthner, Wolf. Mehr Schein als Sein. *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 12 October 1979.

23 Deister, Günther. Wie auf einer Insel. Warschau als Konferenz des Zwiespalts. Archives of the DOSB, Folder “V. ESK Polen (Warschau) 1981 / VI. ESK Jugoslawien (Belgrad) 1983”.

24 Letter from the *Berchtesgadener Anzeiger* to Karl-Heinz Gieseler, 13 November 1979. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.2.43 “IV. ESK 1979”.

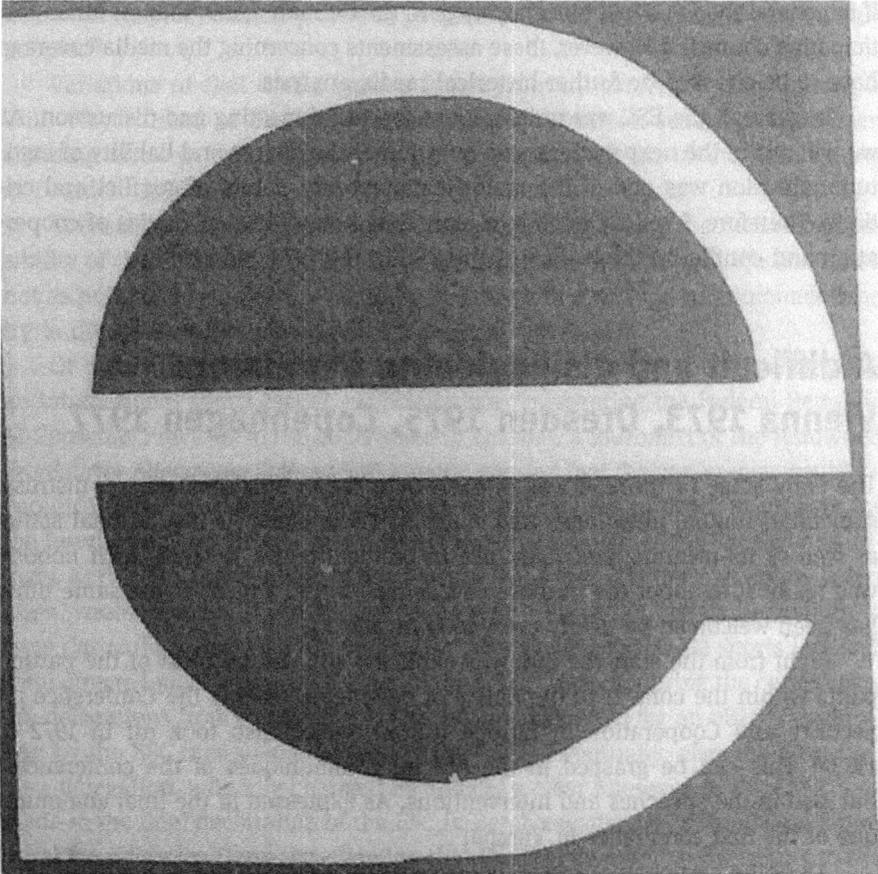


Figure 1. Official emblem of the European Sports Conference. It was slightly adapted to different backgrounds at the conferences.

tionately high number of journalists – more than two-thirds – from both parts of Germany.²⁵ Even if this might have been due to the exceptional situation of the East and West German political and sports relations in that period,²⁶ it seems as

²⁵ Informationen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei im Bundestag, 2. Juni 1975. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.71 “II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 27–30 May 1975 Dresden”.

²⁶ See for example Bösch, Frank (ed.). *Geteilte Geschichte. Ost- und Westdeutschland, 1970–2000*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015; Apelt, Andreas H., Robert Grünbaum and Jens Schöne (eds.). *2 x Deutschland. Innerdeutsche Beziehungen 1972–1990*. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2013; Fink, Carole and Bernd Schaefer (eds.). *Ostpolitik, 1969–1974. European and Global Responses*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Especially for sports rela-

if in general the ESCs had more coverage in the German media than in other participating countries. However, these assessments concerning the media coverage have to be checked by further historical media analysis.

In general, the ESC was quite a loose forum for meeting and discussion. As we will see in the next sections, the question of the degree and liability of institutionalization was one of the major contemporary points of conflict and critique. Therefore, I will try to go into more detail regarding the modes of cooperation and conflict in the history of the ESC in the 1970s and 1980s.

A difficult and disillusioning beginning: Vienna 1973, Dresden 1975, Copenhagen 1977

The early stage of the ESC was marked by a rather stiff atmosphere, distrust, sometimes mutual allegations and sharp conflicts about its institutional status as well as its meaning and relevance in political terms. It seems as if nobody was really sure about the purpose of this new forum which, at the same time, has been welcomed by nearly everybody involved.

