

FOOTBALL AS A FACTOR (AND A REFLECTION) OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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At first glance, it could seem slightly incongruous to study football in an international strategic context. Traditionally, there has been a mutual lack of interest shown between intellectual milieus and the sporting world, often taken to the point of scorn, apart from a few famous exceptions, made famous, of course, because they are exceptions.

The link between sport and international research runs deeper than just a researcher's own sporting interests, or a sportsman's inclination for reflection on world affairs. For a researcher today, sport, and football in particular, is not just a spare-time leisure activity, it is also a scientific object, with the potential to encroach upon his professional field of competence. Football is not, or is no longer, a simple team sport to be played in the context of one's private life. It is also a social, political, cultural, economic and diplomatic issue.

Nowadays, football is a valid component of international relations which can no longer be limited to pure diplomatic relations between states. There is no aspect of present-day diplomatic relations that cannot be applied to football as well.

FOOTBALL AND GEOPOLITICS

Bearing this in mind, we could talk about the “geopolitics of football”, and study how football has conquered the world. Starting in England, it was via the ports that the spherical planet began to emerge: at Le Havre (the first professional French club), Barcelona, Marseilles, Bilbao, Hamburg and Genoa, the inhabitants wanted to imitate the English merchants who filled in quiet periods by playing football. Then it was via the railroads, which in the mid-nineteenth century as the network gradually spread throughout England and gave rise to tournaments between public schools, that football continued its penetration into Europe and Latin America. This worldwide conquest was rounded off by the appearance of television. Could not a parallel be drawn between this manner of forming an empire (that is, peacefully and with the enthusiastic adhesion of the conquered) and military conquests?

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Football in the second half of the twentieth century has become a world ruled by one single superpower - Brazil - and, trailing far behind, a handful of lesser powers (Germany, Italy, England, Argentina, France, etc.) unable to rival the world leader, but fields ahead of the other states. The parallel that can be made with the current strategic situation is clear, with only the slight difference that never has a dominant power ever aroused such universal sympathy and admiration. Those who must take on this power directly, do so atone, contesting its benevolent supremacy for a full ninety minutes, and yet without considering it as the enemy. In 1986, when France eliminated Brazil in the quarter finals after the gruelling trial of penalty kicks, the French were, of course, ecstatic to be in the semi-finals, but nonetheless a little sad to have had to eliminate Brazil prematurely. Brazil is the country that everyone wants to meet in the finals, because it is the favourite of every football fan after his own team. The Brazilian superpower is a great exporter of its football players. In ten years, two thousand professional players have left the country to play not only in countries like Spain, France and England but also in Poland, Japan and China. In 1997 alone, five hundred Brazilian players joined the ranks of foreign championships. The sun never sets on the Brazilian football empire.

In this geopolitical football context, the famous maxim uttered by Clemenceau referring on a political level to Brazil, could be applied to the United States: "It is a country of the future, and will remain so for a very long time."

FOOTBALL AND GLOBALISATION

Football has to be the most universal phenomenon that exists today, much more universal than democracy or the market economy, which are now said to be border-free. Ever since Marshall McLuhan, we have known that the world is a global village. But its most truly global inhabitants are certainly Ronaldo, Zidane, Bergkamp, Sukoer, etc. While the UN has 186 members, the FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) can boast 198, including Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. These four are present in the UN as one United Kingdom, but exist independently in the world of football. At a time when some observers are questioning the future of the United Kingdom (will it remain united?), it could be asked whether their representation in the FIFA demonstrates originality on the part of the football creators, or foreshadows a future political representation. The other FIFA members that do not belong to the UN are Anguilla, the Dutch Antilles, Aruba, Bermuda, the Caiman Islands, the Virgin, Faeroe, and Cook Islands, Tahiti, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, Macedonia, Switzerland, Palestine, Taipei, Hong Kong and Guam. These are microstates or states which are not fully recognised, or even entities that have a flexible relationship with their mainland. On the other hand, certain UN members are not affiliated to the

FIFA. These are Comoros, Eritrea, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Monaco, Mongolia, Palau and Samoa.

Is new FIFA President, Sepp Blatter, as important a figure as Kofi Annan? It must be said that the FIFA has succeeded where the UN, the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and others have failed, that is, to bring the Peoples Republic of China and Taiwan together within the same international organisation.

