



# Minister Sportu i Turystyki

Kamil Bortniczuk

Warsaw, 29 March 2023

**Thomas Bach**  
**President of the International Olympic Committee**  
**(IOC)**

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing on behalf of the Polish government to express my extreme disappointment about the latest recommendations by the IOC for International Federations and international sports events organisers on the participation of athletes with a Russian or Belarusian passport in international competitions.

In the opinion of the Polish government the recommended neutrality criteria in the context of the future participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes in international competitions is unacceptable in the face of the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, both from a moral and practical point of view.

Referring to moral arguments, I would like to point out once again that the Russians have already violated the Olympic truce three times in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is obvious to me that a country that openly and consciously profanes the Olympic idea should not take part in the Olympic Games. In addition, the international sports community cannot be indifferent to the fate of Ukrainian athletes who, due to the war caused by Russia, are not able to train properly because they defend their homeland or they have no place to train due to the destruction of Ukraine's sports infrastructure.

Apart from moral arguments, I don't see any practical possibility of implementing the model of "neutrality" proposed by the IOC. We don't believe in the idea of the neutrality of athletes from Russia and Belarus, unless they are dissidents. It is impossible for an athlete to be neutral if, for example, he or she uses government funding and is selected for the national team under the system developed by a national sports federation.

Moreover, it seems unrealistic to believe that there is a way to fully verify whether a given athlete supports or does not support Russian aggression against Ukraine. Can the wearing in public of a Russian sports club jersey affiliated with the state regime by a famous tennis player during a tournament be considered an act of active support for the war in Ukraine? In this situation, the only solution is not to allow athletes from Russia and Belarus to participate in international sports competitions at all.

Officially, it has been announced that the IOC wants to postpone the decision on the participation of athletes from Russia and Belarus in the next Olympic Games in Paris 2024. The IOC recommends that athletes from these countries can participate in competitions, some of which are Olympic Games qualifiers. In practice this gives a green light for the presence of Russians and Belarusians in Paris. It is hard for me to imagine that if Russians and Belarusians qualify for the Olympics - at the expense of athletes from other countries - the IOC will decide just before the Olympics not to allow them to compete, thus introducing huge chaos in the rules of the competition.

You have repeatedly said that politics should not interfere with sport. I think that it can be expected that in the case of a decision allowing Russians and Belarusians to participate in the next Olympic Games, we will see an extremely politicized games in Paris with demonstrations by both athletes and fans condemning Russian aggression.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rob Aron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal tail at the end.