

# FEDERATION SPELEOLOGIQUE EUROPEENNE



## FSE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING Saturday 30th of May 2015 in Auletta, Italy

Reported by Michael Laumanns

### Introduction

The FSE General Assembly Meeting (GAM) was held on 30<sup>th</sup> May in Auletta (Italy) during the 10th EuroSpeleo Forum, and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Italian Congresso Nazionale di Speleologia organized by Società Speleologica Italiana, Federazione Speleologica Campana, and Gruppo Speleo Alpinistico Vallo di Diano. Ged Campion (FSE President) chaired the GAM.

The FSE Bureau members and the member organization delegates expressed their gratefulness to all organizers for the warm welcome the 2015 EuroSpeleo Forum received.

### Present participants at the GAM

**Voting FSE Bureau members:** Ged Campion (President, UK), Michael Laumanns (Vice-President, DE), Ernest Geyer (Vice-Treasurer, AT).

**Voting delegates:** René Scherrer (CH), Mladen Garasic (HR), Jean-Claude Thies (LU), Silvia Goutier (NL), Bogdan Badescu (RO), Michele Sivelli (IT).

**Voting non-delegate with Proxy:** Martina Drskova (SK), Henk Goutier (SI).

**Voting delegates after approval according to agenda item 3:** Petar Beron (BG).

**Excused (Proxy to):** France (DE), Sweden (DE), Spain (UK), Hungary (HR), Poland (NL), Belgium (NL), Finland (UK).

**Absent/Excused (no Proxy):** Albania, Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, Monaco, Moldova.

**No vote and absent (pending internal agreement):** Greece.

**Observers:** Ivan Krpina (HR), Ian Chandler (UK), Taraneh Khalgehi (AT), Branislav Šmída (SK).

### 1. Opening of the GAM:

In the name of the FSE Bureau the FSE President Ged Campion welcomed all participants. The agenda was proposed by the Bureau and distributed in time to member organizations. The GAM commenced at 13H49.

### 2. Quorum of voting delegates and observing countries and adoption of the agenda

The FSE counted 31 full members. The quorum of at least 16 votes was reached with 19 countries present or represented (physical presence of 12 delegates/representatives + 7 proxies).

The General Assembly accepted the Agenda.

### 3. Approval of membership fee payments for 2014+2015

Approval was given to 31 countries except Fyr. of Macedonia which has not yet paid its contributions for 2015 and the five previous years. The payment for Moldova for the year 2015 was received in cash after the General Assembly.

### 4. Approval of the 2014 GAM report (held in Baile Herculane, Romania)

The report was distributed to all delegates/organizations. It was approved unanimously.

## **5. Situation of the European member countries**

The Treasurer provided an overview concerning the contributions paid. Only the Fyr. of Macedonia was in arrear with its payments and thus has currently lost its membership. The Czech Republic has still not become a member of FSE. Furthermore the European countries Andorra, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Russia, and San Marino are not yet FSE members. There are no speleological organizations known from Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Holy See and Malta. In Monaco only one speleological club exists, which is a member of FSE. However, the president of that club has retreated and Monaco has not yet paid its contributions for 2015. The contributions from Moldova for 2015 were received after the General Assembly.

The GAM was informed about the situation in Spain where the national federation FEE became insolvent. According to Spanish law FEE still has time until the end of 2015 to solve its financial liabilities. After that FEE will legally cease to exist and Spain will have to decide how it can be represented in the FSE.

Furthermore, a new speleological organization in Bulgaria has been founded (Bulgarian Caving Society BCS). Subject of a confirmed intra-Bulgarian agreement on the representation of Bulgaria in the FSE the current speleological organization (Bulgarian Federation of Speleology BFS) remains the recognized national federation according to Art. 7 of the FSE Statute.

## **6. Report of the Bureau 2014-2015**

The following Bureau report was unanimously approved:

Since the last General Assembly the FSE Bureau had to work with the posts of the General-Secretary and the Vice-Secretary not being filled. This kept the remaining four Bureau members very busy with almost daily exchange of e-mails and many telephone consultations. It is our sincere hope that we can fill the existing vacancies during the 2015 General Assembly in order to allow for an orderly organisation of work in the FSE Bureau.

During the last General Assembly the FSE Statute was changed. These changes, together with other statutory changes over the recent years, were officially registered at the seat of the FSE in Luxembourg in 2014.

Nevertheless, although facing severe constraints with regard to its staffing, the Bureau was able to launch a comprehensive reform of the EuroSpeleo Projects (ESP) in December 2014, following time-consuming deliberations. The new ESP guidelines and the new application form are available since December 14th on the FSE website and all national delegates were informed about that. More details on the content of the changes made are provided in the report on the EuroSpeleo Projects for this General Assembly.

