

The International Astronomy Olympic Games and the War

On Sunday, October 16, the opening ceremony of the 26th edition of the International Astronomy Olympic Games (IRAOG) will be held in Matera.

The Greeks of the 9th century B.C. had established that during the week of the Games there should be an “Olympic Truce”. They had actually agreed that for a week all wars should be suspended. Not that there was no authority monitoring the observance of the truce. However, this was a “gentleman’s agreement” which was respected by everyone just because “that’s the way it is”. The best motive is the one which requires no explanation.

Today, as we open the Astronomy Olympic Games, we are witnessing a war in the heart of Europe (which – in my opinion - looks more or less like Greece 3000 years ago), and we do not even seem able to contemplate a week of truce. While overcoming the embarrassment of making some grotesque invitation to peace on my part, I could not ignore the profound injustice of inviting the aggressors to stop and the assaulted people to stop defending themselves. For a whole week.

And yet I think we have to do what we can – namely, almost nothing.

We will give 6 Italian boys and girls the chance to compete with 6 peers from Japan, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Russia, Vietnam and so on about their knowledge of the sky and of the Universe we live in. Perhaps, while talking about the sky, someone will realize that this year boys and girls from Ukraine are not there. Maybe this is so because they are holed up in a subway underground to shelter from the bombs.



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