Nonetheless, although the World Cup has been around since 1930, football has only recently become a truly worldwide phenomenon. Obviously globalisation applies to football, with all that this phenomenon represents: more exchanges and the elimination of borders and distances through the development of means of communication, whether this involves the moving of people or the transmission of information. Thirteen teams participated in the 1930 World Cup, and the four European teams endured a very long boat trip to get there. Information and results filtered back in dribs and drabs. Today, we can watch a match between Australia and Iran live.

Forty billion viewers (the total audience) followed the World Cup in 1998. By way of comparison, it has been estimated that twelve billion (again the total figure) watched the most recent Winter Olympics and twenty billion the Summer Olympics. The fact that matches can take place between countries such as South Africa and France, Jamaica and Japan, Saudi Arabia and Denmark, Cameroon and Austria, not to mention Iran and the United States, is no cause for astonishment, but rather appears to be part of the world order of all things “football”.

France now counts among its champions league not only players from countries such as Poland, Italy and former colonies, traditional sources of immigration but also countries like Korea. Japan, a country traditionally closed to immigrants, welcomes Brazilians, French, Africans in large numbers. The Bosman case, involving enforcement of the freedom of circulation in Europe for professional football players, had significant repercussions in Europe, but the composition of the different teams reveals the immensity of the migratory stream of football players moving around the world, even if it does flow principally from poor countries to rich ones, or from rich countries to ones that are even richer in terms of football. To generalise even further, the flow tends to be moving north. The south, which complains of being pillaged by the north, is also looted on the football field. First there was the problem of “brain drain”, are we now facing a problem of “football drain”?

The players who made it onto the World Cup stage are a perfect representation of the globalisation phenomenon. With thirty-two teams from all the continents, the 1998 World Cup was the first one to be truly representative of the whole planet. The World Cup is no longer the exclusive territory of Europe and Latin America, even if they still have the strongest teams. North America, and particularly Africa and Asia are taking up more and more room.

Just as globalisation brings the question of national identities to the forefront, so teams such as Atlético de Bilbao recruit strictly Basque players, shunning the cosmopolitan mix of Real de Madrid or FC Barcelona. This closing of the ranks is, nonetheless, rare. Hence, in France, Bastia is still the star of Corsican football, but there are barely any other Corsicans left in the team.

CROSS-BORDER PLAYERS

Turning to the players in international relations, another comparison can be drawn between football and the study of the world today. Specialists in political science have observed that the states have lost the monopoly they used to enjoy, and that other players have entered the international arena as competitors. This includes international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), multinational companies and even mafia organisations.

We have already mentioned the FIFA (which, in legal terms, is an NGO), and let's not talk about the mafia, despite the fact that it plays a role in Colombian and Russian football. Moving on, we can also observe the increasing weight carried by national and multinational firms. The role of companies in sponsorship is not new; all we have to do is think of the influence of Peugeot for Sochaux, Fiat for Juventus or Philips for PSV Eindhoven. Today, however, we have moved onto a completely different scale. In Japan for example, the clubs that participate in the championship do not represent different towns, but different companies.

Nike has signed a long-term contract with Brazil provoking comments from some that the most popular national team had been bought by a multinational. In December 1996, a ten-year agreement worth \$400 million was signed. The contract consists of two parts. The first, worth \$220 million, involves the supply of sports equipment to all Brazil's national teams. The second part, which demonstrates Nike's willingness to establish long-lasting ties with Brazil, involves setting aside \$180 million for various projects such as the construction of new headquarters for the Brazilian Football Federation in Rio and a football museum, the extension of training centres in deprived regions, the development of tournaments in the shanty-towns of large cities, etc. Can this agreement affect the composition of the team? Would a player belonging to a club associated with a Nike competitor have a chance of being selected for Brazil's national team? It would appear that one of the reasons why Anderson left the French team of Monaco (equipped by Adidas) to play for Barcelona (Nike), was so that he could then be selected for the Brazilian team, which in the end he was not. The former football star Eric Cantona attributed the failure of French player Ibrahim Ba to be

selected for the French national team to the fact that he is under contract with Nike, whereas Adidas is the official sponsor of the French team.²

FOOTBALL AND THE NATION

We know that Portugal has always feared being absorbed by Spain, and that the two countries have always jealously guarded their different national identities. However, concerned that they would not be playing at a high enough level to properly prepare them for European tournaments, the major and most representative Portuguese clubs such as Porto, Benfica and Sporting of Lisbon have asked to join the Spanish LIGA. If this occurs, Spain would obtain, without fighting and at the express request of the Portuguese, something that it had not managed to achieve for centuries, that is, Portugal's integration into its sphere of influence.

