

FAI Secretary General Report on work of FAI Members, FAI Air Sport Commissions, and FAI Secretariat

Dear Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I'd like to tell you how much I'm happy to be here with you today. A few months ago, I was given the opportunity to take over the work of Max Bishop, and to join the FAI, a federation that I believed had an exciting potential, as well as a glorious history. Since then, I've met a lot of you in various meetings, and I've been on a quick learning curve to grasp the extraordinary complexity of our organization. And today represents the beginning of what I hope to be a long-term and powerful relationship.

As all of you know, I don't have an aviation background. But I come from the sports family with the same passion for sports, the same "volunteer-based" background and the necessary "service oriented" mind-set. In addition, I've been lucky enough to be working in the sports industry for 12 years now, and I hope to bring to the FAI and to all our Air Sports the many lessons I've learned in being involved with one of the world's major sporting events.

All of you in this room, Members, ASCs, Executive Directors and FAI Staff have contributed in making the FAI a very sound and solid Federation, which is now poised to make another major step forward. I'm thrilled and excited to be part of that challenge, and I hope to be able to contribute to its success with a fresh outlook and with no preconceived ideas.

Second of all, and since it's my first opportunity to address you at a Conference, I would like to give you a quick review of my first impressions. And as an introduction to this part of my report, I would like to remind you of the TS Elliot quote, that Max used last year, which is still appropriate

"To make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."

We did not spend much time together, as the handover period was only 2 weeks, but I very much respect Max and the work he has accomplished over the years. Therefore I am going to start where Max ended, after nearly 17 years of hard work and dedication to the FAI.

Last year, in his final report as Secretary General, Max gave his "ending" thoughts. He commented about where we were now, which way we were heading and what the risks and opportunities were for the years ahead. Based on his 17 years of experience with the FAI, his main concerns and / or findings were four fold.

First - Due to various trends, and like the experiences of many other sports over the past 20 years, the FAI competitions of the future – whether we like it or not – will probably have to be:

- More professionally organized
- Better presented and more attracting to the public, and to the media
- Partially financed from commercial sources (ie Sponsors)

Second – FAI Management had to steer FAI through a difference in values between the commercial companies and non-profit associations. The dyed-in-the-wool non-profit oriented individuals had to accept it, while the more commercially oriented ones should have regard for not lose sight of the specificity of sporting and democratically ruled associations.

Third – There is a trend in the administration and management of the FAI, with, and I quote "fewer and fewer qualified candidates coming forward to take over key posts in Commissions" end quote. To be in a position to handle the challenges of the future, this will result in the need for the FAI to depend more and more on professional, paid staff, and consequently to maintain a balanced working relationship between paid professionals, and unpaid volunteer officials.

Fourth – The overall structure and management of the FAI had to evolve. The discussion on the amount of independence that Air Sports Commissions should have vs central FAI, had been going on since the mid-eighties, and yet nothing much had changed. And while our structural diversity was undoubtedly a major strength, we obviously could not stand still.

I've only been here for 8 months, but I could not agree more with Max's final report, and, as I said earlier, his end will be my starting point. During my presentation on Strategic Issues a little bit later I'll give you more details, but I believe the foundation of our future strategic plan could be the four pillars envisioned by Max:

- More professionally organized and “branded” events, with appropriate communication to reinforce the FAI Brand, and to foster the recognition of the FAI, not only commercially, but also in its relationships with any other partners, including regulatory institutions.
- A strong marketing approach, respecting the values of not -for-profit Sports Associations, which does not transform the FAI into a marketing “circus”, but takes into account the needs of those who don't compete and only fly recreationally.
- Appropriate professional paid staff, working hand-in-hand with the essential building blocks of any Sports Associations: our network of extra-passionate unpaid volunteers without whom nothing would happen
- A different Structure and Management model, which would strengthen the relationships within the FAI family, namely HQ, the Members and the Commissions, each working under the same “corporate” guidelines and within a well defined lines of responsibility

Anyway, so much for my “introductory speech”, discussions have already started along the above lines, and we will have many opportunities to debate over these priorities.

Let me now briefly report on the key aspects of the last year.

