



Press Conference, 19 August 2003, ATHENS

Transcript of the Press Conference:

D. Oswald: The main reason for our visit was to attend the Sport Events. I was here last week for Rowing and came back a few days ago. We had a group of observers at the different Sport Events, who have reported to us.

In general terms we are quite satisfied with the outcome of the Sport Events, with the way they were run over these few days. There are still one or two events going on in the coming days, but again in general terms we are quite happy with what we have seen.

The Sport Events have first of all demonstrated the quality of the venues, even if some of the venues used were not yet totally in their Olympic shape, they demonstrated that they were really very high quality, in their design, in their concepts, and all athletes who have been involved have been very positive about the quality of the venues.

One of the reasons for the Sport Events is also to test the operation. It is not just to be in the venue - you have to see how the various activities will be allocated, and these events worked quite well, with all the people involved: with the staff of ATHENS 2004, of course, and also with the members of the relevant International Federations, and of course with all the volunteers.

The volunteers have played a very important role in the success of these events, of these championships, and they have shown the necessary flexibility and a level of dedication to their work, which was very impressive. We found out that in all cases they were very friendly, very helpful, trying to show Greece under the best possible light and to contribute to the success of these events.

Obviously, when you work as a volunteer, in the Rowing event for example, you have to be every morning at seven o'clock at Schinias, and because there is a wind blowing you may be requested to be there at five o'clock every morning, which means that you sleep for just a few hours.

Nevertheless, they were all present there, all smiling, all helpful, and I would like to pay tribute to their attitude and also to their contribution to the success of the Sport Events, which were also an opportunity to check the cooperation between different entities.

Especially in the Cycling event, there was a requirement for cooperation between several Municipalities, ATHENS 2004, the sport's International Federation, the National Federations and all parties involved, including the public, because the public had to evacuate the roads. Everyone - well, most people anyway - understood the necessity to take their car out of the way of the Cycling route. Only a very small number of cars had to be removed during the night to clear the Cycling route. Athenians show that they fully understand what is needed for the Games.

This cooperation in particular, between the various parties involved, was very encouraging. It makes us confident that next year, at the time of the Games themselves, things will be equally good, if not even better.



The main purpose for holding the Sport Events is to see how things work, but also to identify possible weaknesses or difficulties. If everything ran perfectly first time round, you wouldn't need Sport Events - you would simply hold the Games.

Obviously, a number of issues giving rise to concern have been identified, and there certain adjustments or corrections will have to be made. You must realise that a large number of people are working in various fields, such as in transport, in accommodation, in catering, in security, etc. Under the supervision of the organisers, all these activities must be put together without any frictions - it's like the pieces of a puzzle that have to fit each other perfectly.

Some minor adjustments will be needed. Nevertheless, as we are near the end of this series of Sport Events, I can say that the issues, which have been identified do not worry us. They are issues of minor importance and will be taken care of very easily, so that we obtain the result that we need for holding the Olympic Games next year.

If I remember other Olympic Games, such as the Sydney Games, I will have to say that there too, after the series of Sport Events held, some adaptations were needed. The Sydney Games were completely successful. After this experience, we have every reason to believe that the Olympic Games in Athens will be even more successful.

In addition to attending the Sport Events, we also met with the ATHENS 2004 Management and staff, with members of the Government, with the Prime Minister, to discuss various issues. We also are monitoring the progress of works. Yesterday, we visited OCO to have a look at the progress made in the installation of the famous Calatrava roof. We also visited the Beach Volleyball Venue, and we inspected the works of the tramway line along its entire course.

We had done the same two months ago, and personally I was quite impressed by the progress made during the last two months. In part of Faliro they have indeed finished laying the track, the grass has been planted and it is clear how the entire project will look in the future, a project, which is a big improvement for residents in this particular area but also in other areas.

Of course, there is still a lot to be done. We were presented with a schedule, which shows that the tramway will be ready on time, will have undergone the necessary tests on time and will operate flawlessly during the Olympic Games. However, schedules are tight and we have no time for delays. We must not lose a single day.

On the way, we had a look at the Karaiskaki Stadium as well, and we were also impressed by the progress made. Things seem to go well. We had a FIFA delegation here recently, and again now they are confident that the Stadium will be ready on time and will be operational for the Games.