Naturally, recent geopolitical events have had repercussions on the way football is organised. But football has in part reacted to these events and its role has not just been a passive one.

The internal division of European multinational empires into several states has had the direct effect of multiplying the number of national teams in Europe. The Soviet, Yugoslav and Czechoslovakian teams no longer exist and have given rise to fifteen, five and two national teams respectively. It is not by chance that among the very first steps taken by the new independent states was the request for FIFA membership, as if that were as natural and necessary as UN membership, as if a state were no longer defined by the three conventional elements alone (territory, population and government), but also by a fourth element: its national football team. It was as if national independence were characterised by the capacity to defend one's borders, mint coins and compete in international football tournaments.

But national teams have not been a mere result of the creation of new states, they have often helped forge the nation. Thus, for young states where national feeling is fragile or under threat, it is certain that the consolidation of national sentiment has been helped more than one might think by football, which has served more than once to unite a traumatised community. It was Croatian President Tudjman himself who asked that Zagreb's club, Dynamo, abandon its historic name to take that of "Croatia", declaring that the name "Croatia" would help confirm the existence of Croatia, whereas the Western world would have interpreted the name Dynamo as meaning "we are not yet free of the Bolshevik and Balkan heritage". The trainer Blazevic explains that he was the one who awakened Croatian

² *Journal du Dimanche*, 24 May 1998.

nationalism when the club he was running, Dynamo of Zagreb, won the 1982 Yugoslav championship at the expense of the Red Star of Belgrade³, a Serbian club.

Football can precede diplomatic recognition, such as the National Liberation Front team made up of Algerian players who had become famous in France, which set off to Africa and Asia on a grand world tour in 1958.

As seen, football holds an eminent position in confirming the existence of newly independent countries. In 1995, Pavel Katchatrian, Secretary General of the Armenian football federation, declared to the *International Herald Tribune* that: "Alter everything that has happened, the loss of so many houses and so many lives, the men in the changing rooms have the chance to be a country." And the journalist, referring to the two draws between the Armenian team and Northern Ireland and then Portugal, wrote: "Points are golden for emerging countries. They symbolise the nation, they buy recognition. They are a source of great pride."⁴

In 1995 when a Palestinian team came up against the French Variety Football Club with Platini, in Palestinian eyes it represented another step along the very long road leading them first towards recognition and then on towards independence.

But the phenomenon does not just apply to emerging states. Journalists of the highly-renowned London magazine, *The Economist*, almost choked when they discovered that the reason most often given by young British people for being proud to be British was national football talent and not the memory of a great empire or other motives more closely associated with the traditional sense of power.⁵

FOOTBALL BETWEEN WARS, SANCTIONS AND RECONCILIATION

Wars today are no longer between states. The thirty or so conflicts that are tearing up the world today are all confined within state borders. We have moved from wars between states to wars within states. So is football the last place for direct confrontation between rival countries?⁶ Before the semi-final of the 1996 European Championship between England and Germany, *The Times* of London paraphrased Clausewitz's maxim, according to which war is the continuation of politics by other means, stating that: "football, [is] the continuation of war by other means".⁷ Did this match merely signify revenge for the 1966 World Cup final between these two countries with its disputed result, or was it revenge for the Second World War?

³ *L'Equipe*, 5 July 1998.

⁴ *IHT*, 17 November 1995.

⁵ "Imperial Amnesia", *The Economist*, 28 March 1998.

⁶ "Le sport c'est la guerre" was the controversial title of the article published in France by the *Monde Diplomatique*, *Manière de voir*, May 1996

⁷ *The Times*, 21 June 1996.

Since war between states is banned, will it not move to the stadiums? Has sport become a substitute for nationalist movements? Will it re-ignite the embers of national passion? Is it now a war unto itself? Will it enable us to avoid conflicts by venting our antagonism on the field? Even if there are clashes between teams and/or between supporters, is that not better, all things considered, than military confrontation - a World Cup rather than a world war?

