

# **An Open Letter from the FAI ASC Presidents to the NACs**

October 31, 2020

## **Our Purpose**

Each year the Air Sport Commissions (ASCs) supervise hundreds of events filled with the expectations and aspirations of NAC members, and develop the regulations that support them. In recent discussions, the ASC Presidents have established a common vision on the various issues that the FAI is facing. We would like to share with you some of our analysis.

The purpose of this letter is to ensure that you are informed regarding many unsatisfactory aspects of FAI operations as we have seen them develop during recent years. We consider important that you form your own appraisal with knowledge of matters that may directly affect our future, our sports and the teams who drive them. The coming General Conference will be critically important and your input is essential.

## **The Background**

At the 2019 General Conference in Lausanne, the most significant changes to FAI in many years were adopted to kick-start a process of much needed change. The aim was to establish a remedial structure from which could be planned a reliable future for the development of all air sports. This change would enable the FAI to begin moving forward from the worst five years in its financial history.

## **Governance**

Earlier on, in 2018, it was acknowledged that the FAI had serious governance issues. This was reflected in the results of the elections held that year.

Two seminars were organised under the *One-FAI* flag gathering first thirty-five then nineteen people representing the Executive Board (EB), NACs, ASCs and the secretariat. The overall conclusion was that the aims and objectives of the FAI should be centred on competitions and that the ASCs should bring their voices to the EB and that communication should be improved.

Following the seminars, the *One-FAI* project leadership was given to the EB and its Strategy Working Group was led by one of its members. No progress was reported to the 2019 General Conference, except to acknowledge that the conclusions of the *One-FAI* seminars made sense.

The *One-FAI* project became *Refreshing FAI*, then *FAI 2020*. A new working group was implemented by the FAI President, a road map and deadlines were set. Proposals were to be submitted to the EB, then to CASI. We know that the working group exchanged ideas and various proposals, but none came to CASI's knowledge. The ASC Presidents therefore submitted their own proposals, to no avail. The *FAI 2020* timeline was not respected, the working group was disbanded last September with nothing achieved.

Our concern is that the FAI President and the EB may now push some improvised proposals to the 2020 General Conference, an e-Conference where true exchanges will be difficult to achieve. The ASC Presidents strongly advise against such a process, one that clearly lacks support or input from other parts of the FAI community.

In our opinion, the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences have been – at least on the governance issue – a blessing in disguise. Crucial decisions had to be taken. During this period, we have seen how the FAI is (should) in reality (be) governed.

During the coronavirus pandemic and to this day –

- Online work and communications, both written and verbal, have been efficient.
- The EB has run the basic FAI structure.
- The NACs have run the sports in their territories.
- The ASCs have managed their sports in international events.
- The secretariat has supported the EB, the NACs and the ASCs.

The pandemic has shown –

- That each of these entities is responsible and can take decisions in its own field.
- That each body can and should be trusted by the others.
- That all entities can communicate on a regular basis.

Throughout this period, the ‘vertical’ management style which the EB has employed to hand down instructions to ASCs has been largely absent. The participants have operated freely within a balanced structure well adapted to the FAI reality. The current FAI statutes accommodate this kind of management, though some clarification would be useful to define responsibilities in a better way. For the moment, however, the current statutes can be used without modification to run the FAI in a non-hierarchical way.

## **Failures**

The ASC Presidents believe it is important that recent failures should be identified to ensure that repetition is avoided. We recall that –

- The Dubai World Air Games were largely improvised, with ASCs left to resolve many problems. The WAG seminar that followed approved the prospect of further WAGs, but within an air show format at a single location. However, for the failed 2020 (then 2022) WAG to be held in Turkey, the EB chose the exact opposite – a conglomerate of First Category events spread over a whole country.
- FAI participation in the 2018 Asian Games – an Olympic event – was decided without the involvement of the concerned ASC. It ended in a political and sporting disaster, FAI being dismissed by the organisers who subsequently manipulated the rules to secure medals.
- The Air Games Series comprised three different projects over six years, none of which were submitted to the ASCs before they were pushed forward. These projects went nowhere.

- The Noosphere partnership with FAI was used to build a competition management system (the eNavigator) that largely ignored the seven hundred or so yearly ASC events. It is so cumbersome that, in three years, it has been used in only eight events. ASCs continue to develop and pay for their own competition management systems.
- Other sponsorship and special events monies have hardly benefitted our sports. The 2018 Drone World Championships, for example, generated circa. 450k EUR of income but most of it (70%) went to communication and marketing agencies and only 1% to the Commission running the sport. One per cent!
- Along the way, the FAI reserve was plundered and is now largely exhausted.

We wonder how the very people who were the decision makers in the above failures can enjoy the legitimacy to lead the FAI in the coming years.

This recent history shows that the FAI should not invest in elusive dreams and commercial ventures, should not count on magic revenues, but first and foremost should look after its disciplines and those who manage them: the NACs and their members, the ASCs and the competition organisers.

These failures underline the striking differences between the ASC and the EB visions for the FAI. They have been able to happen only because the EB believes that ASCs come under its exclusive authority. The ASC Presidents, representing the NACs through Commission representation, strongly disagree with this interpretation.

### **Priorities**

The ASC Presidents have shared with the FAI President their ideas and proposals but have not seen any encouraging answers from the *FAI 2021 Programme* (described in the *President's Musings*). They believe that the proposed soft evolution of the status quo within which ASCs may be entitled to more involvement falls far short of an acceptable standard: this is the model that has failed.

We do not accept that the task of reshaping FAI be given exclusively to the EB. In reality there is no urgency. The future EB will have a great deal to do, starting, of course, with the absolute number one priority: securing the financial future of the FAI.

The ASC Presidents are extremely concerned by the financial situation. Figures show that the majority of FAI cash or cash equivalent available comes from the ASCs' own reserves, and that membership revenue is in free-fall despite the 10% raise approved at the 2019 General Conference. Currently, there appears to be no plan to maintain or improve membership revenue. We see no viable future for the FAI unless its revenue stream is secured. This issue must be the absolute priority for the future EB.

### **In Conclusion**

The ASC Presidents are encouraged that an alternate candidate for the position of FAI President has stepped forward with a different and positive vision for the Federation. We are also pleased to see many candidates for the positions of Executive Director, including some ASC Presidents among them; their nominations serve to raise our expectations.

We believe that –

- Responsibility for past failures cannot be avoided.
- The historic status quo is unacceptable.
- The way forward is becoming clearer.
- The proposal to allow EB members to hold other roles within the overall FAI structure is key to enabling the right people to lead FAI in the coming years and we fully support it.

The smokescreens of the past must be recognised and consigned to history; they have no place in the future FAI.

We are ready to work with candidates who show their willingness for a balanced and responsible governance. Working together, we will make the right decisions to ensure a sound future for the FAI.

***The ASC Presidents***

Aerobatics – CIVA – Nick Buckenham

Aeromodelling - CIAM - Antonis Papadopoulos

Ballooning – CIA – Mark Sullivan

General Aviation – GAC – Rodney Blois

Gliding – IGC – Eric Mozer

Hang Gliding and Paragliding – CIVL – Stephane Malbos

Microlights and Paramotor – CIMA – Wolfgang Lintl

Rotorcraft – CIG – Jacques Berlo

Skydiving – ISC – Gillian Rayner