Obviously, the early part of the year was dominated by the handover period between Max and myself, and by the restructuring of the FAI Office. As you know, Thierry Montigneaux, who had been with the FAI for as long as Max, has also left the office. With the departure of Robert Hugues (in 2009), who had not been replaced yet, the FAI Office had therefore been operating with an understaffed team, and some long overdue projects were stalled

I take this opportunity to commend the FAI Staff for their dedication and effort. Even though operating with limited resources and with a new Secretary General who they had to bring up-to-date on many of their projects, they were always focused and committed, and I thank them for walking me through this period while continuing to deliver their “regular” duties for the benefit of all of us.

The first part of the year was also for me a chance to visit with many of our constituents. First and foremost I attended as many Air Sports and Technical Commissions' plenaries as possible. And I was fortunate enough that many meetings took place in Lausanne, this year, which allowed me to visit almost all of them. It was very helpful to understand the complexity of our organization, and the cultural differences between each of our sports.

During the second part of the year, the FAI President and I participated in the 2nd Annual meeting of Active Members presidents. This meeting, planned in May, was originally cancelled due to poor-attendance and was rescheduled in August. Focusing on the preparation of the General Conference, it was a first opportunity for me to officially address our Members. I believe it proved very valuable, not only by the quality of the debate, but also in order to offer an opportunity for social interaction and the creation of a better international sense of community. And as a former rugby player, be assured I strongly commend that part of the story. In the future, I strongly recommend to all of you to consider attending these meetings to add even more value to them and to share your concerns and interests.

This 2nd part of the year was also for me, and for Jean-Marc Badan, my Deputy and the FAI Director of Sports, a chance to visit and to represent the FAI at several different Championships. I would like to single out three of them for various reasons, two are first category events, one is a national event.

At the 9th FAI World Hot Air Airship Championship, in Dole, France, we were lucky to attend an event perfectly set for the public, commentated live by a professional speaker and which attracted as many as 10,000 in attendance. This shows that, even with a slow motion sport (sorry for that Jean-Claude !! it is indeed about precision, but it is still very slow motion), there is a potential to create an attractive event, and to package it for the public. Congratulations to the organizers and to Pit Thibo the Competition Director for his creativity. I think both the competitors and the public liked it, and it was a successful event.

At the 31st FAI World Gliding Championship in Szeged Hungary, I gave my first official speech for an opening ceremony. What struck me, at this event, was the outstanding number of participants. With 33 countries represented and more than 140 pilots, the field of competitors was impressive. In addition to the 27 countries and 106 participants for the other 31st FAI World Gliding Championship in Prievidza (yes I know it's kind of confusing) this shows how much our sports can be attractive and challenging, and that, despite regulatory constraints and difficulties in accessing Air Space, there is still an immense potential for us. In my speech, I commended their motivation, their dedication and their love for the sports, and told them that our presence on behalf of the FAI was a tribute to that. They seemed to be surprised to see an FAI Official other than the ones from their own commission, and I think they liked it. We need to build on that potential, and to foster that international sense of community I was talking about a little bit earlier.

However, the display of these two events, as well as the other ones that Jean-Marc went to, also showed how ineffective we are at capturing the benefit of these events for the FAI, its Members, and the ASCs. In Dole, the FAI Brand was almost no-where to be seen, except in the Pilots briefing room, and barely on the Website (only as a Partner)!! As a member of the general public, or even as a media person, you could spend the day out there, without even knowing that you were attending an FAI Competition, and if it were not for the live speaker, you would not even know you were attending a World Championship at all.

In Szeged, it was a different story. We had indeed the same branding issue, although to a lesser extent. But more to the point, there was no "animation" around the airfield, and no animation or information of the Website. If you were not a competitor, you would not know there was a World Championship at this airfield. The only reason for these 140 pilots and their accompanying persons to be there, is their passion. We need to recognize that and to make sure we fuel this passion. We need to reward our pilots by providing them with fun, but also by staging their performances, even over the Internet if necessary.

The last event I would like to comment on, is the 2010 Swiss Championship. To honor the 100th year of aviation in Switzerland, the Aero Club of Switzerland had decided to organize all its National Championships during the same week, at close-by venues, somewhat like a "mini" National Air Games. While the adventure was not easy to begin with, the success was total and brought all our families together around the same "passion for flight". The FAI President and I had the chance to attend this event and let me tell you that

1. it was a wonder to see helicopter pilots watching with great pleasure, eyes wide open, the start of the last balloon race of the competition, and to realize it had actually been the first time they were able to share such a moment.
2. it was also quite extraordinary to see the 2010 Swiss Champions from all Air Sports disciplines sharing the stage together in a spirit of community

Similarly to the lessons learned from the WAG in Turin, which demonstrated how everyone was so pleased to have the opportunity to bond together and to share their passion; this 2010 Swiss Championship shows that multi-sports events can be a good vehicle, even at the national level,

to bring all our Air Sports together, and that we do have the same passion after all. Let's remember that and make good use of it.

On the project side of our activity, I would like to say that the FAI Sporting Licenses Database project is coming to completion. Since the 1st of July the application is on line for testing purposes, and all of you have received an access code and a detailed procedure to up-load your data. In January 2011, the system will become mandatory, meaning that a FAI Sporting License will only be considered valid if the details of it have been up-loaded into the central database. The workload this implies for Members is minor – a few up-loads per year should normally be enough - but the gains for contest organizers and FAI contest officials will be enormous. We have made great efforts to ensure that the system is very simple to use, but it won't work if you don't each enter your data. So please make sure you do test the system in the next few weeks, so that you won't have any remaining issues when it becomes mandatory. The FAI Staff is always at your service to help you and to walk you through the necessary steps, so don't hesitate to call us for questions.

On the media side, FAI's cooperation with Flying Aces Ltd continued through 2010. The 2008 TV series was distributed in 2009 over 20 networks such as Sky Sports, Setanta and ESPN, in more than 50 countries, reaching audiences in the millions. The 2009 TV series is being distributed as we speak and the 2010 one is in production.

Nowadays, and more particularly with the Internet and the likes of YouTube, being able to film and to distribute our events is becoming critical. In 2010, we took 2 necessary steps to improve the exposure of FAI's Air Sports. As discussed with FAI Air Sports Commissions Presidents, we opened a new line of communication with Flying Aces with the aim to redesign our Media Partner agreement, and to facilitate the management of the rights to our Events.

Thanks to our membership in SportAccord, we have also launched our own YouTube channel, which is part of the SportsHub platform. On this platform we can upload and share as many videos as we want, showcase our sports among other ones, and benefit from the exposure of the more popular sports to raise our profile. So, if you have images of our championships, of your own competition, or of a record attempt please don't hesitate to get in touch with our communication manager.

Membership

The FAI Membership (not counting the decisions the Conference has just taken) stands at :

Active Members :	85 (84)
Associate Members :	6 (6)
Temporary Members :	12 (10)
International Affiliate :	3 (3)

(Last year's figures in brackets)

World Championships

32 1st Category Events (including 18 World Champ) were held in **18** different countries in Europe (**11**), North America (**2**), Asia (**0**), South America (**0**), Africa (**0**) and Oceania (**0**). **66** FAI member countries participated in FAI World Championships, with a total of **2276** competitors. (results received at the shortest after 0 days, and at the longest after 15 days)!

ANNUAL QUESTIONNAIRE

This year **ONLY 45** countries responded, *fully or partly*, to the FAI questionnaire. This is less than 50% of our Members. As always, I can provide full details of any or all countries' statistical data on request. Overall, the activity levels appear to remain fairly static, although it remains very difficult to make meaningful comparisons.

This questionnaire might **seem** useless **to** you because you don't see what we're doing with it, well it's actually kind of the other way around. Because we have such a low response rate, data is barely usable. This data is important for us in order to provide **a** fact sheet to our partners, and to monitor the activity of our Air Sports.

FLIGHT SAFETY

192 fatalities were reported in 2009 as compared with 197 in 2008.
(based on 45 answers received to the FAI Questionnaire)

RECORDS

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I'm truly excited about the work and the challenges ahead. There are a lot of opportunities and the room for improvement is substantial.

I would like to close by thanking our very the FAI President and the Executive Board Members first of all for having given me the opportunity to be here and be part of this long-term project, and for their welcoming support over the past few months. They have all helped **me** greatly in **becoming familiar** with the FAI and it is a pleasure to work with them.

I thank you for listening to this long opening report.

Stephane DESPREZ
Secretary General