

The First Mediterranean Games and Turkey with Its Reflections on the Newspapers

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Abstract: The Mediterranean Games first of which was held in Egypt between 5-20 October 1951 was a considerable step in consolidating friendship, in forming cultural ties, and in building peace among countries which have a border on the Mediterranean, after the World War II. During the 1948 London Olympics, President of Egyptian National Olympics Committee Mohamed Taher Pasha's idea of creating a regional olympics was supported by the representatives of the Olympics committees of Mediterranean countries and it was decided that the first Mediterranean Games be held in Egypt. The study reviewed the news and comments published in newspapers Cumhuriyet and Milliyet in the period of the first Mediterranean Games. The changes were given chronologically through citations from the news and comments.

Keywords: Mohamed Taher Pasha, sport, Mediterranean Games, newspaper, media.

Gazetelere Yansımaları ile İlk Akdeniz Oyunları ve Türkiye

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Özet: Dünyada spor, ülkelerin tanıtımı ve uluslararası barışın korunmasında önemli bir araç olarak görülmektedir. İlk olarak 5-20 Ekim 1951 tarihleri arasında Mısır'da yapılan Akdeniz Oyunları da II. Dünya Savaşı sonrasında Akdeniz'e kıyısı olan ülkeler arasında dostluğun pekişmesi, kültürel yaklaşmanın tesisi ve barışın kurulması yolunda önemli bir adım olmuştur. II. Dünya Savaşı sonrasında yapılan 1948 Londra Olimpiyatları sırasında Mısır Milli Olimpiyat Komitesi Başkanı Muhammed Tahir Paşa tarafından ortaya atılan bölgesel olimpiyat yapma fikri Akdeniz Ülkelerinin olimpiyat temsilcileri tarafından desteklenmiş ve ilk Akdeniz Oyunlarının Mısır'da yapılması kararlaştırılmıştır. Araştırmada I. Akdeniz Oyunları süresince Cumhuriyet ve Milliyet gazetelerinde yer alan haber ve yorumlar taranmış ve elde edilen bulgular kronolojik olarak sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Muhammed Tahir Paşa, spor, Akdeniz Oyunları, gazete, basın.

Introduction

Sports in the world are seen as an important tool in the introduction of countries to each other and in the protection of peace. Countries establish close relations and promote dialogue through sports. It is obvious that sports contributed to peace among countries in history. The Modern Olympics, the greatest sports organization in the world, have been organized since 1896. The Modern Olympic Games, launched by the French sportsman Baron Pierre De Coubertin, inspired other regional games. One of the most important organizations held based on the philosophy of Olympic Games is the Mediterranean Games. The Mediterranean Games are a multi-sport games held every four years, mainly for nations bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean Games, insofar as they are intended as a relevant international sporting event on the world scene, have belonged, since their inception in 1951, to a diffuse context. On the one hand, they are supposed to facilitate international understanding and cooperation; on the other, they must face a world of political ambitions, grievances and claims, regional conflict and social and economic differences within participating states.¹

General Information on the Mediterranean Games

The Mediterranean Games, the first of which was held in Egypt between 5th-20th October 1951 was a considerable step in consolidating friendship, in forming cultural ties, and in building peace among countries which have a border on the Mediterranean, after the II. World War.

These games offer the opportunity to young people from three Continents (Europe, Africa, and Asia), different origins, cultures and religions, yet bound together by the Olympic Ideal, to come together in the same place. Despite all the problems, mainly political, arisen in the region, the Mediterranean Games have al-

¹ F. Xavier Medina, "The Mediterranean Games: Dialogue, International Politics and Socioeconomic Promotion", *Revista De Dialectologia y Tradiciones Populares*, 61(2), 2006, pp. 225-38.

ways been held in the scheduled dates and in the place chosen for this purpose.

The issue of organizing the games was first put on the agenda with a proposal by the Deputy Chairman of the International Olympics Committee and Chairman of Egypt Olympics Committee Mohamed Taher Pasha to the representatives of Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, Spain, Lebanon and Syria during the 1948 Olympics Games in London. Kont de Beamont, F. Pietri, and A. Messard from France, A. Bolanachi and J. Ketsess from Greece, P.I Mac Mahon from Spain, Kont P.T. Revel iel G. de Stefani from Italy, Gabriel Gemael from Lebanon, Burhan Felek from Turkey, and chiefs of delegations of Monaco, Syria, Malta and Yugoslavia, among ICO members, attended the meeting held to discuss the proposal.² During the 1948 Olympic Games in London, in a period spoiled by the tensions between big powers, Mohamed Taher Pasha presents the project to the members of the IOC, supporting the idea of sport as a pacifying, unifying factor. International Committee of Mediterranean Games (CIJM) was founded to carry out the organization based on a status consisting of 23 articles. The committee, of which headquarter is located in Athens, set the rules to be applied for the games. Accordingly, the games are held every four years, among amateur sportsmen of the Mediterranean countries in a city bordering the Mediterranean and the games are finalized in maximum 15 days.³

Mohamed Taher Pasha

Mohamed Taher Pasha (1897-1970) was an Egyptian doctor of Turkish origin in political sciences and the founder of the Mediterranean Games. Taher Pasha was the grandson of Arifi Pasha, one of the Grand viziers of the Ottomans, and the son of Mustafa Şekip Bey, Stockholm Ambassador of that period. His mother was Princess Emine Azizi, the daughter of Egypt Khedive İsmail Pasha

² Cem Atabeyoğlu, *Akdeniz Oyunları ve Türkiye*, İstanbul: Türkiye Milli Olimpiyat Komitesi Yayınları, 2000, p. 7.

³ *Ana Britannica Genel Kültür Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: Ana Yayıncılık, 1994, vol. 1, p. 277.

whose mother was of Turkish origin. Taher Pasha was born in İstanbul in 1897; after completing his primary, secondary and high school education in İstanbul, he studied at Berlin and Lausanne Universities and completed his doctoral education in the field of political sciences in Switzerland. During the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, he moved to live with his uncle the King Fuat I and settled in Egypt. After the death of his uncle King Fuat I, his cousin King Faruk was enthroned and Taher Pasha became a senator in the Egyptian Parliament. During the foundation of the Mediterranean Games, he was still serving as a senator. Taher Pasha was both a member of International Olympics Committee and the chairman of the Egyptian Olympics National Olympics Committee since 1934. He had no difficulties in convincing the representatives of the countries to participate the Mediterranean Games since he spoke English, French, German, Arabic and Turkish very well. He died in İstanbul in 1970 after a traffic accident he had in Geneva in 1967.⁴

Egypt, France, Italy, Spain, Lebanon, Malta, Syria, Turkey and Greece sent sportsmen to the Mediterranean Games which were held in Alexandria between 5-20 October. The Games were inaugurated on October 1951, in Alexandria, Egypt, in honor of Muhammed Taher Pasha, the man to whom their inspiration is owed, with contests being held in 13 sports along with the participation of 734 athletes from 10 countries.

The Mediterranean Games, in which the Olympic rules are applied, have been as the preparatory organization for the Olympics for 40 years. The first 10 games took place always one year preceding the Olympics. However, from 1993 on, they were held the year following the Olympic Games. Ever since, they take place every 4 years without any interruption. In 1955, in Barcelona, during the II Games, the set up was decided of a Supervisory and Controlling Body for the Games, a kind of Executive Committee. The decisions were finally materialized on June 16, 1961, and the

⁴ Atabeyoğlu, *Akdeniz Oyunları ve Türkiye*, p. 12.

said Body was named, upon a Greek notion, ICMG (International Committee for the Mediterranean Games).

The Mediterranean Games have regularly been held for 16 times until today: 1951 Alexandria (Egypt), 1955 Barcelona (Spain), 1959 Beirut (Lebanon), 1963 Naples (Italy), 1967 Tunis (Tunisia), 1971 İzmir (Turkey), 1975 Algiers (Algeria), 1979 Split (Yugoslavia), 1983 Casablanca (Morocco), 1987 Latakia (Syria), 1991 Athens (Greece), 1993 Languedoc, Roussillon (France), 1997 Bari (Italy), 2001 Tunis (Tunisia), 2005 Almeria (Spain), 2009 Pescara (Italy).

This study reviewed the news and comments published in the newspapers *Cumhuriyet* and *Milliyet* in the period of the first Mediterranean Games. The changes were given chronologically through citations from the news and comments.

Turkey in the First Mediterranean Games

The political newspapers started to allocate full page for sports events in Turkey since 1950s. The newspapers in Turkey attached great importance to the Mediterranean Games held after the 1948 Olympic Games in London where the Turkish wrestlers won 6 gold medals. The newspapers sending private reporters to Egypt announced the news and comments about the games not only in sports pages but also in the cover pages. The sportsmen going to Egypt was reported as follows in *Milliyet* Newspaper:

Before the olympic games to be held in Helsinki in 1952, the importance of the Mediterranean Games, which are a kind of preparation to the Olympic games, are also considerably important in terms of the number of the participating countries. Our delegation in two teams is going to Alexandria today. Our delegation consists of 4 directors, 4 trainers, 15 athletes, 7 wrestlers and 11 basketball players.⁵

The comments on newspapers also included warnings to the Turkish sportsmen who are going to represent their country:

The young who are going to compete in a foreign country for fifteen days must be careful not only during competitions but also in hotels,

⁵ *Milliyet*, 3 October 1951.

restaurants and tours; and must protect the dignity of being Turk.⁶

The importance of the games is emphasized in a comment in Milliyet Newspaper as follows:

The results of the Turkish wrestlers, athletes and basketball players in the first Mediterranean Games will play an important role in showing the value of our sports in Europe. This is the first opportunity for us since the 1948 Olympic Games in London in that it will give us chance to show the value of our basketball in Europe.⁷

The opening ceremony of the Mediterranean Games was reported as follows on the first page of Milliyet Newspaper:

The Mediterranean Games started following the ceremony held in King Fuad Stadium in Alexandria. Turkey, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Spain, Lebanon, Syria, Malta and Greece attended the opening ceremony with their teams. The Mediterranean Games including various sports competitions will last for 15 days. The King, Egyptian governmental members, and diplomatic representatives of the participating countries attended the ceremony on the VIP stand. The King greeted the flags of each national team. According to the Olympics tradition, the Greek team was the first to march, followed by Spain, Italy, Turkey, Syria, France, Lebanon, Malta and Yugoslavia respectively as for the Arabic alphabet. The Egyptian team was the last as being the host country.⁸

Turkey Got 8 Over 8 in Wrestling

Turkey won 20 medals in the First Mediterranean Games, of which 10 were gold, 3 were silver and 7 were bronze. That the Turkish national team going to Egypt with B team consisting of 8 young wrestlers won 8 gold medals received an enthusiastic welcome in the country. Hasan Gemici, Cemil Sarıbacak, Bayram Şit, Tevfik Yüce, Bekir Büke, İsmet Atlı, Bektaş Can, Kemal Dişçiürük won the gold medal by pinning their competitors. Turkish newspapers reported the success of the team in wrestling, the

⁶ Nuri Bosut, *Cumhuriyet*, 9 October 1951.

⁷ Halit Talayer, *Milliyet*, 4 October 1951.

⁸ *Milliyet*, 6 October 1951.

ancestors' sport of the Turks as follows:

Our wrestlers who have won the championship in freestyle wrestling in eight weights got their awards today. Our national anthem was played eight times successively and our flag waved on the honor stand during the Olympic ceremonies in the games.⁹

The success of our sportsmen in the Mediterranean Games was really awesome. Our wrestlers winning the championship in all eight weights, athletes winning two first places and basketball players, even though they lost the games, showed the Olympics participants the greatest models of politeness of being a sportsman. Beside all, we must be proud of this.¹⁰

Today was a great victory day for us in the Mediterranean Games. In freestyle wrestling competitions, our wrestlers won the championship at all eight weights by pinning their competitors in a short time. More than 5 thousand people watched the final competitions.¹¹

Burhan Felek, who followed the games as the invited person of the Egyptian Olympics Committee, wrote about the success of the young Turkish wrestlers as:

It is a very good decision that we took part in the games. We won the championship in wrestling and now this team is the national team of Turkey. Here, all Turks are crying as the Turkish wrestlers win. The feeling of nationalism is an incredible potion.¹²

Burhan Felek also praised the organization of the games:

“All the Mediterranean countries, except for Israel, Monaco and Albania, participated the competitions. Egypt made a great effort for these games and hosted the first Mediterranean games deservedly. The old stadium in Alexandria was almost rebuilt and a basketball hall with a capacity of five thousand people, a small hall and a great swimming pool were built.”

Egyptian Olympics Committee undertook a very big burden to pro-

⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, 9 October 1951.

¹⁰ *Milliyet*, 17 October 1951.

¹¹ *Cumhuriyet*, 9 October 1951

¹² Burhan Felek, *Cumhuriyet*, 8 October 1951

vide food and accommodation for all directors, sportsmen and reporters participating the games. The participants were also provided free tram tickets.¹³

The Turkish newspapers also reported early return of Nuri Baytorun to Turkey, the coach of the national Turkish wrestling team, due to a dog bite.¹⁴ Turkish Basketball Team could not succeed in the Mediterranean Games and lost the games 48-39 against Spain and 38-36 against Italy and 43-37 against Greece.

The listing of the countries as for the medals won in the First Mediterranean Games was as follows respectively: Italy, France, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Spain, Lebanon and Syria.

The Turkish athletes took the first place on the grandstand in 11 of 16 branches in the first Mediterranean Games held in Alexandria. 15 Turkish athletes won 2 gold, 3 silver and 6 bronze medals. Ahmet Aytar became the champion in the marathon and Akın Altıok in the triple jump.

2013 Mediterranean Games to Be Held in Mersin

The games, of which the last was held in Pescara city of Italy in 2009, have been organized in 12 different countries until today. Athleticism, basketball, cycling, boxing, gymnastics, fencing, football, wrestling, weightlifting, handball, judo, table tennis, tennis, sailing, swimming and volleyball are compulsory sport branches partaking in all Mediterranean Games program. The most successful country of the Mediterranean Games held up to now is Italy regarding number of medals.

Turkey, having participated in all the games, hosted the sixth Mediterranean Games in İzmir in 1971.

Mersin had already announced its candidacy to host the 2013 Mediterranean Games; however, Volos, Greece had been selected as the host city in the General Assembly and candidate selection that were held in 2007 in Pescara, Italy.

¹³ Burhan Felek, *Cumhuriyet*, 16 October 1951.

¹⁴ *Milliyet*, 17 Ekim 1951.

Following this decision, Mersin applied for Mediterranean Games, 2017. However, with the decision of the ICMG on January 28th, 2011, the host of Mediterranean Games was withdrawn from Volos, Greece. In response, the ICMG nominated three cities: Tarragona, Tripoli and Mersin. As a result of voting, on February 23rd, 2011, Mersin has been announced as the host of the Mediterranean Games, 2013. The games in 2013 will be held in Mersin, located on the southern coast of Turkey.¹⁵

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