That's what I wanted to say by way of introduction - we certainly are at your disposal to answer your questions.

C. Groman ("REUTERS"): A question concerning the Calatrava roof. Is the IOC convinced that the work that is being done at the moment around OCO concerning the roof will not hamper other projects that are taking place in the surrounding area? Do you believe that the roof will be installed in its entirety, will this be done in stages or will the roof be a scaled-down version of the original design?

D. Oswald: We spent almost all of the afternoon at OCO, and we discussed the issue of the roof. First of all, we had a presentation by Deputy Minister Mr Alevras, who gave to us all the details of the work and what the progress schedule is. So now we have precise indications as to when each level should be reached, and so we can closely monitor and check the work in the coming weeks.



Of course, it is a great challenge, it is a huge project. When you look at the stadium and you see these big steel sections and parts, you wonder how it will be possible to do it, but the way it was presented convinced us that at the end the project will be successful.

We have reached point, because they couldn't wait any longer to start, where we cannot stop. We cannot go back. Since it has started, it has to be finished, and all the necessary efforts will have to be made. But I think that all have assumed the responsibility needed in order to successfully complete this project.

Your remark is correct, because of course some work needs to be done in all the surrounding area. The question is how the different works will be combined, will be brought together. It is not enough to hear that eight months are needed for completing the roof and installing it. At the same time, the surrounding area must also be completed, and this cannot be done when you are working on the roof. Consequently, additional time is needed for completing the project. So, the works must be coordinated.

The schedules and the plans required have been made and, with very close monitoring and good coordination of the work, it is possible to implement it. I believe that, since no other option is available, the project will be successfully completed.

K. Makri ("ELEFTHERTYPIA ON SUNDAY"): Mr. Oswald, you remarked that there have been some minor, as you said, weaknesses in the Sport Events. Could you please prioritise a hierarchy of these weaknesses? What were the problems identified and how much do they finally worry you or not - although you have probably answered this already.

D. Oswald: It's difficult to go into too many details. There are some weaknesses concerning the transmission of results. In technology, certain things have been identified that should be done in a different way, certain programs should be adjusted,

For example, in some venues we have established that the location of the various offices could be better, so that people working closely together are closer to each other, rather than having to cover a distance of 20 or 30 metres in order to meet someone they want to talk to or work together with.

These are things that you discover when you are really on the spot and when all the people involved are working at the same time. But again, nothing major or serious that cannot be corrected in the time that we have available.

Journalist: Mr. Oswald, referring to the blackout that we saw happening recently in the United States and in Canada, what is your assessment of the corresponding preparations by the Organising Committee and the Greek Government, that is to say regarding the likelihood of a blackout or of a terrorist attack that would cut off electricity supply?

D. Oswald: Of course, when we heard about the situation in New York and in parts of the United States and Canada, we immediately thought "well, if this were to happen during the Games what are we going to do if there is no power supply for three days?" Clearly, this would be a disaster.

There are power generators at many locations, but we still need a lot of electrical power that generators alone cannot produce. We put this issue yesterday to the Prime Minister. He felt confident, because four years ago I think, if I remember correctly, you had a partial blackout in Athens, and since then all the necessary measures, the security measures, have been taken.

Power supply to the venues is not via a single route, which means that if a blackout takes place in one area, this will not necessarily affect the entire precinct we are interested in. Again, the Prime Minister told us that all measures have been taken after this blackout that you had



here four years ago, and obviously they will go through all the venues again to make sure that no such problem occurs during the Olympic Games.

Mr Kollias ("KATHIMERINI"): Mr. Oswald, when did the Government tell you that they will deliver the tramway and the suburban rail? Did they also tell you when the suburban railway cars will be delivered? I am asking this because of there are some problems with the Skaramangas Shipyard, which has undertaken to manufacture the suburban railway cars.

D. Oswald: One tramway has been delivered, six are ready in Italy and will be delivered in September.

The trial operation will start in October, and by January we will have eight kilometres of track on which to test the cars. Full delivery would be in April. This means that we have three months to really operate the train before it goes to the Olympic Games.

