

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Delegates,

I am very happy to welcome you here in the Czech Republic for this General Assembly and I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Roman HABASKO and the Czech Club for the excellent organisation of this event. We, the FISTC were already several times in this area, in the beautiful Karlovy Vary and two times also in Bozi Dar, beautiful places where we twice had the FISTC European Championships MD/LT.

This year my report will be mixed as we had some positive aspects and several negative ones during the past year.

We started the FISTC international season with the fourth European Cart Championship in Reingers, Austria. The race was really very well organised, by both the Club, the Federation SSVÖ and the Mayor of this charming city. The technical part of the race was well organised, the trails were very good and the stake-out large and quite comfortable. The weather was excellent for the dogs as it was very cold, but for us, as organisers, I personally found it a little bit too windy and snowy!! Yes, we had snow for the cart championships! The organisers did their utmost to reach a total success and they succeeded. We had a particularly nice musher evening and all participants really enjoyed it. I would say that it was a typical successful Austrian event!

Equipment and rules are still under review and final decisions will only be taken in 2012 but we really had no problems on that race. I would also add that we had no problems either with the new rules for travelling with dogs which were understood and accepted by all participants.

After this first FISTC championship in the season, we started enjoying a lot of snow in some parts of Europe, but in early December, too early for the racing season unfortunately. .

The lasting economic crisis continued to hit most of our countries, and we have also seen that on our domestic races we had a lower number of starters but when the real snow season started we faced another major problem this winter: there was little or no snow in most of the locations where races were organised, all over continental Europe. With only one or two or in some cases even no races at all organised at national level. Let's say that mushers who were able to race in Auronzo or Inzell were very happy this season.

In Inzell for example, people were informed by friends that the World Championship in Donovaly was cancelled... I had to call Walter several times to get the confirmation that the race would take place and the race was six times confirmed . So I was quite astonished when I reached Donovaly on Tuesday afternoon and saw by myself that there was very little snow there due to heavy rainfalls...

But what has been done by Donovaly and the Donly club was unbelievable. They expected the snow so they started preparing the trail with snow coming by trucks, from another place 22 km away! The weather was really not good, cold, and unfortunately windy. During the opening ceremony which as usual was almost perfect, many mushers were wondering how the race could take place over three days. During the ceremony, the priest blessed the race and that was certainly an excellent idea.

These were the 20 years of our sled dogs sport in Donovaly and we had tried to do our best to achieve a great success. In the end we were successful as the race took place and we were able to run the three heats over the three days. By chance weather conditions improved day by day. On day one, the race was quite difficult as the quality of the snow could not be perfect. Then the rain came! I should tell you that nobody can imagine how lonely the president of the FISTC can be in such times... At night, by 3.00 am I was walking around under the rain wondering how I would be able to tell my friends from Donovaly, Miro and Pavel and the others, that we would have to cancel the race on Saturday because of the rain... But the FISTC once again has been lucky because suddenly the rain turned into snow and the race could continue and the quality of the trails improved day by day.

So finally, we had a beautiful championship, and the FISTC and all participants want to thank very warmly Miro Dano, Pavel Toma, the Donly club and all the organisers for the fantastic work they put in place and for the succesful race they offered to all participants.

The new rules worked quite well. The new A2 class was also quite succesful and really beautiful to see. All participants were happy, and I would say particularly Berndt Sauerhöfer who got a gold medal and a new title that he had never had before! The only negative aspects of this championship were due to some countries that did not play the game as we had decided for the 20 years to have a big beautiful race.

On the other hand we had excellent news as we welcomed a new member, Russia that after a few years of trial has finally decided to join the FISTC. They were quite successful with one title for a young Russian musher. This once again confirms that we are growing and healthy!

After Donovaly, we had to wait three weeks before we could organise our FISTC Middle Distance and Long Trail Championships in Italy in Ospitale di Fanano, with the FIMSS.

There, and quite surprisingly, we had further weather problems, but then due to heavy snowfalls. Olivier Favre was there since Monday and the place received 3.3 meters of snow in five days, something quite unbelievable this winter. Unfortunately, this amount of snow combined with the strong wind blowing on top of the mountains had created some snowdrifts high about 7 meters in some places. Due to these conditions it was totally impossible despite the efforts put by all organisers, including the Italian mushers from both FIMSS and CIS who tried to do the trails walking with snowshoes on the supposed trail to try to enable the snowmachines to pass, were not successful.

While the trails we should use at the three cities where the race was organised were prepared, the trails to link these three places could not be prepared. By chance, we have excellent and very competent people in the FISTC, and I want to congratulate very warmly Olivier Favre, the race marshall who was able to find some solutions that enabled all the teams who were there to do a race, on two days only, but with two heats per day in order to run a minimum distance. Some mushers were very surprised before the start of the first heat on Saturday and some quite worried, but at the end all of them were happy with the solution and most of them were also quite surprised to learn what their dogs have been able to do and experienced that their dogs can do much more than what we can expect from them!

