

# Willibald Gebhardt and Germany's Position



## 1. Introduction

If in the following text Coubertin is handled critically, especially with regard to his purely tactically motivated actions and to his slightly dishonest behaviour towards Willibald Gebhardt, it is not because this author does not consider Coubertin a very important founder of the Olympic Movement. Nor is it the purpose of this presentation to report the events from Coubertin's point of view, but rather to investigate the person, works and way of thinking of Gebhardt. Furthermore, the references examined for this paper do not permit a purely positive presentation of Coubertin.

## 2. Biography

Karl August Willibald Gebhardt was born on January 17<sup>th</sup> 1861 in Berlin, the son of a printer. He attended the Friedrichs Realgymnasium. In 1879 he studied in Marburg and then in Berlin where he received his PhD<sup>1</sup> in chemistry in 1879. He was not a medical doctor as it is often related in the literature, but rather a chemist. He later became interested in medical healing processes. His first interest in sport was established during his studies. Gebhardt was an active fencer in a student association.

From 1885, Gebhardt and his brother managed the book printing business they had inherited from their father. In 1890 he traded in his half of the printing business for cash and moved to the USA, where he had little success starting up his own business. He returned to Germany in early 1895 and opened the Karlsbad public bathhouse together with Baron von Keisenberg<sup>2</sup>.

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, 1895 he founded the Committee for German Participation in the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens of which he became secretary. He also worked as secretary on the committees for participation in the 1900 Olympic

1 Gebhardt, Willibald: Über substituierte Amide der Kohlensäure und Thiokohlensäure. [Substituted amides of carbon dioxide and thio-carbon dioxide]. Berlin 1885. Chemistry was a part of the Faculty of Philosophy.

2 Keisenberg, Baron Karl von (\*1831), owner of knight land in Silesia.

Games in Paris and 1904 in St. Louis and also, since 1904 for the „Deutschen Reichsausschuß für Olympische Spiele“, the permanent German NOC (he retained this position until 1906).

From January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1896 until his resignation on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1906 he was a member of the IOC (the 16<sup>th</sup> member in total and the first German). He took part in the sessions in 1896 in Athens, 1897 in Le Havre, 1904 in London, 1905 in Brussels, 1906 in Athens and 1909 in Berlin (as a guest) and in the Olympic Congresses in 1897 in Le Havre and 1905 in Brussels. He was the head of the German team for the Olympic Games in 1896 in Athens, 1900 in Paris and 1904 in St. Louis and chef de mission in Athens 1906.

After his retirement he expressed his opinion twice concerning the Olympics. In 1917 he criticised the changing of the name „Deutscher Reichsausschuß für Olympische Spiele“ to „Deutscher Reichsausschuß für Leibesübungen“. This name change would have marked the separation of German sports and the Olympic Movement. After the end of World War I Gebhardt protested in Germany and to Coubertin that no German team could participate in the 1920 Games in Antwerp. He demanded the establishment of a „Völkerbund for Olympic Games“.

Gebhardt had constant occupational and financial problems following his return from the United States. It is possible that he withdrew from the IOC and the various committees to try and improve his economic situation. He tried his luck as an inventor and registered numerous patents (light healing methods, appliances for the manufacture of 'filter coffee', alcohol free wine).

On February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1908 Gebhardt married Katharina Zurkalowski (she died in 1941). He himself was killed in a traffic accident on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

### 3. Founder of the first German Committee

In 1895, while still fencing and running the bathhouse, he made contact with the German Gymnastic and Sport Movement. In late March or early April of that year he made an appeal<sup>3</sup> and formed a committee for a general display of sport, games and gymnastics, which was held from June 1<sup>st</sup> until August 31<sup>st</sup> 1895 in the old Reichstag building. The display had lost money by the time it closed.

