



CIVL President's Report the FAI General Conference 2010

Sporting Activity and Competition Review

I am pleased to be able to report that, in both hang gliding and paragliding, international competition activity continues to grow. So far in 2010 290 2nd Category competitions have been sanctioned worldwide. By far the most active discipline is paragliding cross country competition with 177 events sanctioned, the next largest number of events is in hang gliding cross country with rigid wings, paragliding accuracy and aerobatics making up the remainder.

The number of pilots in our world ranking database also gives an indication of healthy activity in our sport with 6200 in paragliding cross country, just under 1000 in paragliding accuracy and 180 in aerobatics. There are also 1400 Class 1 hang glider pilots registered and 117 Class 5 (rigid wings).

In 2010 we ran five 1st Category events: four continental championships and a Women's Class 1 world championship combined with Class 2 and Class 5 rigid wing world championships. The majority of the competitors in these events were from European nations with 32 European NACs represented in paragliding cross country, 19 European NACs represented in hang gliding, 10 European NACs represented in paragliding accuracy and 6 Asian NACs represented in our Asian paragliding championship. This included a team from Thailand for the first time.

Future Championships

For 2011 we have world championships in:

- Hang Gliding Country in Sigillo in Italy
- Paragliding Cross Country in Piedrahita in Spain
- Paragliding Accuracy in Kuncice pod Ondrejnikem in the Czech Republic

During the CIVL Plenary Meeting in February 2010 in Lausanne the following Category 1 events for 2012 have been awarded:

- The European Hang Gliding Cross Country Championships to Kayseri, Turkey
- The European Paragliding Cross Country Championships to St Andre les Alpes, France
- The European Paragliding Accuracy Championships to FYROM

Records

New world records have been set by pilots of various disciplines in the past year and continental records in Europe, North America and South America. Pilots on other continents do not appear to have yet recognised the potential for setting records in these more localized environments and CIVL will try to promote this in the coming year.

Safety

CIVL has continued its programme of ensuring pilots are informed of correct pitch stability settings for hang gliders in 1st category competitions and including the measurement and enforcement of these in acceptance checks for championships.

In paragliding it has been rewarding to see that manufacturers have been collaborating with a CIVL working group to identify practical design limitations to improve stability in these types of aircraft. Our paragliding subcommittee also has a mandate to examine other factors in competition incidents.

CIVL/FAI Organisation

That was the good news. On a less encouraging note, although I have been CIVL President for only six months, I have been in our managing Bureau for ten years and am very aware that there has been a steady reduction in the number of people who are either prepared or able to give their time to the necessary background activities of our sport. In this advanced age of communications the expectation from our pilot community of what CIVL can deliver has increased but that expectation is not being met due to time constraints on people who lead ever busier lives. Many of the best people have good jobs, and together with personal lives, hobbies etc, increasingly require recompense for their efforts, or cannot devote the necessary time to anything other than their own personal affairs and hobbies. Our attention was drawn to this problem by the outgoing Secretary General Max Bishop last year and he also noted that the volunteer culture of the past is fast disappearing. All of this also has an impact on our ability to provide juries and technical staff for our 1st Category events.

A further restriction on the availability of good people for our bureau and subcommittees is that not all NACs will cover the expenses involved in attending plenary or other occasional additional meeting that may be necessary to such work.

Perhaps because less of our sports people get involved with the management aspects of our activities there is an increasing perception that our Commission is remote and, to some degree, irrelevant to actual competitions, and the FAI Secretariat and Executive Board even more so.

Among those few who are actively involved, this perception about the FAI Executive Board and the Secretary General is also evident. I anticipate this is about to get worse as we have been informed that the Secretariat is to become larger while at the same time losing useful functionality as it outsources the essential IT work that we rely on. These expensive and almost certainly less flexible arrangements are to be paid for by the Air Sport Commissions, most of which do not want them. There has been no meaningful consultation about this, merely a briefing to ASC Presidents and a promise extracted to discuss proposals before implementation. The recently released minutes of the September EB meeting now make it clear that a decision has already been taken without that consultation taking place. This reinforces the perception of a remote, top-down management which is determined to pursue its own vision of the FAI's future rather than accepting that this organisation only exists to represent the interests of our pilots. While acknowledging that the FAI is a cooperative of member nations whose majority view will prevail in any decision making, it appears that on this occasion the NACs will not be directly affected by this enlargement of the Secretariat as their subscriptions will not increase to pay for it and they will receive little improvement in service.

It appears that the Board has decided what is best for the ASCs without meaningful consultation about funding this additional post, or whether the majority of ASCs actually want the proposed additional services. This type of authoritarian behaviour is likely to damage the relationship between the Board and the ASCs and can only reduce the authority and effectiveness of Bureaux within ASCs. ASC delegates are likely to see that their Bureaux have little autonomy as they appear to be seen from above merely as useful revenue-collecting tools to expand our Lausanne empire.

Threats

I believe the EB needs to address the threat the above perception is to our position as the world body responsible for bringing together the air sports men and women of the world and creating international good will and mutual understanding [Statutes]. There are other organisations which also seek to provide services for our pilots and forums for them to express their views and needs. Some can do so cost effectively by being selective about what they offer and focusing on competition. In CIVL's area we have the Paragliding World Cup Association which has run very successful, high level paragliding competitions for many years. There is now a similar organisation in paragliding accuracy and some talk of resurrecting the World Hang Gliding Series. These organisations operate with minimal central staff and are generally perceived as less bureaucratic and more flexible than CIVL. We recently had our attention drawn to a regional paragliding organisation in Asia which purports to include among its members some of our own member nations and some non-FAI nations. This body acknowledges the FAI on its website but has not yet contacted CIVL.

CIVL would very much like to increase the exposure our sports have in Asia under the FAI banner and have more Asian nations competing in our championships. Paragliders are an ideal type of aircraft for many Asian countries, light, portable and not needing any significant infrastructure to be flown recreationally. At the last General Conference in Incheon much was made of expanding the FAI's exposure in Asia yet it was at that very same conference that the proposal by the IPC to relax the rules which make it difficult for ASCs to hold plenary meetings outside of Lausanne was sidelined without a vote. The result of that for CIVL was that a bid to hold our 2011 plenary in Asia was lost by one vote. Instead the only plenary to be held in Asia in 2011 which addresses the needs of our sporting community will be run by the non-FAI Asian Paragliding Union.

I welcome the EB's support for the Secretary General's position on strengthening the FAI brand. It could be a very positive move to counter some of the existing negative perception and I recognise that CIVL would have a large part to play in achieving this within our own air sports community. Unfortunately this is negated to some degree by the perceptions I have already described which make the FAI brand less attractive to our pilots.

Summary

In conclusion I stress that the air sports that CIVL represents are healthy and competition within them is thriving. Unfortunately I see a difficult time ahead in the relationship between individual air sports and the central FAI body if the current management style continues.

Despite the reservations I have expressed about top level management, I wish to acknowledge the individual hard working staff members of the Secretariat who have looked after us for many years and thank them for their continuing assistance to CIVL.

John Aldridge
CIVL President