As Eric Dunning writes: "In the context of stable nation-states, of societies where the state holds the monopoly on the use of physical force, sport represents the only opportunity for vast, complex and impersonal entities, such as towns, to unite. In the same way, on an international level, sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup constitute, in a visible and regular manner, the only time when nation states can rally in times of peace. Sport has expanded on an international scale, balancing on the development of international interdependence and on the existence, apart from notorious exceptions, of world peace (albeit fragile and unstable). Sporting events such as the Olympic Games enable the representatives of different nations to confront one another without killing each other, although the move from "pretend" combat to "real" combat depends, among other things, on the pre-existent level of tension between the states".⁸

It would be impossible not to mention at this point the famous "football war" of 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras which took place following a qualifying match between CONCACAF countries (North America, Central America and the Caribbean countries) for the 1970 World Cup (held in Mexico). On 8 June 1969, Honduras beat El Salvador 1-0, thanks to a goal scored at the last minute. The El Salvadorians were not at their best, thanks to the efficiency of the Honduran supporters who had thrown the principle of fair play out the window and organised a wild party the night before around the El Salvadorians' hotel to prevent them from sleeping. The return match took place in a deleterious atmosphere. The Honduran team had to be driven to the stadium in an armoured vehicle, the Honduran flag had been torn and the team lost 3-0. Two Honduran supporters were killed. As a consequence, the border between the two countries was closed and armed militia expropriated El Salvadorian farmers living in Honduras. El Salvador broke off diplomatic relations with Tegucigalpa. On 29 June, El Salvador won the deciding match in Mexico 3-2. The Honduran militia again took their revenge on El Salvadorian expatriates. As a result, on 14 July 1969, the El Salvadorian army attacked Honduras, sparking a war that lasted four days before the OAS (Organisation of American States) obtained a cease-fire and Salvadorian troops were withdrawn.

⁸ E. Dunning, "La Dynamique du sport moderne", in N. Elias and E. Dunning, *Sport et Civilisation* (Paris : Fayard, 1994), p. 307.

For some, the situation was clear: two countries, whose inhabitants were obviously as mentally under-developed as their economies, went to war over a stupid football game. But to believe that this football match, albeit the qualifying match for the World Cup that was going to take place in neighbouring Mexico, was "responsible" for the war is as accurate as saying that the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914 was the cause of the First World War. In both cases this would be to mix up the triggering event with the true, historical, social and political causes.

Honduras, with a population density of eighteen inhabitants per square kilometre has always taken the spillover from over-populated El Salvador. 300 000 El Salvadorians were living, most of them illegally, in the Honduran territory bordering El Salvador. This situation gave rise to extreme tension. Furthermore, entering into conflict with El Salvador enabled the Honduran government to unite the people and crush the opposition which was calling for agrarian reform.

Similarly, in Yugoslavia, the first cracks in the federation could be seen on 13 March 1990 during a match between Dynamo of Zagreb and Red Star of Belgrade. Things became very heated between supporters of the two clubs, the former being Croatian and the latter Serbian. More than sixty people were seriously injured. Perhaps the unified state itself died symbolically on 26 September 1990 at Split, during the match between Hadjuk of Split and Partizan of Belgrade, when the Hadjuk supporters streamed onto the field and burned the Yugoslav flag. "The first event showed that Serbian and Croatian fans could no longer be in the same stadium together, the second showed that the Yugoslav state had lost all authority over a considerable part of its territory".⁹ Zeljko Raznatovic, better known as Arkan, who later became a Serbian war criminal but first achieved fame as the leading fan of Belgrade's Red Stars, declared a few years later: "on the 13th, there was a match and immediately afterwards we got organised. That match in Zagreb made me understand that there would be a war, I could see it all and I knew that the Ustashi (Croatian fascists in the Second World War) knife would once again cut the throats of Serbian women and children."¹⁰

Warring Croatia exempted the most gifted football players from taking up arms; they were better able to serve the nation with a ball at their feet than a gun in their hands.

Football was also used to punish Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav team was banned from the 1992 European Championship, Belgrade being held responsible for the war. For the international community which imposed this sanction, it was a way of taking a symbolic and powerful stand against Belgrade without running military risks. The decision was taken very hard by the Serbs and, more than any other action, marked their exclusion from the international community.¹¹

⁹ O. Kebo, Erasmus Zagreb, quoted in *Courrier International*, no.233, 20 April 1995.

¹⁰ Srpsko Jedinstvo (Serbian Unit), *Serbian Unit Party Journal*, no. 1, November 1994.