In the same way the Bureau was also able to conclude on a less major update of the EuroSpeleo Forum guidelines which is now also available on the FSE website. The new guidelines clarify several issues which led to confusion in the past and also results in a reduction of the fee that a EuroSpeleo Forum needs to contribute for the EuroSpeleo Projects fund of the FSE, which is now set to 1 EUR per paying participant of a EuroSpeleo Forum.

At the UIS Bureau meeting in November 2014 in Sydney, Australia the application of the FSE to become the first associated speleological organization to the International Union of Speleology (UIS) was approved. This affiliation does not result in a fee to be paid by FSE to UIS but in nomination of a delegate with no voting rights to ensure the contacts and the exchange of information between FSE and the Bureau of the UIS. FSE president Ged Campion was nominated European delegate to the UIS. The contact from the UIS to the FSE will be the UIS General Secretary Fadi Nader. Ged Campion has been invited to attend the UIS bureau meeting in Slovenia on 20th June.

The FSE Facebook page, updated regularly by FSE treasurer Henk Goutier, can be visited by everybody even without a registration on Facebook. The page is continuously visited by thousands of cavers and non-cavers thus representing an excellent outreach for European speleology. URL: <https://www.facebook.com/eurospeleo>.

With the help of our partners of the WikiCaves organization we are able to update the FSE website on a regular basis. The FSE has offered help to WikiCaves to promote their activities to the European caving community

Members of the Bureau participated at the following national caving events: Hidden Earth 2015 in Leek (UK), 52nd congress of the Fédération Française de Spéléologie 2015 (Saint-Vallier de Thiey), the annual conference of the Austrian Speleological Association (Gams bei Hieflau, October 2014). The FSE will be represented at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of UIS in June in Postojna by the president Ged Campion.

#### **7. Financial report 2014 (Annex)**

The treasurer, Henk Goutier, informed the members on income and expenditure. At 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2014 the FSE net assets amounted to € 29.982,33.

The auditor, Jean-Claude Thies has checked the accounts in early May 2015 and recommended approval of the treasury. He acknowledged the prudent management of FSE resources for administrative expenses. However, he reminded the Bureau to anchor the annual audit of the FSE accounts in the Internal Regulations. He also reminded that old paper files from the Treasury could not be retrieved yet from the former Treasurer Manuel Freire (Portugal).

The financial report was approved unanimously.

#### **8. Annual report of the Protection Commission 2014-15 (Annex)**

ECPC member Jean-Claude Thies reported on the 2014 EuroSpeleo Protection Label which was granted to the Belgian protection project «Atlas Wallon du Karst - Bassin de la Basse Lesse» of the Commission Wallonne d'Etude et de Protection des Sites Souterrains. A call-up for the 2015 EuroSpeleo Protection Label has recently been distributed to all member organizations.

A competition to create an ECPC poster was started.

ECPC has 2 Workgroups: Shale Gas WG and White Nose Syndrom WG. The latter WG is currently not active as no WNS cases were so far reported in Europe. Altogether there are 5 Board members and 45 subscribers on the Protection.Info mailing list.

The post of the ECPC Chair is currently vacant and Jean-Claude Thies informed the General Assembly that he has sent his application for Presidentship of ECPC earlier this year to the FSE Bureau.

Upcoming major activity is the "4th EuroSpeleo Protection Symposium" during the European Speleological Congress in Great Britain in 2016.

Bärbel Vogel from Germany (via Jean-Claude Thies) has applied to become an ECPC Board member. The General Assembly has approved her candidature.

The ECPC report was agreed unanimously.

#### **9. Report on our membership in the European Environmental Bureau (www.eeb.org) (Annex)**

Jean-Claude Thies reported that FSE membership in the EEB keeps the European cavers in close touch with the EU environmental issues. Just before the GAM a questionnaire from EEB was received by FSE to ask if FSE would eventually be interested to become a permanent member of the EEB Board. The GAM unanimously agreed that in case an invitation should be received, FSE should accept becoming a member of the EEB Board.

#### **10. Report of the European Cave Rescue Commission (ECRC) (Annex):**

The ECRC President, Christian Dodelin, was unable to attend the GAM. His written report was accepted unanimously.

#### **11. Report about the EuroSpeleo Projects (ESPs) 2014-2015 (Annex)**

The ESPs are one of the flagship activities of FSE. Major updates of the ESP guidelines and the ESP application form with a lot of clarifications for applicants were launched on 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2014. This remedied a lack of maintenance of the ESP system over the past years. A positive trend in project applications exists with 16 applications received since the GAM in Baile Herculane (August 2014) and several more applications were pre-announced for 2015. It was also stated that FSE from now on will carry out in-depth checks and balances on all ESPs as two cases of financial irregularities were detected. Both fraud cases were settled by re-payments of the project organizers. At the time when the report annexed hereto was finalized the top countries participating in the 2014/15 ESPs were Switzerland and Bulgaria (20 participants each), as well as Greece (19) and Germany (18). However, after drafting of the report,

updated figures from the 2015 French Gouffre Berger ESP were received which make France with 124 individuals (!!) by far the largest member benefitting from the ESPs 2014/15. The report was agreed unanimously.

#### **12. Report of the Speleo-TV FSE workgroup (Annex)**

The workgroup Coordinator, Elina Saarinen, could not come to the GAM. Her written report was accepted unanimously.

#### **13. Report from EuroSpeleo Magazine FSE workgroup**

The Coordinator of the Workgroup and Magazine editor, Mihaela Micula, was unable to attend the GAM. Oral information was provided by Michael Laumanns: Mihaela's current professional duties and the lack of Internet access during her continuous work abroad does not allow her to carry out work on the EuroSpeleo Magazine. This situation also prohibited a planned meeting between Mihaela and Ged at the UIS Anniversary meeting in Postojna and may continue, most likely leading to a long delay of the launch of a new issue of the EuroSpeleo Magazine. The GAM was also informed about the wish of Mihaela to significantly shrink the list of Workgroup members.

#### **14. Information on the International Caving Expeditions database (ICE db) (Annex)**

The database is maintained by FSE partner Wikicaves (Grotto Center) and work on the presentational structure is in progress. The basic idea for the database is to provide a networking platform for people interested in caving expeditions. UIS and the French foreign relations Committee CREI are also working on similar databases. The Romanian delegate saw added value if the database could include storage of further information (like expedition reports or cave surveys). It is foreseen to provide an update on the ICE db on the FSE website as soon as possible.

#### **15. Report on our partnership with the International Union of Speleology (UIS)**

FSE, being now the first "affiliated speleological organization" to UIS, was invited to join the UIS Bureau meeting scheduled to be held at the UIS Anniversary meeting in Postojna. Ged Campion will represent FSE at that meeting. Being an affiliated organization allows FSE to participate in UIS meetings as observer with the right to speak but no vote. No contributions need to be paid by FSE to UIS. The FSE president, Ged Campion, will be the FSE contact point for UIS and UIS General Secretary Fadi Nader will be the UIS contact point to the FSE.

#### **16. Report on our participatory status within the Council of Europe (CoE)**

FSE, after having made and subsequently registered the necessary changes in its Statute in Baile Herculane, has formally applied to CoE for participatory status. A decision of the CoE was still pending at the time of the GAM 2015.

#### **17. Report from the delegates about opening to new members**

Previous GAMs authorized some delegates to step into contact with European countries which are not yet members of FSE. The results were as follows:

- Andorra: at the GAM 2014 Olivier Vidal reported that there is a speleo federation in creation and they consider a membership application to FSE. Ged Campion will take over this issue.
- Armenia (Michael Laumanns): new e-mail and letter to the Armenian federation were apparently received by them. There has been no reply yet. To be continued.
- Azerbaijan (Ernest Geyer): there are apparently no cavers in Azerbaijan and the mountaineering federation has no caving section. Consequently, Azerbaijan should not be followed up until further notice.
- Belarus (Silvia Goutier): there is a caving club existing with 2 sections in different cities. They currently discuss internally about an FSE membership. To be continued.
- Bosnia Herzegovina: Mladen Garasic investigated the situation. There are apparently 2 clubs/federations existing but the situation remains unclear. To be continued.
- Montenegro: Mladen Garasic informed the GAM that the creation of a national federation is in progress. To be continued.

- Georgia: No news. Ged Campion will now deal with this investigation.
- Iceland (Michael Laumanns): new e-mail and letter to the Icelandic Speleological Federation were apparently received by them. No reply yet. To be continued.
- Liechtenstein (Patrick Deriaz): no news.
- Russia: apparently no Russian caving club is in the position to start an initiative for founding an overarching structure to become FSE member. To be kept under review.
- Estonia + Latvia (Jean-Claude Thies): only singular cavers. No news from them.
- Malta (Ged Campion): Ged has investigated; apparently no real cavers. Consequently, no further FSE investigations will be made until further notice.
- Cyprus: the difficult political situation, especially those of Northern Cyprus, was briefly discussed. Only the Republic of Cyprus can currently become a member of FSE. There is a UIS caving project launched on Cyprus where European cavers will take part of.
- San Marino: Michele Sivelli informed the GAM about one caving club in San Marino, which is a member of the Italian federation SSI and thus already represented in the FSE. No further FSE investigations will be made due to that.
- Holy See: No cavers known. Consequently, not to be followed up.

