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Federal Council in favour of Sion 2006

To lessen the impression of money-grubbing, perhaps, and to put the 118 members of the IOC jury into a receptive mood, the Federal Council and Council of States intend to exempt the International Committee – which is based in Lausanne – from value added tax with effect from 2001. “A coincidence,” as president Flavio Cotti stressed at the autumn session. But not even he could take the sting out of the reproach that the IOC had applied for this privilege as long ago as 1994, to see it approved only in the run-up to the candidature. The National Council had not taken a view when we went to press.

What is certain is that the federal government attaches great importance to the Olympic candidature: President Cotti spent a Saturday looking at the sites from a helicopter. And as long ago as March 4th 1998, Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi – once director of the ski association – appealed to the National Council and Council of States: “If we do not organise the games, the valleys will empty and their people fill the towns”. As Ogi has said – notably at the Swiss Abroad Congress in Lugano – the Expo, Olympics and a positive approach to the past mean a new start and self-confidence for Switzerland.

Persuading sports lovers world wide

Switzerland wants to win. Nobody knows quite what criteria decide who gets a positive answer. Apart from objective criteria, we can take it that June 1999 will show whether the country has enough friends world-wide. Necessarily, if we lose the country will have to show its sporting side. As Jean-Daniel Mudry often says: “Anyone who goes in for sport plays fair, and knows how to lose occasionally.” ■

The Sion 2006 candidature dossier is to be found on <http://www.sion2006.ch>.

Interview with Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi on Sion 2006

“We want to reinforce our



Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi thinks that sport is Switzerland's way out of self-inflicted isolation. (Photo: Keystone)

Federal Councillor, why does the country need a major event like the 2006 Winter Olympics?

Our candidature, and still more the possible attribution of the 2006 Olympics to this country, would give us a platform to put Switzerland across abroad as a place open to the world and worth visiting. It would shake the country up a little, and we should go into the next millennium with self-confidence and a swing. Our application gives us Swiss a chance to work toward a goal that is of national importance because it extends beyond sport. When the IOC assessment commission visited Sion recently, our country's stability and security were emphasised as well as the support of the municipal, cantonal and federal authorities and Swiss Olympic Association (SOV). The admirable concept, with Sion as the centre, the experience of the people of Valais with international competitions, and the existing hotel, public transport and hospital infrastructure found favour with our foreign guests.

Switzerland has taken something of a beating recently: do you feel that our candidature is already giving Switzerland the feeling of a new start?

Our candidature is an opportunity to reinforce the feeling of togetherness in our country with its four languages, four cultures and twenty-six cantons. There are not all that many possi-

feeling of togetherness”

bilities these days for a small country like Switzerland to put on projects which are both carried forward by the people and generate great interest abroad. The feeling of a new start which you mention is not rooted in a single project; rather the candidature is a means by which we can make a contribution to a Switzerland looking towards the future.

What consequences do you expect as Sports Minister for the economy, environment and sport?

The example of Lillehammer in 1994 showed that a major Olympic event can provide the spur for an improvement in the position of sport in society. That is why I believe that the far-off goal of the Winter Olympics in Switzerland can give an important impulse to sport

among young people and more broadly. We shall all be inspired to take exercise. At a time when we spend more than 100 million francs a day on public health, such stimulus can only be a good thing. Considered from the point of view of the economy we should be able to create new jobs and improve our tourist potential. One of our candidature's trumps is that Sion 2006 is committed to sustainable development. We are to set out in a "Rainbow Book" how this principle can be implemented in the environmental, political, industrial, social and cultural sectors.

What spirit would you like to see at the 2006 Sion Olympics, as spectator and Sports Minister?

I should like to see competitive events which are both of the highest standard

in sporting terms, yet at the same time peaceful, at which all the sportsmen and sportswomen are supported by large numbers of spectators. And I dream that the commitment of our people will contribute to making a reality of our motto "les jeux du coeur", "the games with a heart", and anchor more firmly and for the long term the fundamental values of great importance to our country, such as family spirit, fairness and social integration.

Interview: Alice Baumann ■