A total of 35 tramcars should be delivered by the Italian company producing them. For the Games, we may hire additional trains to increase capacity. We met also representatives of the Berlin tramway system, who are assisting the corresponding company here in Athens to put in place the operation. So I think that all measures have been taken, and that that the tram will be operational in April. That is of course of key importance for the Games.

We did not spend enough time to discuss the suburban rail, because the information we had didn't show any reason for concern. We know that delivery times are a little tight, but everybody seems to be confident that delivery will take place as scheduled. In addition, there are always solutions involving other cities, which can lend equipment for the period of the Olympic Games.

Mr. Hadoulis: I would like to return to the question of the tramway, if I may, to the track specifically. Based on the fact that works have been continuing since January 2002, even in areas where no objections were raised from local residents, are you really satisfied with the progress made? Because on many occasions problems have arisen in other areas. In other words, is the progress made by the construction crews so far satisfactory?

D. Oswald: Because this is the holiday season, some 600 people are working right now, but from next week the people working on the construction of the tramway will be 800.

There were some delays, but now we have initiated a programme for accelerating the works, which should put us on the schedule I just described to you, that is to say full delivery in April 2004. There will be the possibility to increase the number of workers in these specific crews in order to make sure that the delivery dates will be respected, should this prove necessary.

This is regarding one part of your question. After seeing the section which has been completed above Faliro - I do not know exactly the name of the locality, but I mean the place where the track and the grass are in place - you can really see how the work will look in the future, and I believe that all those who were against the tramway will now be in favour of it, because it is really an improvement for the city and for its residents.

P. Tsoutsias ("ETHNOS"): Mr. Oswald, we are used to see you, when you come to Athens, always make statements which we more or less know and expect, you find everything going well, and when you leave and go abroad, then you criticise the Olympic preparations. This is a comment I would like to make.

My question is: According to the experience that you now have of the Olympic preparations and the organisation, as this is running now, if you were to vote today, would you again give to Greece the opportunity to organise the Games?



D. Oswald: Regarding the first part of your comment, I have heard it in many Press conferences, and I already had the opportunity to explain that sometimes circumstances are different, and if you are asked to give your impression about the Games in general, all the way back since 1997, that is to say concerning the preparations in relation to the Games, then naturally there have been some difficult periods, but now things are more positive. So, it always depends on what you refer to.

I think I have never used ambiguous language, I have always been quite clear in my statements. Certainly I would again vote in favour of Athens for organising the Games. The closer we get to the Games, the more confident we are that the Games will be successful.

Within the sport community, and especially after these Sport Events, I have spoken with the leaders of International Federations, with Technical Delegates and with Athletes, and they were all impressed because they have visited the locations many times and were impressed by the progress made recently.

Which shows that, when it really comes to the important thing, Greeks are capable of working miracles and work in an extremely efficient way. If the pace that Greece has established in the last months continues, I believe that the schedules will be respected, and then all the necessary conditions for Magical Olympic Games will be there.

M. Daliani ("TA NEA"): Mr. Oswald, the first week of the Sport Events in Athens was full of negative titles about Greece in the international Press. I don't know if you have had the opportunity to discuss this issue with the Government and with the Organising Committee, and I don't know if you have advised them on the way in which to handle such situations.

D. Oswald: I think that on many occasions, here in Athens during the previous week, but also abroad - because I was asked to give my opinion abroad as well - I praised the Organising Committee for the Sport Events. Certainly the fields of play and the stadiums are among the best in the world.

The Organising Committee has shown great flexibility, when at first we decided first to change the competition times. Maybe the competitions could be held at a time when the wind would be less strong. Everybody immediately adjusted to the new conditions, absolutely smoothly, gracefully, with a smile. Then we had to also reduce the distances, that is to say we had to move all technical installations from 2,000 metres 1,000 metres, to move the spectator areas, etc - so a lot of work was done.

When you hold a test event, you test a lot of things: you test the ability of the Organising Committee to carry out their task, and the way in which they carried out their task was perfect. You also test Technology, and Technology worked, in spite of all the changes, which we made, in spite of the fact that all the equipment was moved from 2,000 metres to 1,000 metres. Transport also worked. Everything worked, except the wind.

That is why everybody was satisfied, even though the conditions were difficult for the athletes. But wind is wind. We cannot be absolute in our predictions about it. In many sports, you face difficulties of this type. With winter sports you know that very often the competitions have to be cancelled because of the fog, because of fog or of wind or because there is not enough snow.