#### **18. Change of the FSE Internal regulations concerning a mandatory weblink to FSE (Annex):**

The proposal of the FSE Bureau annexed hereto was unanimously approved by the GAM. Consequently, all member federations are required to establish a link from their websites to the FSE website. Henk Goutier will provide different logos for this purpose.

#### **19. Proposal of establishing a Contact Group for show caves and cavers in the FSE (Annex):**

The proposal of the FSE Bureau annexed hereto was unanimously approved by the GAM. The Workgroup was thus established and can now start with its planned activities.

#### **20. Organization of EuroSpeleo Forums 2016-2019**

2016: (13<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> August) in Ingleton, Yorkshire Dales, UK. This will be a EuroSpeleo Congress due to the fact that the next UIS Congress takes place outside of Europe. Website is now accessible (<http://www.eurospeleo.uk/>). Further details expected to be available very soon.

2017: an invitation was received from the Bulgarian Federation of Speleology, which was welcomed by the GAM. Details will follow. Overlap with other major conferences in 2017 to be avoided. September could be a good date.

2018: (23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> August 2018) in Ebensee, Oberösterreich, Austria.

2019: The Slovakian Speleological Society has sent an invitation, which was very warmly acknowledged by the GAM.

#### **21. Annual Fees 2016 & 2017 (Annex), Provisional Budgets 2015 & 2016 (Annex)**

A change of contribution steps to better reflect the number of individual members in the FSE member organizations has already been voted at the last GAM in 2014. No percentage increase of the fees for 2017 was proposed, which was unanimously agreed by the GAM.

The GAM was also unanimously in favor of the provisional FSE budgets 2015 and 2016.

Jean-Claude Thies was confirmed as FSE auditor by acclamation by the GAM.

#### **22. Elections**

In the absence of other candidatures Treasurer Henk Goutier (NL) was unanimously re-elected for a new term until 2019. He informed the GAM that this will be his last term in the FSE Bureau.

In the absence of other candidatures Vice-President Michael Laumanns (DE) was re-elected (with one abstention) for a new term until 2019.

The GAM was informed that a last-minute application for the vacant position of Vice-Secretary was received in the morning of 30<sup>th</sup> May 2015 from Greece. However, this application did not meet the formal requirements and thus could not be presented to the GAM.

Martina Drškova (SK) introduced herself to the General Assembly and put forward her candidature for the vacant position of FSE General-Secretary. Delegates were already informed about this before the

GAM. The Slovakian Speleological Federation had agreed to her candidature and the minimum of three supporting Delegates was achieved through the Bureau member Delegates (UK, AT and DE) who supported the candidature. In the absence of other candidatures Martina was unanimously elected for a term until 2017. The GAM warmly welcomed the new Bureau member and thanked the Slovakian Speleological Society for its kind willingness to support this candidature.

Jean-Claude Thies (LU), in the absence of other candidatures, was unanimously elected President of the ECPC.

All elected FSE officials accepted their election.

### **23. Discussion on the idea of establishing a EuroSpeleo Rescue Solidarity Fund (Annex):**

Michael Laumanns introduced the subject, which is a follow-up from FSE fundraising activities resulting from the accident of a Spanish caver in Peru in 2014 where FSE has promised to suggest remedies in case of accidents that entails high rescue costs. As currently existing national tailor-made professional insurances are not available on a pan-European level a self-administered Fund financed by a one-time payment of participants was proposed (described in the annex). Such Fund exists since 1995 in Germany and was an unexpected success with currently over € 40,000 being available.

The GAM had a discussion on the proposal. A number of questions were put forward by delegates related to what the Fund may cover, whether it may trigger rescue organizations so far working for free to issue unnecessary bills, and also related to administrative questions. As the management of an additional Fund with many potential members will overburden the FSE treasury a different responsible may be needed. Also possible abuse of the Fund was questioned. Contributions to the Fund could be adapted to the different economic situation in member countries.

As a result, the FSE Bureau was tasked to investigate among member organizations whether a EuroSpeleo Rescue Solidarity Fund would be of interest for them and, if this was the case, to pursue the issue and to present a fine-tuned proposal for further discussion without creating time pressure.

### **24. Miscellaneous**

Henk Goutier, who currently manages and updates the online presentation of FSE, wishes to receive information on new events and general news for the FSE website and the FSE Facebook page.

Information collection on national regulations on caving was proposed by the Romanian federation. This kind of information should be handled through the respective national FSE Delegates/Vice-Delegates.

The GAM closed at 16H21.