Right from the start the ESC was explicitly situated by most of the participants within the context of the policy of détente, especially the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which also took off in 1972 to 1973.²⁷ This can be grasped in the official communiqués of the conferences, but also in the speeches and interventions. As expressed in the final communiqué of the first conference in Vienna:

All of the participants agree, that especially in present times, where the peoples of Europe are striving for European cooperation and security, also in the realms of sport the need has grown in all European countries to realize the humanistic and social mission of sport and to achieve effective contributions for agreement and friendly cooperation without difference of race, religion or political convictions. [...] The participants of the first European Sports Conference are filled with satisfaction that just now a clear sign has been shown, that sport can

tions, see Balbier, Uta. *Kalter Krieg auf der Aschenbahn. Der deutsch-deutsche Sport 1950–1972. Eine politische Geschichte*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007; Blasius, Tobias. *Olympische Bewegung, Kalter Krieg und Deutschlandpolitik, 1949–1972*. Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2001.

²⁷ For the context of the CSCE see Bange, Oliver and Gottfried Niedhard (eds.). *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.

be as relevant for relations between peoples as for the well-being of every single people.²⁸

Variations of that theme can be found in every conference that followed. Willi Weyer, head of the West German sports federation seems to have been standing alone in criticizing overtly this political emphasis of the ESC, stating in Dresden (1975):

There is no reason to expand our dialogue politically into the field of responsibility of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. We meet here not as politicians who aim to combine politics with sport, but as sportsmen who try to do the best for sport given the political situation.²⁹

Of course, this statement has to be judged as a classical rhetorical figure of an international sports leader, especially one representing the Federal Republic of Germany. Previous to the conference in Dresden a journalist of the renowned *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had already warned that the conference would be “politically transformed” by the Eastern representatives in order to prepare for the heavily debated “third basket” of the final declaration of the CSCE.³⁰ Accordingly, Karl-Heinz Gieseler, the general secretary of the West German sports federation, wrote after the Dresden conference that it had been “synchronized” from “one particular side” with the CSCE. The inputs of the “socialist sports leaders” were directed more to the CSCE than to the ESC.³¹ Indeed, during the conference, the delegations from Rumania and Czechoslovakia opted for an official declaration by the ESC that should be sent to the CSCE. Eventually, after the West German delegation suddenly changed its stance, a clear reference to the CSCE was made in the final declaration of the ESC in Berchtesgaden (1979) following a proposal from Eastern Germany, claiming that the ESC wanted “to contribute to the principles and measures laid down in the final declaration of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe”.³²

28 Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 404–405.

29 II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1975, 27–30 May 1975 in Dresden, Record, 25.

30 Haffner, Steffen. Nach Dresden nicht der Ausflüge werden: Europäische Sportkonferenz soll politisch umgemünzt werden. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 May 1975. On the “third basket”, see i.a. <http://www.humanrights.ch/en/standards/europe/osce/helsinki/>.

31 Gieseler, Karl-Heinz. Politische Nachhilfestunde. *Olympische Jugend* 20 (1975): 6.

32 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, 206. See also Holzweißig, Gunter. Multilaterale Aktivitäten des Deutschen Sportbundes. In *Geschichte der Leibesübungen, Band 3/2*, Horst Ueberhorst (ed.), 806–807. Berlin: Bartels & Wernitz, 1982. The final declaration at Helsinki had stated: “In order to expand existing links and co-operation in the field of sport the participating States will encourage contacts and exchanges of this kind, including sports meetings and competitions of all sorts, on the basis of the established international rules, regulations and practice.”

In fact, the ESC was built upon the will to communicate and exchange views on developments in sport commonly faced by all participating sports federations. As the international preparatory committee stated in 1973 before the first ESC in Vienna:

It is the purpose of the conference to analyse the function of sport in the societies of the European countries, examine its further development and initiate an exchange of experience in all domains of sport and physical education.³³

In this regard, it seems interesting that the participants largely agreed in their perception and general diagnosis of current problems and prospects in sport. As the Danish representative Kurt Moeller expressed, certain facts had to be accepted: "We are organized in different ways and have to put up with this. Therefore, we have to concentrate upon problems that are common to all of us."³⁴ First of all, there can be identified a strong concern for Sport for All, which remained the main theme of the ESC throughout its existence. This is a very interesting aspect, because so far the development of Sport for All policies has been stressed mainly for Western European countries.³⁵

At the different sessions of the ESC one can see that the aims of the Sport for All concept (to activate more people to do sport, whether competitive or non-competitive, and especially to reach those parts of the population that were thought of as being discriminated against in sports participation, namely women, children, old-aged and handicapped people) were shared by all of the countries, as well as the rationale behind them: for example, changes in the organization of modern societies, the challenging growth of leisure time, or the spread of "civilization diseases".³⁶ Apart from the Sport for All orientation, important themes of common perception included the construction of sports facilities and questions of urban development, the growing importance of the media, and the doping problem. Referring back to our analytical framework, we can see here an important element of Europeanization which consisted of the construction and identification of commonly perceived problems. The vice-president of the West German sports federation, Hans Gmelin, put it in a geographical frame, stating that "sport should be open for everyone from childhood to old age, and should be in effect under different names from Reykjavik to Moscow, from Oslo to Bukarest".³⁷

³³ Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 3.