For example, no Sport Event was held in Salt Lake City for downhill skiing, because two weeks before them there was not enough snow, so the Sport Event was cancelled. One week before the Games there was too much snow, so again the Sport Event did not take place for the specific sport.

In Rowing, nearly every year, in every World Championship, there is at least one day where we have to change the schedule and adjust the competition format. Of course, it is unusual to



have five days in a row with very rough conditions. We hoped the wind would abate at night, but it did not.

However, at Games-time we have scheduled for eight days of competition, here we had only four days, so we reacted in a flexible way, we adjusted to the situation, and this is a good thing. It was also good that this happened during the Sport Events, because we know how to handle adverse conditions during the Olympic Games.

But I would like to stress one more time that, in spite of this particular difficulty, which was very obvious and affected the rowers, we did test everything that we wanted to test, and I have to say that ATHENS 2004 passed with flying colours, and everything needed to ensure successful Games was done, taking of course the strong wind into consideration.

Journalist: Mr. Oswald, you are aware of publications in the foreign Press concerning the security of the Athens Olympic Games. There is criticism and there are suspicious publications. The Greek Government and ATHENS 2004 have rushed to allay any fears, however would IOC consider it necessary or suitable to give its own, somewhat more official, response?

D. Oswald: Do you believe what the Press is writing? Not always, anyway. We should not joke about it, there are many contradictory information coming from various areas and environments.

What I know is that, according to our information, the security programme is progressing according to schedule, the progress needed is being made, the Government, the IOC and ATHENS 2004 are paying all necessary attention and, of course, security is a foremost priority for all of us. All efforts required will be made and all difficulties will be overcome to ensure that Athens Olympic Games in Athens will be the safest possible.

Rozos ("ALTER TV"): On this same question, Mr. Oswald has answered for the IOC. I see that today it is Mr. Simitsek who represents the Organising Committee. It is conjectured, probably safely so, that the publications in "The Guardian" originated from an associate of the Organising Committee, Mr Ryan. I would like a comment on this, as a relevant question has been submitted today in Parliament.

M. Simitsek: Look, I have not investigated the matter personally. I think this is the responsibility of the company's management. When the time is right an official statement will be issued.

Journalist: A question for Mr. Oswald, since he told us that the Sport Events are intended to improve the overall system. Given that Mr Oswald is based Greece, I would like Mr Oswald to give a grading of the test events, always keeping in mind that you are based outside Greece.

D. Oswald: You know, we don't give grades. We are just satisfied or not satisfied. Various aspects are tested, not necessarily all dimensions or all aspects, at each Sport Event.

In order to organise Olympic Games, to hold an Olympic event, you need - as I mentioned before - a Venue. So, you have to test the Venue, you have to train and test the people. They may be permanent staff, they may be volunteers, and they may come from abroad, from the International Federations.

All these have to be investigated and tested to see how they work together. You have catering, transport, security, health services - you also have technologies, for which tests are very important. So as a rule you do not always test everything in all the Venues, because this way you would hold the Olympic Games twice.

But if you test a procedure in two or three Sport Events, what you learn from these tests can also be applied to other tests. So it's never a full event, as the Olympic Games are, but you



have fully tested security or accreditation. It is difficult to give a grade to Beach Volleyball, for example.

I repeat that we are very satisfied with what we have seen, with the way the operations were run, with the flexibility of the people, with their knowledge of their task. Most Federations - I use the word 'most' because there some events are still in progress - or in any case all Federations whose Sport Events have finished, have expressed their complete satisfaction.

G. Felli: May I just add that I was heading a group of 20 experts from the IOC, from the International Federations and from the next Organising Committee, who were here for four days, representing ten different nationalities. If you were to ask how each one of these persons to rate the Sport Events, I can tell you that all these persons, who had significant experience on the issue, were very impressed by what you have achieved in Greece.

And I think you can be proud of yourselves, the Greeks, for what you have done here.

Your success in the Sport Events does not mean that you are ready for the Olympic Games today, but you should be absolutely proud of the Sport Events that you held. There will be more such events, you need to do more, but you should be proud of what you have achieved.