It still has not been determined at what point Gebhardt first realised that Coubertin intended to organise the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens. A permanent committee had certainly been started from the above mentioned display committee. This new committee called itself „German Federation for Sport, Games and Gymnastics“ [Deutscher Bund für Sport, Spiel und Turnen] of which Gebhardt was vice-chairman. In the above mentioned appeal it was said that the new committee had the responsibilities „to organise sport festivals similar to the planned Olympic Games“<sup>4</sup>. After one committee session on April 23<sup>rd</sup> notification was given that „there had been an unofficial effort to make contact with the French organisers of the Olympic Games in Athens“<sup>5</sup>. Gebhardt frequently tried in vain to convince this committee that they should take the responsibility for German participation in the Olympic Games in Athens. The committee was strongly influenced by people from the „Deutsche Turnerschaft“, the „Central Committee for Folk and Youth Games“ [Zentralausschuß für Volks- und Jugendspiele] and national conservative groups, who had all previously demanded a boycott of the Games. The committee was against the Olympic Games because the Olympic Movement was started by a Frenchman and above all because the German banks were badly affected by the financial problems of the Greek states. The gymnasts were against the movement for ideological reasons and they considered the international Olympic Games to be a false interpretation of the ancient in which only Greeks were allowed to participate.

3 Printed in: Dokumente zur Frühgeschichte der Olympischen Spiele, edited by the Carl Diem Institut, Köln 1970, p. 8.

4 In: Dokumente, p. 8.

5 In: Deutsche Turn-Zeitung 39(1895)20, p. 428.

When Gebhardt initiated the Exhibition Committee of the exhibition and later the German Federation for Sport, Games and Gymnastics he must have already had a motive. This is pointed out in a short note in the book „Was jeder Sportsmann von der Olympiade wissen muß“<sup>6</sup> [What every sportsman should know about the Olympics] written in 1928 by Erich Zessler-Vitalis. During a social evening the Greek ambassador Kleon Rangavis<sup>7</sup> complained „about Germany's refusal to participate in the Olympic Games“. He is said to have asked „Is there no man in Germany who is willing to work towards German participation in the Olympic Games?“ Gebhardt happened to be present and answered „Yes, there is a man, and he is sitting at this table. [...] Later that same evening Dr. Gebhardt began to prepare his work.“<sup>8</sup> This meeting with Rangavis was probably in February or March, shortly before the appeal was made for the exhibition. After many unsuccessful attempts with the „German Federation for Sport, Games and Gymnastics“ Gebhardt withdrew from the organisation on November 18<sup>th</sup>. On December 13<sup>th</sup> he invited athletes familiar to him to the Four Seasons Hotel. There were 40 people present, one of which was Rangavis. At the end of the meeting the participants formed a committee for the purpose of *taking all the appropriate and necessary steps to ensure respectable German participation at the Games in Athens.*<sup>9</sup> Gebhardt found the son of the German Chancellor<sup>10</sup>, Prince Philipp Ernst zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst<sup>11</sup> willing to become president of this new committee. One reason for this was that the prince was married to Princess Charikée Ypsilanti<sup>12</sup> who happened to be Greek. His father had also been the Bavarian ambassador to Greece. The influences operating here surely dated back to the good Greek relationship during the reign of King Ludwig I<sup>3</sup>. Another reason can be found in the Hohenzollern family: The president of the Organising Committee in Athens was Prince Konstantin<sup>14</sup>. He was married to Princess Sophia<sup>15</sup>, the daughter of Empress Viktoria<sup>16</sup> and the sister of Emperor Wilhelm II<sup>17</sup>. They both supported the ideas of the new German committee and also provided financial support by buying the majority of tickets for a Sportwerbefest. Part of the proceedings were donated for the travelling costs of the German team to Athens. In a manner similar to Coubertin on the International Committee (later the IOC), Gebhardt worked as secretary on the „Committee for German Participation in the 1896 Olympic Games in Athens“ [Komitee für die Beteiligung Deutschlands an den Olympischen Spielen] as it was soon known.