³⁴ Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 187.

³⁵ For example, in 1975, the Council of Europe adopted the Sport for All Charter.

³⁶ See for example the classical account of the Hungarian sport official Sándor Beckl in Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 128–129.

³⁷ Beckl, Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 312.

However, the emphasis on shared perspectives could not overwrite the dissonances that frequently manifested themselves. One fundamental cause for conflict that accompanied the ESC from its beginning was the discussion about the role the state had to play in sport. Whereas in many speeches and contributions of representatives from the socialist countries a pivotal role was given to the state in providing and organizing sport activities, some of the Western delegations (especially those from the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Norway) repeatedly criticized this view, claiming an autonomous and apolitical role for physical education and sport. In Copenhagen (1977), the president of the Soviet Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Sergej Pawlow, defended himself vehemently against this kind of knee-jerk criticism, stating:

It seems as if cooperation is from time to time hindered by artificial problems. Lots of comments have been made about the so-called “interference” in sport by institutions of the state. It is hard to say what prevails here – naivety, primitivism or demagogy.³⁸

Even if this passage of his speech appeared only in the previously distributed written version, it evoked an intervention by the West German Willi Weyer, calling on Pawlow to explicitly name who he had in mind with this reproach.³⁹ Pawlow prevented an open dispute by claiming that no participant of the conference was meant. At the same conference a certain kind of fatigue was expressed, when Ole Jacob Bangstad, president of the Norwegian sports federation, remarked that in the future no more time should be wasted in discussing the role of the state, since these discussions would lead nowhere.⁴⁰ However, it is very telling that the discussions about the role of the state in sport were so prominent in the meetings of the ESC in the 1970s, because this was an era where government departments responsible for sport started to exchange views more regularly on an international level, for example at the Council of Europe’s Conferences of European Ministers Responsible for Sport from 1975 or UNESCO sports conferences from 1976.

That the Eastern countries were accused of bringing too much state intervention into sport was in large part due to their preference for bilateral sports treaties. Those were championed as a way towards closer cooperation especially by

38 III. Europäische Sportkonferenz 11–15 May 1977, Protokoll, 71.

39 III. Europäische Sportkonferenz 11–15 May 1977, Protokoll, 187. See also: Pawlow bringt Weyer auf die Palme. Sind wir naiv, primitiv oder demagogisch? / Attacke des UdSSR-Sportministers. In *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 May 1977.

40 III. Europäische Sportkonferenz 11–15 May 1977, Protokoll, 203f.

the USSR and the German Democratic Republic. In fact, one concrete effect of the ESC was that it did contribute to the conclusion of numerous sports treaties between socialist and non-socialist countries.⁴¹ However, the bilateral treaties were criticized by some of the representatives from the Western sports federations, because of their seemingly political character. As Nicolaas Vlot, representing the Dutch sports federation, deliberately pointed out, treaties signed by autonomous sports organizations were by no means political or state treaties.⁴² Again, Willi Weyer warned that the system of bilateral treaties should not lead to the erosion of the authority of the international federations, and to the “shifting of the ingenious idea of a free world sports system to the level of state treaties”, which would “cause much more political trouble than already [exists] in the present-day situation.”⁴³

Beside bilateral treaties, the majority of the socialist countries⁴⁴ tried to move the ESC to a closer cooperation with – or even merging into – UNESCO.⁴⁵ Already during the first conference, Konstantin Kulinkovic from the USSR and Manfred Ewald from the GDR introduced the idea of a qualified sports organization within UNESCO.⁴⁶ Symptomatically, a controversy arose at the end of the conference around the number of delegates UNESCO should send to the international preparatory committee of the next ESC. Mainly Karl-Heinz Gieseler from West Germany opposed a draft that allowed for two delegates – one from UNESCO itself, and one from the UNESCO-affiliated International Council of Sport and Physical Education (ICSPE). But the big offensive came in Dresden in 1975. Sergej Pawlow suggested that the ESC could become a “European Sports Council” under the umbrella of UNESCO,⁴⁷ and was immediately supported by

41 Just to give an example, following the first conference the USSR signed sports treaties with Sweden, Austria and France, and Yugoslavia signed a treaty with Sweden. See II. Europäische Sportkonferenz lässt neue Impulse erwarten. Interessante Pressekonferenz nach Konstituierung des Vorbereitungskomitees. In *Deutsches Sportecho*, 29 April 1974, 1 and 4.