¹¹ When in December 1996. Yugoslavia was again permitted to participate in tournaments and go to Brazil to play its first football match and its trainer, Miljanic, was asked by the newspaper *L'Equipe* "what does this match mean for Yugoslav

But football can also serve the peace process. On 20 March 1994, when the role of the UNPROFOR was disputed by the Bosnian community, its Commander-in-Chief, British General Michael Rose, organised a match under heavy surveillance between the Sarajevo club and UNPROFOR. The objective was to show that peace once again reigned in Sarajevo because they could play football. But the match was protected by four American F16s, three British helicopters, eight French transport aircraft and several hundred soldiers to dissuade the Serbian batteries from bombarding the stadium.

History tends to peter out more than to repeat itself, and in 1998 Sweden proposed banning Yugoslavia from the World Cup if President Milosevic did not begin negotiations with the Albanians of Kosovo, where five people had just been killed by police officers. It should be noted that nobody has ever proposed banning Russia from a tournament, despite the 60,000 to 100,000 deaths at the hands of its army in Chechnya.

And thanks to its symbolic strength, football can contribute to reconciliation. The Liberian, George Weah, star of Paris Saint Germain and then Milan AC, played an important part in making the national team a united element in a country torn apart by civil war. His message of peace was considerably facilitated by his aura.

In March 1998, Joao Havelange, then president of the FIFA, announced a pet project to the press: to organise a match between the national teams of Palestine and Israel. "If I do not succeed in setting up this match, I will be deeply sorry, because football could help two peoples that have been at odds for too long, to reach an understanding. Where politics, diplomacy and the business world have failed, I believe that football can succeed."¹²

The World Cup match between Iran and the United States on 27 June could become the first milestone along the road to reconciliation between the two countries.

MIRRORING TODAY'S WORLD

So football is a reflection. We must not be deluded by its highly spectacular nature. A football match will not spark conflict between two countries that enjoy good relations, nor will it bring peace to states that wish to separate. Football did not cause the war between El Salvador and Honduras, or the one in Yugoslavia, just as it alone will not bring peace to Liberia or reconstruct diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran. But it can forewarn of a situation which is deteriorating or bring tidings of one that is improving. It provides a way for players on the inter-

football?", he declared, "It carries great political significance for our country and it represents a great sigh of relief for our football playing. We are back and we must now forget the part. We have been victims of political terrorism against the players, football and the game. We were hostages, now that is over. We feel like we have been saved".

¹² *Journal du Dimanche*, 15 March 1998.

national stage to split apart or draw closer together. So its importance must not be over- or underestimated.

In 1954, Western Germany became a NATO member. This added the final touch to German reintegration in the Western family after the end of World War II. The 1954 World Cup victory was perceived in Germany as an important element in confirming their status. The Germans said at the time: "We have become somebody again." Winning the World Cup erased the last traces of losing the world war.

In the same way, the 1974 World Cup victory of the German Democratic Republic over the Federal Republic of Germany, which took place in West Germany, was seen as a victory of socialism over capitalism but also of the brave and valiant eastern team over the opulent and cocky western team.

There has often been a very definite diplomatic background to the World Cup. The first (1930) took place in Uruguay, which was celebrating the centenary of its independence. Indeed, the stadium where the final took place was called the Stadium of Independence, a loaded signal in the direction of neighbour and rival Argentina, Montevideo having gained independence at the expense of Buenos Aires. In 1934, the World Cup took place in Italy, and gave rise to a wave of fascist propaganda. Mussolini presented the Italian victory (which was renewed four years later in France) as the victory of fascism over other ideologies. And it strongly inspired Hitler who used the 1936 Berlin Olympics in the same way.

In 1978, the Argentinean junta wanted to make the World Cup (Buenos Aires had been chosen to host it before the brutal dictatorship came to power) the display case of its regime. Those who called for a boycott of this World Cup were not heeded. The football players who had fought hard to qualify were reticent about withdrawing from the final phase and emphasised the fact that it was not about politics. Indeed, the opponents of the junta, including the main guerrilla group, Los Monteneros, called for foreigners to come to Argentina to denounce the dictatorship. In the end, the Argentinean military did not achieve their goal. Yes, the World Cup took place and nobody boycotted it, Argentina even won, but for several months beforehand and for the duration, the international press was full of stories of torture and murder at the hands of the junta.

Globalisation also means outsiders can look in and compare, and they can criticise. What was possible in 1934 was no longer permissible in 1978 and would be even less so today. Thus Nigeria was refused the right to host the junior World Cup because of the dictatorial nature of its regime.

However, during the 1998 World Cup, Croatia was able, thanks to its football team, to make us forget its role in the war in former Yugoslavia and the rather undemocratic nature of its regime. Thanks to football, it played the role of a small country bravely defying big countries, of a country barely on its feet after a difficult birth from war and already at the front of the world stage.