#### 4. Participation in the 1896 games in Athens

Before Gebhardt contacted Coubertin or the Greek Organising Committee on behalf of the newly established committee he first wrote to the „German Turnerschaft“. He informed them of the new committee and invited the gymnasts to take part in the Games in Athens. He did this for purely tactical reasons. He knew that the Turnerschaft and the Central Committee had already decided on a boycott, but he wanted legitimisation to continue as the only German organisation. The answer from the chairman of the „German Turnerschaft“,

6 Zessler-Vitalis, pp. 11-12.

7 Rangavis, Kleon (1861-1917), diplomat and poet, studied in Berlin and Heidelberg, Greek ambassador to Berlin since 1891, wrote tragedies, comedies and novels.

8 Zessler-Vitalis, p. 11-12.

9 Gebhardt, Willibald: Soll Deutschland sich an den Olympischen Spielen beteiligen?, Berlin 1896, p. 34.

10 Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, Fürst Chlodwig zu, (1819-1901) German Chancellor from 1894 to 1900.

11 Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, crown prince (later Prince [Fürst]) Philipp Ernst zu (1853-1915), also Prince of Ratibor and Corvey, member of the committee of the Hamburg-America Line and other companies.

12 Ypsilanti, Princess Charikée (1863-1912). The YPSILANTI family were a famous Greek patriot family. A number of freedom fighters belonged to this family.

13 Ludwig I. (1786-1868), Bavarian King from 1825 to 1848, fan of art, had many extravagant buildings constructed in München.

14 Konstantin (1868-1923), Greek King from 1913 to 1917 and 1920 to 1923.

15 Sophia (1870-1932), married to crown prince Konstantin since 1889.

16 Viktoria (1840-1901), daughter of the British Queen Victoria, married to Emperor Friedrich III.

17 Wilhelm II. (1860-1941), German Emperor from 1888-1918, traveled to Athens for his sisters's wedding, often had holidays in Corfu.

Ferdinand Goetz<sup>18</sup>, arrived on December 28<sup>th</sup>: „*The well-known facts about the behaviour of the French organiser of the Games makes it unbearable for the pride of a German man to participate.*“<sup>19</sup> Gebhardt now had a clear path. The arguments from Goetz were not easily forgotten and burdened the work of the German Committee for the next twenty years. For tactical reasons Coubertin had intentionally not invited any German delegates to Paris for the Olympic Congress in 1894. He probably feared that the largest sports organisation in the world, the „German Turnerschaft“, with its nationalist views, would disturb his plans. Therefore, he presumably pretended not to have the addresses of the German committees. A look into Coubertin’s address book reveals hundreds of addresses from gymnastic clubs, both large and small from all over the world, but none from Germany. Coubertin also provided his critics with another argument against himself when, during an interview with a journalist from the „Gil Blas“ newspaper, he reportedly said that the absence „*[of] Germany, which - may have been intentional - were invited very late [...] to nobody’s discontent*“<sup>20</sup>. When the article was discovered by the Germans, the gymnastic groups and the national conservative press rose up in protest. When Coubertin later half-heartedly and unconvincingly denied the reports, the Greek press and the organisers of the games distanced themselves from Coubertin. Arguments for another criticism against Coubertin came after the Berlin National-Zeitung [National Newspaper] asked him why there were no German members on the International Committee and Coubertin responded that this could only occur if there were „*vacancies in the existing party*“<sup>21</sup>.

Under these conditions Gebhardt wrote a letter to Coubertin, probably for the first time on December 30<sup>th</sup>, and notified him about the presence of the German committee, explained that the other German committees had all declined to be involved in the Olympic Games and requested that Coubertin deny the reports of what he had said during the Gil-Blas-Interview. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1896, Coubertin answered Gebhardt with a short letter. He denied what was reported in the Gil-Blas-interview and also sent copies to the National Zeitung, Rangavis and Prince Konstantin. He also wished them luck in organising a German team to participate in the Olympic Games. This was the beginning of a co-operation between these two personalities in a relationship that had problems from the outset. Gebhardt probably made the first mistake in his first letter to Coubertin. In this letter he explained in detail the criticisms of the opponents of the Olympic Movement and Coubertin and he also acknowledged the Greeks as responsible for the first Olympic Games. From this point on Gebhardt almost always found himself in a difficult position. He had to accept Coubertin’s actions and defend his behaviour in Germany. Coubertin was probably also aggravated from the outset because a normal citizen wrote him letters whereas the president of the German Committee, of aristocrat status like himself, never contacted him.