Under these extreme conditions of course the race was not perfect but we did it. Once again there has been quite a high cost for the organisers as once again weather conditions added more costs to what was planned.

The little participation was also due to the fact that many mushers, some of whose I contacted personally by phone, told me that they had had no chance to train their dogs properly for distance races and some others did not come because they did not believe that there would be snow in the South (in Italy) as they had no snow in their own country much more North.

Our sport is extremely dependent on weather conditions, particularly in the snow season and there is nothing we can do. There I also will let Olivier report in details on that race.

Overall, in this season once again the FISTC has been able to organise its three championships even in very difficult conditions, so we can at least be satisfied for this.

That is it for the sportive aspects of our activity. Now let's talk a little bit about some administrative aspects.

The first very positive organisation was the organisation of the race Marshall Course organised in Austria on 2nd and 3rd October 2010 and was, thanks to Olivier and Walter, a total success. Many participants, nine, from Germany, Austria, Belgium and Denmark were attending this course including two Board members, Gert Kronholm and Wolfgang Speer. All participants were enthusiastic. We have now decided to organise such a course every two years so the next one will be organised next season and we already have the demand from three participants.

After the decision taken by our General Assembly last year about dogs, in order to come back to our fundamentals, I mean that our dogs must be real FCI pure breed dogs! And FCI pure breed dogs mean dogs within the standard, in size, weight and type! This aspect has recently been confirmed by the FCI at the latest meeting of the FCI Sled Dogs Commission early May this year. A pure breed dog is only a dog with a pedigree AND within the standard of its breed. A pedigree only is not acceptable as it is only a piece of paper that is delivered by national organisations, too often without any controls!!! This means that the pedigree itself does not give any proof whether a dog is purebred, as you cannot even be sure of the parents except if you have the obligation of the DNA test for the puppies and the parents!

The FCI commission for sled dogs has made proposals to the FCI General Committee for new sled dogs working judges for the four Polar dogs' breeds. These judges already exist in countries like Finland and France. So soon, I hope, as the FCI General Committee should adopt the document in a few months time, we will be able to have working judges on our races who will be different from show judges, but they will be FCI judges!

Anti-doping, for example, is an issue that needs to be taken more and more seriously, not only at FISTC international level, but also at national level. This means that you will soon need to conform to WADA rules and organise for anti-doping controls on your national championships and races. In France, this year we had surprise control, done by the National Antidoping Agency on all our races but after a bad experience we had last year with one positive control, they were all negative this year. The main reason why I mention this

developing policy for anti-doping controls is that now, and France as a big nation is probably leading it in this area, these controls will soon be extended to all canine activities, and not only sled dogs and coursing hounds.

As from next season I think that for transparency purposes we should publish on our website all dogs tested and the results of anti-doping controls.

I would like to remind you that unfortunately we are under scrutiny for many other very strict rules that may then be edicted by the European Commission (where they understand very little about the dogs problems).

The initially stupid and totally unacceptable EU rule about the transportation of more than 5 dogs has been modified thanks to the efforts put in place by the FISTC, but also the IFSS, ESDRA and the FCI and several national organisations. Now the rule as it stands is acceptable as we need to do only one declaration before we leave the country and that declaration is valid for four months which for us represents the whole season. But one of the consequences of the application of this new rule is that they are working on the maximum number of dogs that can be allowed by person and new rules for the equipments at home as well as some minimum distances to neighbours when you have more than 9 dogs. It looks like if they would like to kill our sports. I have recently been informed that this is what is happening in Switzerland where, due to new laws, it becomes very difficult if not impossible in some areas to have more than four dogs... Luckily Switzerland is not a EU country but this shows on which trend some politicians are going.

The FISTC continues to increase its members slowly but surely. This year we will have, in a few minutes, the pleasure to welcome three new Members that have sent a complete set of documents in perfect order --- Luxemburg and Russia as well as a second Romanian club. Two other countries are still in the process to filling in all the documentation for membership, the USA and Estonia. These countries are willing to enter the FISTC because of our approach to pure breed dogs!

I meet new countries in the FCI regularly but there is still quite some time before we will see teams from the entire 83 FCI Member countries coming to our championships but that will come, many of these countries need to structure and develop the sport and the FCI commission is trying to help them to start..

Once again I repeat that it is fundamental for the future development of our pure breed sled dogs sports that we find new mushers where they are, and that we work more closely together with breeders and the world of dog shows. One further possibility is also that in a close future our four breeds will be declared as breeds subject to work by the FCI. Then all the dogs of breeders and other owners will have to work. This position is quite surprisingly pushed by Sweden actually. It is already done in France for the Siberian Husky and that works very well!

I would like to thank our board members and all the people who have been helping the FISTC in all our Member countries for all the work done. We continue to develop and improve and we must continue that way.

All together we have been able to promote our sports and our wonderful and lovely pure breed polar dogs, but we still have a lot to do. We need to continue to work in a positive

way and to progress, and our future should look bright if weather conditions do not deteriorate too much. Anyway, we must all work together to solve any arising problems but please always keep in mind the interests of our sport and of our Federation before the interests of some individuals. