

EPC GENERAL ASSEMBLY - JUNE 2005 - DUBROVNIK

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Introduction

The fact that four years have now elapsed since my election as EPC President is hard to accept. In one sense, so much has happened during this time, within both EPC and IPC, that four years hardly seems long enough. In another sense, time has flown by so quickly, it is amazing that anything has been achieved at all. Either way, it is difficult to know where to start this report, what to include and what to omit.

Almost certainly, I will forget something or someone that should have been mentioned but, as two years ago in Athens, my inclination again is to divide this report into two parts: first, to draw on my experience with IPC as the EPC representative on its Executive Committee and, second, to comment on the continued development of EPC itself. However, given the significance of recent changes within IPC, on this occasion I will also add a third part and treat what might be described as 'issues and trends'.

IPC development

IPC's strategic review: Since EPC's last General Assembly, IPC has had its own General Assembly in Cairo, the outcome of which is well known to all of you. I made my own position clear before that meeting and I am delighted that IPC's membership saw fit to endorse the changes to structure, constitution and membership that had been recommended to it. All that remains is implementation and, for some (EPC included), the assumption of new responsibilities. Given its size, history and maturity, I have no doubt that EPC is well positioned to play a significant role in all future developments.

IPC Executive: Under IPC's current constitution, the membership of its Executive Committee extends to 22 people, with eight of these (supported by the staff in IPC's Bonn office) also acting as a Management Committee. In truth, neither of these committees is 'executive' or 'management' ... these being the responsibility of the paid staff ... but, in any event, the numbers are excessive. From November, IPC will have a new Governing Board ... smaller in number and more obviously focussed on governance rather than management. The job of the new Governing Board is not to do the work itself (that is why we have a paid staff), but to ensure (through dialogue and oversight) that the staff understands (beyond

any reasonable doubt) and delivers (both efficiently and effectively) what the membership wants.

Development: The implications of IPC's strategic review for NPCs, IOSDs, IPC Sports and the Regions will be considerable and not least in the context of development. I realise that much has been said about this already (indeed, these are more or less the same words that I used two years ago), but I still believe the debate suffers because we use the same word 'development' to mean so many different things. However, I also believe that there are more than enough 'development' roles (albeit different ones) for all members of the Paralympic family to play their part. All that is needed is a clear understanding of what those different roles might be, a dialogue to establish who is best placed to do what and, of course, a willingness to collaborate. My own experience during the last few years of meetings between representatives of IPC Regions and IOSDs provides ample evidence of a huge reservoir of goodwill and a shared commitment to making this work.

EPC development

EPC Executive: Having decided not to seek re-election as President (and I will say more about this later), I would like to use this opportunity to thank each of the members of EPC's Executive (individually and collectively) for their efforts over the past four years and for their unstinting support of me as President. Jürg Weber's contribution as Treasurer has been immense and I am truly sorry that his personal circumstances do not enable him to continue in post. He will be sorely missed. Our Secretary General, Enrique Sanchez-Guijo, has also been a huge asset, combining his normal secretarial duties with a growing expertise in all matters relating to the European Union. I understand that the Spanish NPC has decided to nominate Enrique for EPC Presidency and, without wishing to gainsay any other candidate that may emerge, I have no doubt whatsoever that EPC would be well served by Enrique's election. However, we are a committee of nine and I would not want to neglect the contributions made by the other members of this Executive: Karl Quade, EPC's Technical Officer; Sverre Bergenoldt, until recently EPC Development Officer; the so-called 'members-at-large', Ratko Kovacic, Arto Pehkonen (recently replaced by Luca Pancalli) and Pal Szekeres; and our athlete representative, Cristian Sainz. I am grateful to all of them. For the record, perhaps this report should also confirm that, since the last EPC General Assembly, this Executive Committee has met in Rome, Zurich, London and, by the time this year's General Assembly takes place, in Dubrovnik.

Operations Plan: For ease of reference (as two years ago), the Operations Plan for 2002-2003 has been reproduced as originally presented to and agreed by the General Assembly that took place in Ireland four years ago, with the EPC Executive Committee's comments on progress to date added in bold italics. Clearly, a lot has happened in the mean time and, equally clearly, there is still need for further action in a number of areas. However, the Executive

Committee's efforts to generate a new Plan have been frustrated by the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of IPC's strategic review. As this is now resolved, it should be possible for the incoming Executive to give this its full, urgent and immediate consideration ... reverting to the full EPC membership as and when appropriate.

Championships: The EPC championships programme will be covered in more detail by the Technical Officer's report, but the various matters that two years ago I suggested warranted special attention are still relevant: (i) EPC's achievements in this area are second to none (there is no other IPC region with a comparable calendar of regional events), but we have still fallen short of our target and it may be necessary to consider a four-year cycle rather than attempting (and failing) to offer EPC championships every two years; (ii) there is still no universally acceptable formula for the avoidance of conflict between IPC/EPC championships and IOSD events; (iii) for me at least, the distinction between 'IPC sports' and other Paralympic sports is no longer relevant; and (iv) almost certainly, the whole basis for IPC regions (and arguably the IOSDs as well) offering their own separate championships programmes will need to be fundamentally reviewed when/if each of the sports within the Paralympic programme achieves independence.

Communication: With an EPC membership of over fifty NPCs and IOSDs, communication between Executive Committee members and EPC members more generally is still the single most important challenge before us. With e-mail and a much improved web-site, there are still grounds for optimism. However, EPC's inability to fund the appointment of at least one member of staff (to provide continuity of service and to cope with the ever-increasing volume of paperwork) is critical. I do not have an obvious or immediate solution, but EPC members may be interested to note the following agreement reached in Turin recently by representatives of all IPC Regions: namely, that the IPC should provide secretarial services to the new Regional Council, with such services to include liaison with members, arranging meetings and agendas, as well as minute taking and any possible follow-up action. There is no doubt that such a step would be useful, but even this falls short of the sort of IPC commitment to the activities of its Regions that I believe is both necessary and appropriate.

Issues and Trends

Roles and responsibilities: The identification within the new IPC structure of four key stakeholders (NPCs, Regions, IOSDs and Sports) clearly provides an opportunity for all such stakeholders to review the contribution that they make (or could make) to the whole Paralympic movement. The membership survey conducted recently by our Secretary General may have something useful to say on this. Either way, I believe the time is right (and arguably long overdue) for EPC's Executive to be sure that it understands the requirements of its membership and for IPC to facilitate an open discussion, involving all the

stakeholders, of who is best placed to do what ... possibly via the newly created IPC Councils.

Continuity of service: I have touched on this already and, possibly, for EPC this is the most urgent consideration of all: what can be done (by EPC or IPC) to provide EPC's membership and its Executive with the benefit of at least one full-time paid officer? Clearly, an IPC solution would need to benefit all Regions and not be seen as a convenience for Europe, purely and simply as a consequence of geography, but this (for me at least) is the preferred solution ... enabling IPC to act, far more effectively than at present, through all five of its regional arms.

European championships: Again, both this report and the last one have already identified what I consider to be unresolved issues relating to IPC's programme of regional championships. EPC is currently the only region to offer a programme of sport-specific championships and even this begs an important question: Is this a development that IPC would wish to see in all regions and, if so, what is being done to encourage this? But there are other questions, too, that have an even greater significance for EPC: For example, what can EPC do to ensure that European championships are available in all Paralympic sports (whether 'IPC sports' or otherwise) ... even if this means moving from a two-year cycle to a four-year cycle ... and what are the implications for all of this of the move towards sports independence ... whose responsibility will it be (i) to ensure that these championships take place; (ii) to assume responsibility for their organisation; and (iii) to determine an equitable application of any capitation fees?

Marketing and fund-raising: I realise that this is a difficult and complex area for all concerned ... IPC, NPCs, Regions, IOSDs and Sports ... but the future viability of the entire Paralympic movement will, to a considerable extent, be determined by the ability of the whole movement to agree a sensible, equitable and workable framework for marketing, sponsorship and fund-raising more generally. I understand that there has been dialogue already between IPC and NPCs, but this can only benefit the whole movement if the needs of the other Paralympic stakeholders are taken into account as well.

Summary

In closing, let me say something about my decision, already communicated to all EPC members, not to seek re-election as President.

In particular, let me stress that this does not in any way indicate a lack of interest in EPC or a lack of faith in its Executive. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as EPC's President and to play a small part in its continuing evolution. When I took over from Hans Lindstrom four years ago, EPC was already the strongest region in the Paralympic family. I believe that it still is and I believe that it will probably remain so for some considerable time. But this is not my

achievement; it is yours ... as NPCs, IOSDs and Sports ... and that of your Executive, with whom I have been pleased to be associated over these past four years.

Indeed, my decision was not based on any negative feeling; rather a belief, reinforced by my observations of Phil Craven, Mike Brace and others, that there is real 'added value' to be derived ... at all levels of Paralympic operation ... from having a President who, in addition to whatever other qualities that may be required, has personal experience of the Paralympic Games as a Paralympian. As I have said already, my hope is that this General Assembly will see fit to ensure that this happens within EPC at the earliest opportunity ... but that is your decision and not mine.

There will doubtless be time later in the meeting for me to say a collective 'thank you' and to hand over the reins to my successor. For the time being, therefore, let me close this report in the usual way: by inviting questions, comments and, in due course, its formal receipt by this General Assembly. Thank you.

Dr Bob Price (EPC President)