When the German Committee was founded in 1896, they had problems and would have had trouble organising and financing a team trip to Athens by April 1896, so they recommended that the games be delayed until autumn of that year. The answer from Coubertin must have been very strongly worded<sup>22</sup> because when Gebhardt received it he expressed: „*It was immediately clear to me that I could not show this letter to our committee and definitely not to the press.*“<sup>23</sup> Because the Greek and German press had been criticising Coubertin’s comments on German membership with no response, Gebhardt finally called president Dimetrios Vikelas<sup>24</sup> on January 12<sup>th</sup> and wrote a letter to Coubertin on the 14<sup>th</sup> to request the appointment of a German representative. In his letter to Coubertin Gebhardt mentioned: „*Even I can not do anything other than to admit to you, [...] that I would have considered it proper not to leave the German entry onto*

18 Goetz, Ferdinand (1826-1915), Dr. med., chairman of the German Turnerschaft from 1895 to 1915, opposed sport all his life.

19 Gebhardt, p. 51.

20 Cellarius, Albert: Les Jeux Olympiques. In: Gil Blas, 16th June 1895.

21 Letter from Coubertin from the 1st January, 1896 to the National Zeitung, printed in: Gebhardt, pp. 37-38.

22 The letter no longer exists.

23 Dokumente, p. 60.

24 Vikelas, Dimetrios (1835-1908), merchant and literate, in the IOC from 1894 to 1899, president from 1894 to 1896.

*the International Committee up to chance, but rather to give another co-worker a friendly greeting.*"<sup>25</sup> Finally Vikelas solved the problem and asked Rangavis and Gebhardt for a nomination. On March 13<sup>th</sup> the German Committee recommended Gebhardt unanimously. Gebhardt was the only IOC member not accepted by Coubertin. In his memos and in the *Revue Olympique* Coubertin informed the members that yet another person was found who was prepared to work as a co-worker on the IOC, and he asked if there were any objections. There was also no official vote during that session, but possibly a general acclamation of the nominations which had taken place since the last meetings.

The attacks made in public against Coubertin, Gebhardt and the German Committee continued. It was very important to advertise that a German team was going to be sent, so at the end of February 1896 Gebhardt published a brochure titled „Soll Deutschland sich an den Olympischen Spielen beteiligen? Ein Mahnruf an die Deutschen Turner und Sportsmänner [Should Germany take part in the Olympic Games? A warning for German gymnasts and sportsmen]"<sup>26</sup>. He included letters, minutes, explanations and related materials to try and publicly win acceptance of the Games, to defend Coubertin, and to put the blame for the entire stress on the gymnastic organisations.

In the remaining time before the first games the German Committee succeeded in organising a 21 man Olympic team<sup>27</sup> to travel to Athens. Gebhardt accompanied the athletes to Athens as head of the team and in Athens he met Coubertin for the first time. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, in the Panathenaic Stadium Gebhardt supposedly said to Coubertin: „All that is your work".<sup>28</sup>

## 5. The 1897 Congress in Le Havre

As a result of the success of the first Olympic Games, the Greeks developed a plan to permanently hold the Games in Athens. At a reception on April 12<sup>th</sup> King Georg I<sup>29</sup> expressed the hope that his country would be chosen as the „permanent location for competition of the Olympic Games"<sup>30</sup>. This effort was strengthened by a letter sent by the American team to Prince Konstantin, which was also published on May 3<sup>rd</sup> in the *New York Times*<sup>31</sup>. Coubertin must have opposed this plan. His Olympic idea was based on the holding of the Olympic Games in various major cultural cities in the world: 1900 Paris, 1904 a city in the new world, 1908 Rome and so on.

