

Åland: Sport Organisations and Sport Events

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A substantial part of the identity of countries, nations and peoples is built on participation in sports.¹ Athletes and sports teams are identified as coming from or representing a country in international competitions, regional and world championships and the Olympics. Åland is not a sovereign state but, based on a special international agreement, it is a country recognised in international law as a subject and not merely as an integrated part of Finland like any other Finnish region.

In this paper, the Faroe Islands and a number of other countries and territories will be examined with the purpose of describing the membership opportunities of non-sovereign entities in international sport organisations and events. How and where the Faroe Islands have obtained international sport membership will be identified, plus some reflections on where this has not been achieved. The paper can also be seen as providing an overview of the possibilities that Åland has for achieving membership in international sport so that Åland athletes and teams may compete under their own flag if and when they so desire.

1 Functional Sovereignty Approach

In the post-Westphalian world of globalism it is common to work with a concept of functional sovereignty, meaning that countries with formal power over a specific policy area are admitted to membership in inter-governmental organisations which are involved in the same field of activity. This is the case with e.g. the Faroese membership of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Among other inter-governmental organisations which use this approach are the World

1 For an earlier article on a similar topic, see Bogi Eliassen, “Non-Sovereign Polities and Their Access to the International Community” in Sjúrdur Skaale (editor), *The Right to National Self-Determination. The Faroe Islands and Greenland*, Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2004, pp. 179–203.

Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Also the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) could be mentioned as international organisations where the functional approach is employed.

In international relations it is generally understood that non-sovereign but overseas polities will not disrupt territorial integrity by gaining membership in sport organisations in their own right. The support of the so-called metropolitan state is required, which for the Faroe Islands means the agreement of Denmark. When the polity has metropolitan acceptance to membership, most organisations will accept the application.

2 What Is a Country?

In the context of sport organisations, and seen from a Faroese point of view, there has been an ongoing discussion about what is a territory and what is a country. The general understanding of territory is a colony, as can be seen in the process of decolonisation at the United Nations, with its lists of non-self-governing and trust territories. The Faroe Islands have never been on such a list because they have always been considered a country in the Danish Commonwealth (rigsfællesskabet). The Faroes have furthermore a very long parliamentary tradition, which, it is claimed, is the oldest in the world.

Historically, the Faroe Islands have never been fully integrated into Denmark but remained a people and a proper country in the Danish Commonwealth. This is underscored in the most important bilateral treaties, where it is stated that the Faroes and Denmark are equal parties in this commonwealth.² Access to international cooperation and membership of inter-governmental organisations underscore that the Faroe Islands are recognised as a country in

2 The Foreign Policy Act of the Faroe Islands, no. 80 of 14 May 2005, on the Conclusion of Agreements under International Law by the Government of the Faroes. The Act is based upon a Treaty between the Government of the Faroes and the Government of Denmark as equivalent Parties; for full text see "<https://www.government.fo/en/foreign-relations/constitutional-status/the-foreign-policy-act>". See also Act no. 79 of 12 May 2005 on the Assumption of Matters and Fields of Responsibility by the Faroese Authorities. It is based upon a Treaty between the Government of the Faroes and the Government of Denmark as equivalent Parties; for full text see "<https://www.government.fo/en/foreign-relations/act-on-assumption-of-fields-of-responsibility>". All websites referred to in this article were visited on 20 December 2023.

international law and by international governmental bodies. In international law the Faroe Islands are thus a subject of international law.³

3 Compared to the Cook Islands

Free Association is a model developed in the UN decolonisation process as one of the results that can flow from a colony's exercising of the right of self-determination. It was created as a middle course between secession and integration. Several former island colonies, like Micronesia and the Cook Islands, are in free association with the former colonial powers – in the two instances mentioned with the United States and New Zealand, respectively.⁴

Free association provides for, or can lead to, formal sovereignty within the UN decolonisation framework. It has been argued that the Faroe Islands actually enjoy free association with Denmark. By contrast, while geographically separate and to a large degree self-governing, the Åland Islands have so far been seen as an autonomous territory. With the achievement of sovereignty, the right to membership in international or regional sport bodies is likely to follow when other practical requirements have been fulfilled.

4 Differing Requirements

There is no common approach to the membership policies of international sport federations regarding non-sovereign polities. The break-down of the Soviet Union shocked the system established after World War II. The aftermath witnessed several secessions, civil wars and secessionist movements, many of which approached inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to obtain membership as a part of their struggle for the restoration of old states or the creation of new ones. This was especially the case for former Soviet republics and Eastern European countries.