42 III. Europäische Sportkonferenz 11–15 May 1977, Protokoll, 172.

43 II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1975, 27–30 May in Dresden, Record, 22.

44 Yugoslavia, which was extremely critical about any type of institutionalization, was an important exception.

45 The history of sport within UNESCO is almost as poorly known as the ESC. As an exception see: Desplechin-Lejeune, Blaise, Saint-Martin, Jean and Pierre-Alban Lebecq: L'UNESCO, l'éducation physique et le sport: Génèse et évolution d'une éducation corporelle internationaliste (1952–1978). *Stadion. Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Sports* 34 (2008): 119–142. For UNESCO in general, see Maurel, Chloé. *Histoire de l'UNESCO. Les trente premières années (1945–1974)*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010.

46 Europäische Sportkonferenz 1973, 12–17 May 1973 in Wien, Record, 125 and 97.

47 II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1975, 27–30 May in Dresden, Record, 18.

delegates from the GDR, Poland and Bulgaria. Eventually, the approach did not have the consent of all the delegations. Yugoslavia was against any form of institutionalization, René Bazennerye from France pointed to the fact that the ICSPE already existed.⁴⁸ The West German press heavily criticized Pawlow's proposition. The commentators were unanimous in condemning his idea as an attempt to further politicize sport:

What is meant to be called European Sports Council and set up within UNESCO is no other than the continuation of previous Soviet efforts to institutionalize sport by creating an intergovernmental body, whose political effectiveness would necessarily further restrict the scope of traditional sports organizations – such as the IOC or the international federations.⁴⁹

The Dresden conference in general was described in the press as a “private teaching in politics”⁵⁰ for the Western sports organizations. “Simple-hearted sports officials” from the West had been confronted with “professional politicians” from the East.⁵¹

In Copenhagen (1977) the institutional future of the ESC and its relationship to UNESCO was once again subject to discussion, although in this case, a higher level of institutionalization of the ESC was favoured by Nicolaas Vlot from the Netherlands in order to “counter the potentially dangerous endeavours of UNESCO”.⁵² Eventually, it was decided to mandate the international preparatory committee for the 1979 conference with the drafting of a proposition for the further institutionalization of proceedings.

In sum, it seems appropriate to say that the ESC had a difficult beginning in the 1970s. As Willi Weyer declared after the conference in Copenhagen in 1977, it was already a positive development that the different sports organizations got together at all.⁵³ Indeed, as pointed out, the atmosphere was determined on the one hand by a strong will to communicate – sometimes only in order to show

48 II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1975, 27–30 May in Dresden, Record, 67.

49 Knecht, Willi. Alter Hut mit neuem Etikett. *Sport-Informations-Dienst* 31 (28 May 1975): 1. See also Haffner, Steffen. Pawlowsche Vorstellungen von Sport und Politik. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 May 1975.

50 Gieseler, Karl-Heinz. Politische Nachhilfestunde. *Olympische Jugend* 20 (1975): 6. See also Kunkel, Ralf. Kein Ersatz für Fortschritt. *Die Zeit*, 6 June 1975.

51 Haffner, Steffen. Die Dresdner Sportkonferenz: Ein Lehrstück in Sachen Politik. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 June 1975.

52 III. Europäische Sportkonferenz 11–15 May 1977, *Protokoll*, 173.

53 Für saubere Aufgabenteilung. Interview mit dem DSB-Präsidenten Willi Weyer nach der III. ESK, die vom 11.–15. Mai in Kopenhagen stattfand. *DSB-Information* 20 (1977): S. 1.

the achievements one's own country.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the tactical moves of the "other" were sceptically observed. Taking again a West German perspective, two aspects are worth mentioning. Firstly, the West German sports federation undertook attempts to coordinate its strategy with other Western sports organizations via the NGO Club. Apparently, this was not very successful.⁵⁵ According to the journalist Steffen Haffner who wrote for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, most of the delegates from the Western countries judged the behaviour of Willi Weyer in 1975, when he opposed several formulations of the final communiqué, as a case of annoying "*querelles allemandes*".⁵⁶ Secondly, and linked to the first aspect, the delegates (and journalists) from the FRG were *indeed* obsessed with small details of formulation. As Haffner again wrote shortly before the ESC in Dresden, it would be about single terms like "coexistence", "liberty" or "international understanding".⁵⁷ In fact, the West German sports federation archive contains a general memorandum and linguistic analyses of the "Soviet theses" with clear references to positive and negative language use.⁵⁸ After the conference, Karl-Heinz Gieseler sent an explanatory letter concerning the final communiqué to the Department of Foreign Affairs, asserting that it was not possible to emphasize to a higher degree "free, unhindered sports relations in the sense of liberal, human encounters", nor to fully avoid the term "friendly coexistence".⁵⁹

To conclude, after 1977 not only the West German sports officials but the bulk of the participants as well as most of the commentators agreed that the ESC had to change its character. Primarily, it was argued that more concrete action should follow the beautiful rhetoric displayed at the conferences.