Now both the Greeks and Coubertin had interests to protect. The IOC members who were present in Athens (Vikelas<sup>32</sup>, Kemény<sup>33</sup>, Gebhardt<sup>34</sup>) made recommendations for mediation: the Games were to be held every two years in Athens and major international cities. Coubertin seemed to agree to the new plan as he visited Prince Konstantin in Athens before he left to bid him farewell<sup>35</sup>. In May 1896, Vikelas sent out a memorandum to the IOC members recommending that a second Olympic Congress be held to discuss the new Olympic set-up of alternating every two

25 Gebhardt, p. 69.

26 New edition Kassel 1995.

27 This was the largest foreign contingent.

28 Coubertin, Pierre de: *Olympische Erinnerungen*. Frankfurt 1959, p. 44.

29 Georg I. (1845-1913), Greek King 1863-1913.

30 Politis, N. G. / Anninos, Charalambos: *Die Olympischen Spiele in Athen 1896, Athen/Leipzig 1897*, p. 60.

31 Printed in: Mallon, Bill: *Das erfolgreiche Team, die Amerikaner*. In: Lennartz, Karl (Ed.) *Erläuterungen zum Neudruck des Offiziellen Berichtes*, Kassel 1996, p. 91.

32 Guth, Georg: *Die Olympischen Spiele in Athen 1896*. In: *Zeitschrift für das österreichische Gymnasium* 11(1896), p. 274.

33 Kemény, Ferenc (1860-1944), Bohemian, teacher, in the IOC from 1894 to 1907, activities in the international peace movement. Kemény, Franz: *Die Bedeutung der olympischen Spiele für die körperliche Erziehung der Jugend*. In: *Zeitschrift für das Realschulwesen* 12(1896)1/4, pp. 1-21.

34 *Dokumente*, p. 88.

35 Richardson, Rufus: *The New Olympic Games*. In: *Scribner's Magazine* 20(1896), p. 286.

c.f. Coubertin, Pierre de: *Einundzwanzig Jahre Sportkampagne*. Ratingen 1974, p. 103.

years<sup>36</sup>. Gebhardt seized this opportunity and wrote a letter to Coubertin on June 9<sup>th</sup> requesting that the conference be held in Berlin during the first half of September of the same year. Coubertin should choose the final date. Gebhardt wanted the timing of the second congress to coincide with that of an already planned German sport congress and Sportfest. On June 22<sup>nd</sup>, Coubertin gave his approval of the planned congress in Berlin. This letter can no longer be found. The date and contents can be interpreted from Gebhardt's reply which was sent on August 18<sup>th</sup>. On June 24<sup>th</sup>, two days after receiving Coubertin's letter, Gebhardt advertised for a German sports day and a Sportfest and made invitations for a meeting which should appoint a new Organising Committee<sup>37</sup>. Coubertin later interpreted this opportunity completely different. Although the cities being considered for the congress were „Berlin, Stockholm, and Paris“<sup>38</sup>, he could not bring himself to call the members of the International Committee „together in the glaring lights of a big capital city“<sup>39</sup>. Instead, he chose the small Normand port city of Le Havre. He only mentioned in passing Gebhardt's plan, which was also agreed upon by Vikelas, Kemény and Guth<sup>40</sup>. This can only mean that Gebhardt had already been in contact with those members. In the above mentioned letter of August 18<sup>th</sup>, Gebhardt had asked Coubertin if he had already invited the IOC-members. He also wrote that the Sportfest would take place from the 19<sup>th</sup> until the 27<sup>th</sup>. The congress could have taken place in the same time period. And then he mentioned in a somewhat surprised tone that he had received a telegram (from whom?) that Coubertin had notified the „Le Havre city management that the congress would be held there. What is that supposed to mean?“<sup>41</sup> Coubertin had actually already asked the mayor of Le Havre for use of the town hall for the congress on June 25<sup>th</sup><sup>42</sup>. The town government approved the use of the town hall in July<sup>43</sup>. This means that Coubertin had never seriously considered Berlin as a location for the congress. The argument about the „glaring city lights“ was only an excuse. In 1894 the congress also took place in a big city. Why did Coubertin not want to meet in Berlin? First of all a meeting in Berlin would have the best chance to decide that the Games would alternate between Athens and other major cities. In addition Coubertin probably would have had the consent of the German sport leaders, but he would have faced difficulties in Paris for the 1900 Games because it had been planned for some time to hold the Olympic Games in conjunction with the World Fair. Alfred Picard<sup>44</sup>, the general secretary of the World Fair, was aware of Coubertin's plans but he himself was not really interested and was occupied with other things. Coubertin somehow had to try to convince the French leadership to support his plans. He saw a possibility in Le Havre. Felix Faure<sup>45</sup>, President of the Republic since 1895, lived there. Coubertin had arranged for Faure to be in charge of the congress and to welcome all congress members at his home. It cannot be denied that Coubertin had made agreements with Gebhardt which he did not take seriously. As a matter of fact, it would have been very difficult for Coubertin to explain to the members the real reason for the change in congress sites. This would have damaged Paris' chances to host the Olympic Games and strengthened the chances that Athens would become the permanent host. When Gebhardt finally understood what was happening he broke off contact with Coubertin for some time. But his enthusiasm for the Olympic Games did not allow him to get too discouraged. Towards the end of 1896 he wrote Kemény a letter notifying him that he had not received an invitation to the congress in Le Havre. He hoped that it was a mistake and not an intentional disregard.<sup>46</sup> Coubertin had sent out the invitations in Autumn 1896.