Deciding where the 2002 World Cup would take place gave rise to an intense diplomatic struggle. For the first time, it will not be organised in America or Europe but in Asia as a

symbol of its own globalisation. Two countries fought to have the honour Japan and South Korea. The Empire of the Rising Sun is a relatively new country in football terms, but it is developing fast and rich Japan is a promising market. South Korea has a longer history of football, its national team having participated five times in the final phase of the World Cup (Switzerland in 1954, Mexico in 1986, Italy in 1990, the United States in 1994 and France in 1998) to which can be added the participation of North Korea in 1966. For Japan, hosting the World Cup would be a way of confirming its dominant position in the region. For South Korea, it would be a way of disputing this pre-eminence and enabling it to renew contact with North Korea from which it has been separated since the end of the Second World War, even though the two formed a single nation for 1500 years.

In the end, the FIFA decided that the two hopefuls would share the task of organising the World Cup. For Michel Platini, "it is, in fact, a political decision, which is not good for football."¹³ It was indeed a political decision aimed at bringing closer together the traditional enemies, Korea and Japan, since neither firmly established democracy nor economic success have succeeded in healing the wounds of history.

"If Joao Havelange [president of FIFA] has his sights set on the Nobel peace prize, he needs to let Korea host the World Cup. The World Cup would contribute to peace. Our aim in applying relates not only to sport or economics, but is also driven by a goal of peace", explained Chung Mong-Joo, President of the Korean Football Federation, but also vice president of the FIFA.¹⁴ Furthermore, in 1998, Joao Havelange was going to propose to the North Korean president that a unified Korean team be formed for the World Cup in 2002.

Besides the unavoidably megalomaniac nature of the decision made by the person who has lead the FIFA since 1974, we must be reasonable. If the two Koreas have decided to draw closer together politically, football could be one of the ways for them to carry this out. The love affair with the round ball, strong as it may be, is not enough to reunify Korea, any more than it can resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The FIFA on its own cannot succeed where the UN, the United States, Russia, Europe, the Pope and the Arab world have failed. But it could help decisions made in other spheres to be fulfilled by providing a favourable environment. Football is a symbolic (and therefore important) means which could influence international progress. It will not be the deciding factor, but will nonetheless not be without importance.

From 11 to 16 March 1997, when Jacques Chirac visited the four countries of the South American common market, MERCOSUR (Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina), and Bolivia to mark France's return to the South American continent and to campaign for closer ties between Europe and Latin America, shunning the traditional hegemony of the United

¹³ *Libération*, 3 June 1996.

¹⁴ *France football*, June 1996.

States, he took the precaution of inviting Michel Platini along with him. The French president used football to improve France's image, knowing how important the sport is in that region. He saw it as something that could help draw France and Latin America closer together. To prove it, he personally represented Bolivia before the FIFA, as it was under threat of exclusion from the elimination matches for the 1998 World Cup because it is at too high an altitude. Chirac was given a hero's welcome by the people of La Paz, where demonstrations in favour of France took place over several months.

The criteria for international power are currently undergoing profound changes. Without going into the typology of power, it can briefly be said that the conventional criteria (military and demographic territory and technological prowess) are moving aside to make room for new criteria: the capacity to influence, image, etc. Conventional "hard power" has now been joined by "soft power". Football, the incarnation of a state, the symbolic image of a nation - almost universally appreciated - makes a considerable contribution to the image and the popularity of a country, in the same way as cultural factors do.

In the darkest hours of Brazil's dictatorship, this country was able to maintain a likeable image thanks, in particular, to its football, a symbol of the generosity and skill of its people. It was also the symbol of the Brazilian melting pot. During the 1974 World Cup, a German journalist discerned "all the different shades that you get by adding drops of milk into a cup of black coffee" in the faces of the Brazilian players, thus acknowledging both the mixture and lack of discrimination in Brazilian society. The composition of the French team reflects a concept of a nation based on blood rights and the possibility of integration. German football serves as a showcase for those upright qualities of application and organisation. English football embodies the drive, determination and physical courage of the British. Italian football reflects the flamboyancy of the Italian spirit.

Of course football does not rule the world. But it is nonetheless an important element in a country's influence and prestige. It can play a supporting role in diplomacy and can help confirm national identity. Globalisation and changes in the criteria for power have bestowed an increasingly important role in the international arena on this leading sport.

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