Already prior to the breakdown of the Soviet Union, most sport federations were open to polities which met an administrative standard, generally understood to mean an approved local or national body organising competitions

3 Gudmundur Alfredsson, "The Faroese People as a Subject of Public International Law" in *Føroyskt Lógar Rit – Faroese Law Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 2001, pp. 45–57.

4 Gudmundur Alfredsson, *A Step in the Decolonisation Process: Free Association*, Nasiffik Working Paper No. 1, Nasiffik – Centre for Foreign and Security Policy at Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland) and the Danish Institute of International Studies (DIIS), Nuuk, May 2023, 6 pages; available on line at "<https://www.diis.dk/en/research/a-step-in-the-decolonisation-process-free-association>".

according to the accepted rules of regional and/or global sport organisations in the respective field. Some federations, like those for volleyball, handball and table tennis, have kept that practice, while others, like the World Athletics (formerly known as the International Amateur Athletic Federation or IAAF), are only open to countries with a recognised international profile. Others, like basketball, require IOC (Olympic) membership.

5 Comparing Åland with the Faroe Islands and Cook Islands

The comparison between the Faroe Islands, Cook Islands and Åland in the context of international sports memberships, set forth in the following table, helps to illustrate what is possible. Åland has participated in the international Island Games since 1985. It is the only international competition that Åland currently participates in. Participation in the International Islands Games does not require sovereignty or statehood.⁵ The differences between Åland and the Faroe Islands are also interesting, even striking, as both are self-governing Nordic polities. To broaden the comparison, the following table also shows memberships acquired by the Cook Islands.

Faroe Islands	Cook Islands	Åland
NatWest Islands Games. Will be hosted by the Faroes in 2027.		NatWest Island Games
ENGSO (European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation)		
IBF (International Badminton Federation)	IBF	
ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation)	ITTF	
EVBU (European Volleyball Confederation)	IVBF	
FIFA (World Football Association)	FIFA	
IHF (International Handball Federation)	IHF	
IPC (International Paralympic Committee)		
IJF (International Judo Federation)	IJF	

⁵ For information about the International Island Games Association (IIGA), see their website at "<https://www.iiga.org/>".

(cont.)

Faroe Islands	Cook Islands	Åland
FINA (Fédération Internationale de Natation)	FINA	
FITA (Fédération Internationale de Tir à l'Arc)		
UEC (European Cycling Union)		
International Triathlon	International Triathlon	
International Shooting Sports Federations		
	International Golf Federation	
	World Sailing Organization	
	International Tennis Federation	

The Faroe Islands have had a long-standing application for membership in the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Even given that the Faroes were eligible for IOC membership prior to the change of rules in 1992 and had submitted the application before that change, the Faroes have not been successful in gaining admission. A resulting complication is that, for example, Faroese swimmers, who can participate in international competitions representing the Faroe Islands, need to be part of the Danish team if they want to participate in the Olympic Games.

While it will be difficult to obtain a full membership of IAAF (World Athletics), it should be possible for the Faroe Islands to obtain membership of Nordic Athletics, as it is up to the member countries to decide. While the Faroe Islands have pushed for Nordic Athletics membership for many years, it has yet to be realised. Nordic Athletics does not have a formalised organisation but rather a Nordic Handbook entitled 'Rules and Regulations covering the Meetings and Competitions between the Nordic Athletic Federations', which provides the framework for collaboration.⁶ It is quite clear that the will of the

⁶ The Rules and Regulations covering the Meetings and Competitions between the Nordic Athletic Federations are available at "<https://fri.is/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Nordic-Handbook-updated-June-2021.pdf>".

five Nordic states is the decisive factor whether the Faroe Islands, Åland and Greenland can participate under their own flags in Nordic championships.

6 Concluding Remarks

The Faroe Islands have been an independent country for at least 1200 years and for the last 1000 years as an independent or separate country, first within the Kingdom of Norway and later as part of the Commonwealth of Denmark.

The Faroes have the support of the so-called metropolitan state, Denmark, both when it comes to membership of international sports federations as well as in many inter-governmental organisations. Thus the membership of the Faroe Islands in any particular organisation would not constitute a precedent for secessionist regions as the Faroes already constitute a country in their own right, have metropolitan state acceptance, are located overseas, and will not disrupt the territorial integrity of the state.

