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# Israel's participation in the Olympics in Paris – an inappropriate parallel with Russia's suspension



Israel will still have competitors at this month's World Aquatics Championships in Qatar, even though until recently, their participation was uncertain due to concerns for their safety.

The competition in Doha will also be the qualification for participation in the Olympic Games in Paris this summer, so this fact also contributed to Israel's decision to participate.

Israel has already decided to **participate** with a complete team at the Paris Olympics. "We are going to be in Paris 100%", said the president of the national Olympic committee, Yaël Arad, a former judoka who won Israel its first-ever medal at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

However, the participation of Israeli athletes in the Olympic Games in Paris has been the subject of great controversy because of the Israeli military action against Hamas in Gaza. A large group of countries, primarily from the Islamic world, have been asking the International Olympic Committee to ban Israeli athletes from travelling to Paris.

They are joined in this request by pro-Palestinian groups and even some Western athletes, demanding that Israel be denied the right to compete because of their state's military action in Gaza.

## An inconsistent campaign

Opponents of Israel's participation in the Paris Olympics base their actions on several inconsistencies, which makes those actions doomed to failure from the outset. But the tension is already there and will be another headache for the IOC and the French hosts.

There were demands for Israel's exclusion after the IOC decided to **suspend** the participation of athletes from Russia and Belarus under national symbols, including the suspension of their national Olympic committees.

**Israeli athletes are excluded from obligations to the army**

Israel's opponents search for the parallel with Russia. Apart from being purely politically motivated, this is unfounded from the point of view of the rules of the Olympic Movement.

One of the more significant reasons for the disqualification of Russian athletes is that a large number of them are somehow **involved** in military structures, as members of military sports clubs, for example, or as direct participants in military operations.

On the other hand, Israeli athletes are excluded from obligations to the army. They have no contact with it. "Our Olympic team members were not recruited (by the military) and are not involved in any combat or military activity. The Olympic team is wholly devoted to their training and solely focused on representing Israel at the Olympics", said the president of the Israeli Olympic committee.

## Respect towards Munich 1972

The attempt to apply the disqualification that the IOC used in the case of Russia to Israeli athletes is baseless, even when politics are left aside.

Russian athletes and their National Olympic Committee did not fall out of favour with the IOC overnight when Russia attacked Ukraine.

The Russian Olympic Committee, and the entire Russian sports scene in general, has been under various levels of international sports organisation sanctions for a long time due to the unacceptable influence of state structures in the sports institutions organisation and due to the state-controlled and systematic doping of Russian athletes over a long period.

Severe violations of the rules of the international Olympic Movement are a long-standing practice of the Russian state-sponsored sports structure, and even if there were no political obstacles, their participation in the Olympic Games would be highly questionable.

## Opposing the participation of Israeli athletes in the Olympic Games is ethically unacceptable

Ultimately, opposing the participation of Israeli athletes in the Olympic Games is ethically unacceptable. Israel and its athletes were victims of a **terrorist act** in Munich in 1972 - the greatest tragedy that the Olympic Movement experienced in its history.

12 Israeli athletes and one German policeman were killed in the attack by Palestinian terrorists from the Black September Organisation in the Olympic Village in Munich.

This terrorist act left a permanent stain on the peaceful mission of the Olympic Movement, and the Israeli victims have since become a symbol of suffering that Olympianism must never allow again.

## Moving towards anti-Semitism

The organisers of the Paris Olympics will have a significant and complicated task of ensuring security for around 120 Israeli athletes and Olympic team members.

In France alone, anti-Semitism experienced an expansion and quadrupled in the last year alone, particularly after the terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israel and the Israeli military action in Gaza that followed.

Considering the pressure and risk to which the athletes will be exposed, Israel increased the security budget of its Olympic expedition by as much as 42% (to about \$1.4 million).

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There is no doubt that there will be anti-Israel protests during the Olympic Games in Paris, given the intense social media campaigns to ban Israeli athletes from participating. The hosts have announced unprecedented security measures, supported by a significant budget of around €320 million.

They will certainly not be able to influence refusing handshakes or similar boycotts towards Israeli athletes by competitors from countries that condemn the Israeli action against the Palestinians.

They will receive adequate sports sanctions, already seen at the last Olympics in Tokyo, when the Algerian judoka was excluded from the competition because she refused to fight against an Israeli opponent.

The IOC has set firm criteria for such situations and highly politicised cases - the suspension of Russian participation under national symbols and full participation for competitors from Israel.

Together with the Parisian hosts, they will suffer pressure and open confrontation until the end of the competition next August. However, any different decision and yielding to politicised campaigns would mean the tragic disqualification of the Olympic Movement.