36 Dokumente, p. 88, c.f. Coubertin, Jahre, pp. 105-106.

37 Sport im Bild 2(1896)26, p. 413.

38 Coubertin, Jahre, p. 107.

39 Coubertin, Erinnerungen, p. 50.

40 Ibid.

41 Dokumente, p. 89.

42 Müller, Norbert: Von Paris bis Baden-Baden. Niedernhausen 1983, p. 35.

43 Coubertin, Erinnerungen, p. 108.

44 Picard, Alfred (1844-1913), engineer and canal builder.

45 Faure, Felix (1841-1899), politician, State President from 1885 to 1899.

46 Dokumente, p. 212, Note 186.

Gebhardt must have discovered that from someone else. Gebhardt informed Kemény that despite everything that had happened, he would contact Coubertin by the end of the year. The next preserved letter is one from Gebhardt dated March 27<sup>th</sup> 1897<sup>47</sup>. This letter revealed that Coubertin had already answered the previous letter from Gebhardt. He had sent Gebhardt a photograph of himself as well as an honorary medal for his work at the Games in Athens. Coubertin was now interested in improving their relationship. Gebhardt requested an invitation to the congress and Coubertin sent him an invitation on a postcard on March 28<sup>th</sup>. Gebhardt also asked for a list of the German delegates who were invited and recommended that programs be sent to the German sport publications. Gebhardt rather naively requested that the German Emperor be named honorary president alongside Faure. Two months later, on May 21<sup>st</sup>, Gebhardt sent Coubertin the addresses of people who „were interested in sport and hygiene“<sup>48</sup>. Coubertin had chosen the topic Pedagogy, Hygiene and Sport as the congress topic. Gebhardt doubted that many German participants could be found. He informed the organisers that he would give a presentation on „The healing effect of light“.

During his years in the USA Gebhardt had become familiar with the hygiene-movement. In Battle Creek he had visited John Harvey Kellogg's<sup>49</sup> laboratory which had the first bicycle ergometer. At the bathhouse, Karlsbad, run by himself and Baron von Keisenberg, he had introduced the so called Electric Healing Bath. He had first seen this healing method in America. In 1898 he published a book about this method titled „The healing power of light.“<sup>50</sup> Gebhardt was therefore, once again completely involved. He also accepted the changing of the congress topic which was originally supposed to be about the sites and cycle of the Olympic Games.