54 In the West German press, of course, primarily the speeches of the Eastern delegates were described as mere propaganda shows and socialist agitations.

55 In 1975 Karl-Heinz Gieseler wrote a letter to the Chancellery of the FRG complaining about the non-homogenous performance of the Western NGOs, although there had been strategic meetings before the conferences in Vienna and Dresden. Also, he announced a forthcoming strategic meeting in Frankfurt. Letter from Karl-Heinz Gieseler to Min. Dir. Hermann Marx (Bundeskanzleramt), 11 November 1975. Archives of the DOSB, Folder "III. ESK Dänemark Kopenhagen".

56 Haffner, Steffen. Die Dresdner Sportkonferenz: Ein Lehrstück in Sachen Politik. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 June 1975.

57 Haffner, Steffen. Nach Dresden nicht der Ausflüge werden: Europäische Sportkonferenz soll politisch umgemünzt werden. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 May 1975.

58 See Für II. Europäische Sportkonferenz in Dresden im Mai 1975, and Bemerkungen zu den sowjetischen Thesen. Both in Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.71 "II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 27–30 May 1975 Dresden".

59 Letter from Karl-Heinz Gieseler to I. K. Gracher (Auswärtiges Amt), 2 June 1975. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.71 "II. Europäische Sportkonferenz 27–30 May 1975 Dresden".

Berchtesgaden 1979: a turning point?

The international preparatory committee began to work on its task to set out a more concrete institutional framework for the ESC immediately after the conference in Copenhagen. In September 1977, it met for the first time in Frankfurt. It was agreed that the ESC should represent “a sort of umbrella organization of European sport” vis-à-vis UNESCO, the IOC and the newly formed General Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF). The West German sports federation was instructed to draft a detailed paper of principles and rules of procedure prior to the next meeting.⁶⁰ This draft, sent to the other members of the preparatory committee in March 1978 before its second meeting, went very far compared to the previous stance of the German delegates. It envisaged a “European Sports Committee”, including an executive committee, which should among other things represent the organization between the conferences and should decide by majority vote, and further sub-committees.⁶¹

Already at the second meeting of the preparatory committee, the delegates from the Netherlands, the USSR, Great Britain and Yugoslavia reacted sceptically to the West German proposal and called for a revision, apparently because the draft went further than anything discussed earlier.⁶² In addition, there were signs of distrust coming from the West German press and governmental sphere. One commentator at the end of 1978 expressed the fear that of all meetings the conference in Berchtesgaden could lead to the adjustment of European sport to the political strategy of the socialist countries. Since the West German sports federation failed to publicly explain its strategy, the preparations aroused a latent suspicion.⁶³ Indeed, Karl-Heinz Gieseler of the West German sports federation had already had to meet with sceptical officials of the Foreign Department in September 1977. From the report of the meeting, one can detect one side of the rationale behind this move. Gieseler explained that in the debate about the future organization of the ESC, it would be a strategic advantage to make the

60 Solf, Otto-Isao. Internationales Vorbereitungskomitee, 15 September 1977. Archives of the DOSB, Folder “Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.2.43 “IV. ESK 1979”.

61 “Statuten des Europäischen Sportkomitees” and “Geschäftsordnung für die Europäische Sportkonferenz”. Archives of the DOSB, Folder “Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.2.43 “IV. ESK 1979”.

62 Solf, Otto-Isao. 2. Sitzung des Internationalen Vorbereitungs-Komitees (IVK) am 19 April 1978 in Herzogenaurach, 21 April 1978. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.2.43 “IV. ESK 1979”.

63 Knecht, Willi. Der Sport auf den Spuren der KSZE. *Deutschland-Archiv* (December 1978): 1240–1243, here 1242.

first step. Since an integration into UNESCO was no longer an option,⁶⁴ and since in that forum, no one challenged the claim of the West German sports federation to also represent West Berlin – one of the contested points within East and West German/USSR sports relations – there was no argument against a further institutionalization, Gieseler argued.⁶⁵

Besides the strategic rationale, one can assume a certain demand for prestige on the side of the West German sports federation. Prior to the conference, its president Willi Weyer declared that Berchtesgaden could cause “a breakthrough” and “bring the European sports organizations closer together”.⁶⁶ However, the initial draft of the statutes was already watered down by the international preparatory committee. The fourth meeting declared unambiguously that “an institutionalization of the ESC [was] not planned”, that no international organization would replace the national ones, and that the only mode of decision making was by consensus.⁶⁷ This again clearly reveals that the ESC could only be institutionalized on the lowest common denominator.