When inter-governmental organisations allow certain countries membership, it should be natural for international sport organisations to follow the same approach, as many of them already do. In order to gain membership of additional organisations, such as IAAF, Åland and the Faroe Islands would have to enjoy the support of Finland and Denmark, respectively, and underlining that Åland and the Faroe Islands are countries and not territories. As concerns participation in Nordic Athletics cooperation, the possibility for the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland rests on the will of the current participating countries, that is Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

When we look at other continents in the world the openness of non-sovereign polities for membership in sport organisations and events is wider than is generally the case in Europe. The criteria for membership are also different between sports associations, be they regional or global and depending on the type of sport.

If a wish arises from Åland to participate as a country in international sports, this article and the accompanying annexes show some clear precedents. Although the membership window in Europe is narrower than in the rest of the world, there are openings and they could be actively pursued. One place to start could be in the specific sports in which Åland participates as part of the International Island Games.

The following annexes contain lists of non-sovereign countries which are members of a series of sport organisations. The lists are indicative rather than exhaustive.

Annexes

1

IAAF – world athletics, with 213 member countries and territories at 2010:⁷

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Montserrat – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

Turks & Caicos Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

US Virgin Islands – organised, unincorporated United States territory

Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macao – special administrative region in China

2

European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO):⁸

Faroe Islands FAROESE CONFEDERATION OF SPORTS AND OLYMPIC COMMITTEE – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Greenland SPORTS CONFEDERATION OF GREENLAND – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

3

IBF (International Badminton Federation):⁹

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Macau – special administrative region in China

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Norfolk Island – external territory of Australia

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

Curaçao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

⁷ See "<https://worldathletics.org/about-iaaf/structure/member-federations/europe/>".

⁸ See "<https://engso.eu/our-network/members/>".

⁹ See "<https://corporate.bwfbadminton.com/about/membership/>".

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

Saint Helena – British Overseas Territory

Falkland Islands – British Overseas Territory

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

French Polynesia – overseas collectivity and an overseas country of the French Republic

Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Greenland – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

4

EBF (European Badminton Federation):¹⁰

Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Greenland – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

5

ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation):¹¹

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Bonaire – special municipality of the Netherlands

Cayman Islands – British Overseas Territory

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand.

Curacao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Falkland Islands – British Overseas Territory

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Micronesia – UN member State in free association with the USA

Guernsey – self-governing British Crown dependency

Greenland – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Isle of Man – self-governing British Crown dependency

10 See “<http://badmintoneurope.com/CMS/?cmsid=239&pageid=4651>”.

11 See “<https://directory.ittf.com/#/home>”.

US Virgin Islands – organised, unincorporated United States territory
 British Virgin Islands – British territory
 Jersey – self-governing British Crown dependency
 Saint Maarten – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
 Marshall Islands – UN member State in free association with the US
 Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States
 Norfolk Island – external territory of Australia
 New Caledonia – overseas territory incorporated by France
 Niue – self-governing island country in free association with New Zealand
 Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth
 Tokelau – dependent territory of New Zealand
 Wallis and Futuna – French overseas territory

6

IVBF (International Volleyball Federation) and EVBU (European Volleyball Confederation):¹²
 Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark
 Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 Greenland – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

7

Asian Volleyball Confederation:¹³
 American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States
 Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand.
 Guam – territory of the United States
 Marshall Islands – UN member State in free association with the United States
 Niue – self-governing island country in free association with New Zealand
 Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States
 Macao – special administrative region in China
 Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

12 See “<https://www.fivb.com/en/thefivb/directory/europeanvolleyballconfederation>” and “<https://www.cev.eu/team/13000-faroe-islands>”.

13 See “<https://www.fivb.com/en/thefivb/directory/asianvolleyballconfederation>”.

8

The North, Central America and Caribbean Volleyball Confederation (Norceca):¹⁴

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

Netherlands Antilles – Saba, Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao,
all Dutch territories

Montserrat – British Overseas Territory

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a
commonwealth

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

British Virgin Islands – British territory

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

9

Fifa (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and UEFA (Union of European
Football Associations):¹⁵

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory

Cayman islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

Curaçao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macau – special administrative region in China

Montserrat – British Overseas Territory

New Caledonia – overseas collective owned by France

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States

Turks and Caicos Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

14 See “<http://www.norceca.net/41%20Affiliated%20Federations/Federation%20Affiliated.htm>” and “<https://www.fivb.com/en/the-fivb/directory/norcecavolleyballconfederation>”.