After Coubertin had informed him that no other Germans would be present he announced that he would arrive in Le Havre on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July. July 26<sup>th</sup> was the opening day of the conference. On that day the International Committee also had a meeting (the third IOC session in the later numbering of the meetings). In addition to Gebhardt and Coubertin, Balck<sup>51</sup>, Kemény and Guth were also present. On July 28<sup>th</sup> President Faure gave a reception for the congress participants at his home. Gebhardt was introduced at this point. Faure talked to Gebhardt, who only spoke English and did not understand French. Faure, who was somewhat inconsiderate and often undiplomatic, rudely pointed out that the members of the International Committee must speak good French. When Faure's impertinence was translated for Gebhardt he left the room and travelled home.<sup>52</sup> Coubertin seemed not to have noticed this incident. Shortly before the congress he had fallen ill and only just managed to attend the session and the reception.

Gebhardt interrupted his trip home with a stop in Paris and that same evening he wrote a detailed letter to Coubertin.<sup>53</sup> He thanked him for the friendly reception that Coubertin had organised for him and said that the reason for his early departure was that he „was not feeling well“. He only hinted at the real reasons. He mentioned that his lack of French made his „attendance at the congress not that important“. He then expressed the value of sport, his role of helping the people to possibly „develop to a higher level“ and „to find satisfaction“. The committee should fight for these goals. This was especially important for the relationship between Germany and France. „We have to hold a very large peace-union where thousands of byal Germans as well as French come together, [...]“. He also asked Coubertin that the Le Havre congress request of himself and Kemény to „express best greetings and a desire for

47 Ibid., pp. 92-93.

48 Ibid., p. 93.

49 Kellogg, John Harvey (1852-1943), proprietor of the sanitarium in Battle Creek founded by his parents in 1866.

50 Leipzig 1898.

51 Balck, Viktor (1844-1928), important Swedish sport leader, IOC-member from 1894-1921.

52 This episode was described in detail by Guth-Jarkovski, Jiri: Memories, vol. 2, The Olympic Memories, Prague 1929, p. 38 ff. (Czech).

53 Printed in Dokumente, pp. 95-96.

*prosperous co-operation with the Hamburg Peace Congress*<sup>54</sup>. Coubertin replied with a letter on August 10<sup>th</sup> but he did not respond to Gebhardt's suggestion. Gebhardt wrote another letter to Coubertin on September 29<sup>th</sup> in which he again addressed the previous topic. In the correspondence between these two it is easily noticed that they did not address the issues written by the other but rather each only addressed his own topics. Coubertin regarded the Olympic Games primarily as a world festival with a success that should be reflected back upon the people who participate in them, and secondly as a possibility for France to assume an important international position in the world and to forget the defeat of 1870/71. For Gebhardt, the Games were an opportunity for reconciliation between France and Germany. That was why he kept making his recommendations for Berlin as the site for the congress and later as the site for the Games, the Emperor as patron of the planned congress in Berlin and also for the congress in Le Havre.

Gebhardt's departure did not remain unnoticed. The incident was first reported on September 17<sup>th</sup> by the French sport newspaper *Tous des Sports* which reported the incident in Faure's favour. It was reported that Faure acted patriotically. Coubertin immediately sent out an article that stated that Faure had never expressed himself in that way and that Gebhardt did not leave because of that.<sup>55</sup> Five years later when Gebhardt was protesting over the treatment of the German athletes at the Olympic Games in Paris 1900 he mentioned to Coubertin the disrespect that the now deceased Faure<sup>56</sup> had shown him. In his response Coubertin admitted Faure's rudeness but also added that Gebhardt's reaction had been too touchy.<sup>57</sup>

## 6. Further 'co-operation' with Coubertin

Gebhardt's further activities with the Olympic Movement are outlined below. They are influenced by his permanent, sometimes naive idealism and also by the problems and difficulties in working together with Coubertin.

In 1899 Coubertin travelled to Berlin to discuss Germany's participation in the Games in Paris. While he was there he felt that he was treated poorly and put the blame on Gebhardt.