During the conference in October 1979, Willi Weyer tried for the last time to convince the participants to support the final draft version, proposed by the preparatory committee. In a sudden change of argument – compared to his statements at previous conferences – he now associated the ESC voluntarily with the CSCE, claiming that sport was an integrative part of the “political process of rapprochement”.⁶⁸ He once again argued in favour of a permanent committee that could represent the ESC internally and externally. In addition, he gave a list of suggestions for concrete cooperation ranging from the development of joint Sport for All programmes, organization of seminars and conferences as well as coordinated efforts to fight doping, to joint planning of development aid in

64 In 1976 UNESCO organized the first world conference of ministers responsible for sport and initiated the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport in 1978.

65 Ergebnisvermerk über die Besprechung vom 6 September 1977 beim Auswärtigen Amt über Fragen der 1. Sitzung des Internationalen Vorbereitungs-Komitees vom 12–14 September 1977 in Frankfurt für die IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979 in Berchtesgaden. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.243 “IV. ESK 1979”.

66 Quoted in Gieseler, Karl-Heinz. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979: Auf dem Weg zu neuen Strukturen. Es geht stärker um das sportliche Leben der Völker. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 October 1978.

67 Solf, Otto-Isao. 4. Sitzung des Internationalen Vorbereitungs-Komitees (IVK) am 28. März 1979 in Dreieich-Sprendlingen bei Frankfurt/Main. Archives of the DOSB, Folder 1.243 “IV. ESK 1979”.

68 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 96.

sport.⁶⁹ He finished with the insistent appeal: “We can no longer release promising rhetorical balloons and produce documents for the archives. We should come back down to earth and ask how we will proceed with the ESC. Our highly praised principles will stay useless and empty, if we do not bring them to life.”⁷⁰

Weyer’s speech produced a heavy debate. Especially the delegations from Yugoslavia, Great Britain, the Netherlands and France opposed the idea of a permanent executive committee as well as any representative function of the ESC towards others. After Karl-Heinz Gieseler showed himself strongly disappointed due to the fact that even the countries who participated in the draft version now criticized it, the session had to pause for one hour.⁷¹ During that time the statutes were once again revised. In the final version, the claim to represent the ESC to other organizations was left out and the executive committee was renamed the Coordinative Committee. The German Democratic Republic was successful in bringing in the reference to the CSCE and a clause on the political and geographical balance of the Coordinative Committee and the working groups, formerly named subcommittees.⁷²

In the long run, the working groups would prove to be the most important innovation of the 1979 debate. In the final declaration, four seminars were announced: a seminar on the construction of sports facilities to be held in Austria, a seminar on Sport for All in Switzerland, a seminar on the evaluation of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow to be held in West Germany,⁷³ and a seminar on “the function of sport in the education of the youth”.

In the immediate aftermath, however, the conference was seen as a failure: “Europe cannot speak with one voice in sport.”⁷⁴ Above all, heavy criticism of Weyer’s performance set the tone in the press coverage. On the one hand, he was blamed for not speaking out against allegations made by his East German counterpart Manfred Ewald, who polemicized in his speech against an “atmosphere of pogrom” and accused West Germany of helping GDR athletes to commit “*Republikflucht*” (desertion from the republic).⁷⁵ On the other hand, commentators expressed their lack of understanding for Weyer’s insistence on stronger in-

69 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 99.

70 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 100.

71 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 152–154.

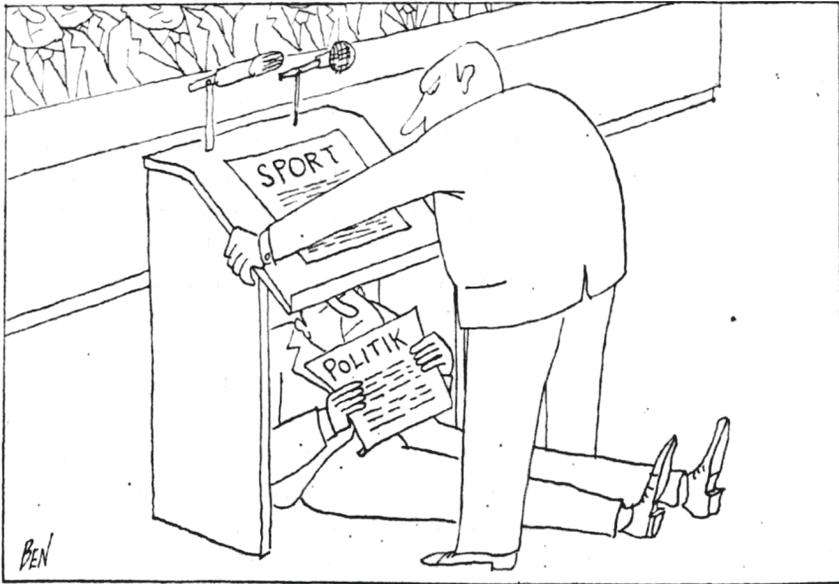
72 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 163–168.

73 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 207. Since the FRG boycotted the 1980 Olympic Games, the seminar was cancelled.