15 See “<https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/associations>”.

10

IHF (International Handball Federation) and AHF (Asian Handball Federation):¹⁶

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macao – special administrative region in China

11

The European Handball Federation (EHF):¹⁷

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

12

North America and the Caribbean Handball Confederation (NACHC):

British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Greenland – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Guadeloupe – overseas department and region of France

Martinique – overseas department and region of France

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a
commonwealth

13

Oceania Continent Handball Federation (OCHF):

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the
United States

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

Guam – territory of the United States

Marshall Islands – in free association with the United States

New Caledonia – overseas territory of France

14

IPC (International Paralympic Committee):¹⁸

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

16 See “<https://www.ihf.info/federations>” and “<https://www.ihf.info/federations>”.

17 See “<https://www.ihf.info/federations>”.

18 See “<https://www.paralympic.org/teams-npc>”.

Macao – special administrative region in China

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

15

IJF (International Judo Federation):¹⁹

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Aruba (Suspended) – Dutch commonwealth

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

Curacao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

French Polynesia – overseas collectivity and an overseas country of the French Republic

Guadeloupe – overseas department and region of France

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macau – special administrative region in China

New Caledonia – overseas territory of France

Niue – self-governing island country in free association with New Zealand

Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

Réunion – overseas department and region of France

Saint Maarten – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

16

FINA (Fédération Internationale de Natation):²⁰

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

Aruba – Dutch Commonwealth

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Curacao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

¹⁹ See “<https://www.ijf.org/countries>”.

²⁰ See “<https://www.worldaquatics.com/members/national-federations?region=all&country=>”.

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory
 British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory
 Saint Maarten – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
 Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a
 commonwealth
 Turks and Caicos islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 Hong Kong – special administrative region in China
 Macau – special administrative region in China
 Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark
 Gibraltar – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States
 Cook islands – free association with New Zealand
 Guam – territory of the United States
 Marshall Islands – in free association with the United States
 Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the
 United States

17

FITA (Fédération Internationale de Tir à l'Arc):²¹
 Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory
 Curacao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
 Falkland Islands – British Overseas Territory
 Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark
 Hong Kong – special administrative region in China
 Macau – special administrative region in China
 Niue – self-governing island country in free association with New Zealand
 Norfolk Islands – external territory of Australia
 Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a
 commonwealth.
 US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

18

European Cycling Union (UEC):²²
 Faroe Islands, UEC Associate Member (article 6) – autonomous territory of the
 Kingdom of Denmark

21 See “<https://www.worldarchery.sport/members>”.

22 See “<https://www.uec.ch/en/national-federations>”.

19

International Golf Federation:²³

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

Turks and Caicos – self-governing British Overseas Territory

US Virgin Islands – organised, unincorporated United States territory

20

World Sailing Organisation:²⁴

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth

Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory

British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory

Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory

Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand.

French Polynesia – an overseas collectivity of France

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macau – special administrative region in China

Montserrat – British Overseas Territory

Netherland Antilles (Curacao And St Maarten) – Dutch territories

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth

Turks and Caicos – self-governing British Overseas Territory

US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

21

International Tennis Federation:²⁵

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States

Anguilla – British Overseas Territory

23 See “<https://www.igfgolf.org/about-igf/nationalmembers/>”.

24 See “<https://www.sailing.org/inside-world-sailing/organisation/governance/world-sailing-membership/>”.

25 See “<https://www.itftennis.com/en/about-us/organisation/member-associations/>”.

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth
 Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory
 Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand
 Curacao – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
 Guam – territory of the United States
 Hong Kong – special administrative region in China
 Macau – special administrative region in China
 Marshall Islands – in free association with the United States
 Norfolk Islands – external territory of Australia
 Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States
 Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth
 Dutch Antilles (St. Maarten) – constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
 Turks and Caicos – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 US Virgin Islands – unincorporated United States territory

22

International shooting Sports Federations:²⁶

Aruba – Dutch commonwealth
 Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark
 Guam – territory of the United States
 Hong Kong – special administrative region in China
 Macau – special administrative region in China

23

International Triathlon:²⁷

American Samoa – unincorporated territory of the United States
 Aruba – Dutch commonwealth
 Bermuda – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 British Virgin Islands – British Overseas Territory
 Cayman Islands – self-governing British Overseas Territory
 Cook Islands – free association with New Zealand

²⁶ See “https://www.issf-sports.org/theissf/organisation/member_federations.ashx”.

²⁷ See “<https://triathlon.org/federations>”.

Faroe Islands – autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark

Guam – territory of the United States

Hong Kong – special administrative region in China

Macau – special administrative region in China

Northern Mariana Islands – unincorporated territory and commonwealth of the United States

Puerto Rico – unincorporated territory of the United States classified as a commonwealth