Gebhardt was of the opinion that Coubertin had not done enough for the German athletes or for the Games themselves in Paris.

Coubertin disagreed with the fact that Gebhardt complained about the discrimination against the German athletes and the poor organisation at the Paris Games.

Coubertin nominated several Germans, who had little to do with the sport movement, as members of the IOC without informing Gebhardt.

At the 1901 session of the IOC in Paris, the German members successfully moved to hold the new Olympic Games in Athens as well as various major cities of the world.

Gebhardt always tried to get the 1908 Games to be held in Berlin but Coubertin wanted Rome to host them.

Gebhardt did not understand that Coubertin did not go to St. Louis in 1904, but was willing to officially represent the IOC there together with Kemény.

Gebhardt strongly supported the Greek plan to host the 1906 Games in Athens and aimed at sending a large German team. It is hardly believable that he supported Coubertin at the session in Athens because the IOC was considering asking Konstantin to become President.

54 The connection between individual IOC-members and participants and honorary guests of the Olympic Congresses 1894 and 1897 has only been partially investigated. c.f. Quanz, Dietrich, R. Formatting Power of the IOC-Founding: The Birth of a New Peace Movement. In: *Citius, Altius, Fortius* 3(1995)1, pp. 6-16.

55 Printed in: *Tous les Sports* (24.09.1897).

56 Gebhardt to Coubertin, 15th March 1902.

57 Coubertin to Gebhardt March/April 1902 (Dokumente, pp. 145-146).

Coubertin was against the Deutscher Reichsausschuß für Olympische Spiele mission to organise a German National Olympia.

Coubertin was presumably relieved when Graf von der Asseburg<sup>58</sup> became President of the Deutscher Reichsausschuß thereby taking control of the Olympic Movement. Gebhardt was relegated to second position, withdrew from the board of the Reichsausschuß and then left the IOC.

For Coubertin it was probably easier to work with the German aristocracy than with representatives of the middle class. Coubertin quite possibly had regrets as the new German members, who happened to be of high military as well as political rank, worked together with delegates from the IOC majority groups; Austria and Great Britain, to accomplish their goals. For example, at the congress in Paris in 1914 they joined forces to exclude Finland and Bohemia from the Olympic Movement, a loss for Coubertin.

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58 Asseburg, Graf Egbert Hoyer von der (1847-1909), president of the Deutscher Reichsausschuß für Olympische Spiele from 1905 to 1909, IOC-member from 1905 to 1909.

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## Résumé

### Willibald Gebhardt et la position allemande

Willibald Gebhardt (1861-1921) est considéré comme le fondateur du Mouvement olympique allemand. Malgré une forte opposition des Clubs de Gymnastique il réussit à constituer une très grande équipe (pour l'époque) devant participer aux premiers Jeux Olympiques modernes qui se tinrent à Athènes. Gebhardt dut aussi s'opposer aux reproches adressés par les Nationalistes allemands envers Coubertin et le CIO. Et tandis que Coubertin hésitait toujours, Bikelas, alors Président du CIO proposa à Gebhardt en janvier 1896 de devenir membre CIO.

À la suite des Jeux Olympiques d'Athènes, Gebhardt était parmi les membres du CIO qui étaient favorables à une organisation tous les deux ans des Jeux Olympiques à Athènes en alternance avec une autre capitale. Coubertin était opposé à de tels plans et en réponse organisa le Congrès Olympique au Havre afin de s'attirer les faveurs du Président de la République qui y résidait. Les objectifs de ce Congrès étant de proposer l'organisation des Jeux Olympiques dans le cadre de l'Exposition Universelle de Paris en 1900.

Gebhardt était très fâché mais se déplaça tout de même au Havre; il finit cependant par quitter le Congrès prématurément, d'autant plus en colère. Gebhardt était l'âme des équipes olympiques allemandes qu'il accompagna lui-même à Paris en 1900, St-Louis en 1904 et Athènes en 1906. Il quitta le CIO trois ans plus tard en 1909.