74 Deister, Günter. Europa kann im Sport nicht mit einer Stimme reden. *Rheinische Post*, 13 October 1979.

75 IV. Europäische Sportkonferenz 1979, 9–13 October 1979, Berchtesgaden, 67.

stitutionalization. The danger existed, according to the newspaper *Die Welt*, that the ESC would become “a political sports organization”.⁷⁶ The “political” character of the conference in Berchtesgaden was also expressed in a caricature in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*:



SPORTKONFERENZ

SZ-Zeichnung: Gabor Benedek

Figure 2. Caricature in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13–14 October 1979.

In the account of the journalist Günter Deister, the West German sports federation had made itself the puppet of Sergej Pawlow, acting as the “locomotive” with Pawlow and Manfred Ewald as firemen, and causing confusion “in their own camp and the Federal Ministry of the Interior”.⁷⁷ Although still not fully enthusiastic, a more promising outlook was given by Harald Piper in the journal *Olympische Jugend*. After all, sports officials from both sides of the Iron Curtain *did* finally agree on common principles for future cooperation and a programme of subjects to treat. This could make “Berchtesgaden an important cornerstone on Europe’s sports path”.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Quednau, Frank. Am Ende fehlte nur noch der Bruderkuss. *Die Welt*, 13 October 1979.

⁷⁷ Deister, Günter. Europa kann im Sport nicht mit einer Stimme reden. *Rheinische Post*, 13 October 1979.

⁷⁸ Pieper, Harald. Europäische Initiativen. *Olympische Jugend* 23 (1979): 3.

New modes of action in a difficult environment: the ESC in the 1980s

In retrospect, it seems paradoxical that cooperation within the ESC was more conflict-ridden in the era of general détente during the 1970s and became more concrete in the 1980s when the Cold War intensified again, also in the realm of sport. This can be explained in part by the fact that by the 1980s the ESC was already a well-established network. The participants had known each other for years and did find a way to communicate despite all the differences. In addition, the view that sport could build bridges even in times of political conflict was well established and often endorsed by international sports leaders. However, the growing tensions in sports relations between the Eastern and the Western bloc also left their traces on the ESC, especially at the beginning of the 1980s. The conference in Warsaw in 1981, held only a couple of days before the declaration of martial law in Poland, stood under the shadows of the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow and the congress of the IOC in Baden-Baden earlier in 1981.⁷⁹ One of the key figures of the ESC, Willi Weyer, who had played an unfortunate role in the boycott, did not participate – officially because of an urgent commitment to the Federal government. Sergej Pawlow for his part declared in his speech at the conference that the Moscow Games had been a “victory over reactionary forces” who aimed at “dividing the Olympic family”.⁸⁰

The following conference in Belgrade in 1983 was also overshadowed by the looming Eastern boycott of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The USSR, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Rumania sent only second-rank officials to the conference. Manfred Ewald from the GDR denounced American rearmament, Willi Weyer answered by criticizing the previous action of the Soviet Union. Eventually, the final communiqué, which was only made possible by informal background discussions between the delegations from Eastern and West-

⁷⁹ For the context of the boycott see Mertin, Evelyn. The Soviet Union and the Olympic Games of 1980 and 1984: Explaining the Boycotts to their Own People. In *East Plays West*, 235–252; Hulme, Derick L. *The Political Olympics. Moscow, Afghanistan, and the 1980 U.S. Boycott*. New York: Praeger, 1990; Sarantakes, Nicolas Evan. *Dropping the Torch. Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

⁸⁰ V. European Sport Conference, 8–12 December 1981, Warszawa: 143. For a summary of the ESC in Warsaw see: Fischer, Herbert. Nach Baden Baden hat man sich wenig zu sagen. Die fünfte Europäische Sportkonferenz in Warschau vom politischen Umfeld gelähmt. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 14 December 1981.

ern Germany, appealed to both sides in the conflict and declared that “the ESC worried about the maintenance of peace”. The participants urged those who were “politically responsible in all countries to reach an agreement, in order to help sport to enable open and humane contacts and create a more peaceful and better world”.⁸¹

But in general, after the first two conferences in the 1980s, the danger of stagnation and loss of prestige was widely noticed. On the one hand, the project of some of the Western delegations to get the ESC to collaborate closely with the newly formed International Assembly of National Organizations of Sport (IANOS) was not successful. On the other hand, the working groups that were envisaged in Berchtesgaden in 1979 only slowly started to function properly. Although there were several meetings – in particular the working group “youth sport” was very active from 1981 on – their work was not very broadly discussed at the conferences. This changed, beginning with the conference in Cardiff in 1985. From then on, much more room was given to the reports and the discussion of the work and projects of the working groups, which met between the conferences. Usually, one country was entrusted by consensus with the organization and the thematic arrangement of the working groups. Sometimes, the working groups only stayed in place for two years, in other cases, they were accredited by the ESC for another term. During the 1980s, there existed working groups on “sports facilities” (organizing country: Austria), “Sport for All” (organizing country: Switzerland), “youth sport” (organizing country: GDR), “sport for women” (organizing country: Soviet Union/Sweden), “sport for the world” (organizing country: Norway), “doping” (organizing country: Great Britain), “European Sports Conference Charter” (organizing country: Denmark) and “sports science” (organizing country: Soviet Union).

Although the cooperation within the working groups did not always run smoothly and without conflicts, their work was much more concrete than the general discussions at the ESCs in the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Their output was apparent primarily in the form of resolutions and recommendations concerning their respective subject fields, which were adopted at the conferences.⁸² Other projects ensued. While the “sports science” working group failed to establish a scientific competition under the leadership of the ESC in the late 1980s, a European Youth Sport Camp was organized on the occa-

81 Gieseler, Karl-Heinz. Packen wir es an. *DSB-Pressedienst* 24 (10 October 1983): 1–4, here 1–2. See also: Fischer, Herbert. Gespräche geben Hoffnung auf ein Ende der deutsch-deutschen Eiszeit. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 October 1983.

82 See for example European Sports Conference, Athens 1987, Minutes: 312–320.

sion of the conference in Athens in 1987 following a proposal from the Austrian and Dutch delegations in 1985.⁸³ A follow-up was planned for 1990. Finally, a working group installed in 1987 worked out the official charter of the ESC that can be read as a compressed version of the work done until then. The Charter was unanimously adopted in Sofia at the ninth conference in October 1989. It ends with the words:

The European Sports Conference, whilst being practical in both form and substance, must at all times look to the future. It must be prepared to review frequently the overall position of sport at European level and, as circumstances dictate consider ways and means of reinforcing this position. It must encourage the exchange of information, issue guidance on matters of common interest and produce programmes of action.⁸⁴

Conclusion

After 1989 the ESC continued but slowly changed its character when the whole context of cooperation changed after the collapse of the socialist bloc. In the long run, the ESC lost its *raison d'être*: to serve as a multilateral forum of communication between Eastern and Western European sports organizations in the context of the Cold War. However, it is remarkable that it continued to hold biennial conferences until 2005.

It is quite clear that this article marks only a first attempt to approach the mostly neglected history of the ESC with a focus on the 1970s and a shorter overview of the 1980s. Much more research has to be done, more sources from different countries have to be included. A few relevant aspects, however, should be noted here. The ESC was an important platform of communication in sports between East and West during the 1970s and 1980s – if not for some time the only one of this kind. Due to sustained opposing views on the level of institutionalization that should and could be achieved, it maintained a rather loose structure throughout that period. Also and linked to this, its place within the rather over-organized world of international sports was not well defined, even if it claimed to represent an exclusive focus on Sport for All and the ethical questions of sport.

This might lead to the conclusion that its historical relevance is insignificant. However, this judgement would not be adequate to describe the contempo-

⁸³ See the report European Sports Conference, Athens 1987: 271–275; Gesamteuropäische Initiative im Jugendsport. *Olympische Jugend* 10 (1987): 22.

⁸⁴ The charter can be found in IX. *Evropejska sportna konferencija, Sofia 1989, Record*, 183–190.

rary ascriptions and perceptions of the ESC. For many participating countries and federations that regularly sent their highest officials to the conferences, the ESC was an important platform – and it was seen as one at least by the West German press analysed here. As discussed in the article, too, a lot of bilateral sports treaties that were signed during that period had their origins in the ESC. In the 1980s, more concrete projects were planned and realized, even if they did not receive a high degree of attention in public. From an analytical point of view, then, the ESC can be interpreted as a form of Europeanization, if one uses the concept in the culturalist and process-related manner proposed here. In analysing the ESC, one finds a continuing and commonly affirmed will to communicate and cooperate, although it sometimes was only to display one's own achievements. Furthermore, with regard to content, it is remarkable that the delegations, whether governmental or non-governmental, shared a common perception of the dominant contemporary problems and questions in sport, which explains the possibility and willingness to exchange experience and expert knowledge.

Nevertheless, the ESC also shows the limits and reservations that prevented a thorough agreement. Above all, this can be seen in the never-ending discussions about the way and the institutional form in which the ESC should be organized. Also, even if the participating countries of the ESC declared again and again that they tried to come together independent of political convictions, the East-West division framed the institutional working and also a good few discussions. Especially the controversial discussions about role of the state, together with the question of the “political” nature of sport, show how communication was sometimes obsessively overshadowed by bloc semantics. This, however, does not contradict an interpretation of the ESC as an example of Europeanization in sport, if one agrees that Europeanization can also include conflictual processes. Rather, it tells us about the specific discursive settings and institutional modalities in which communication and encounters in Cold War Europe were embedded.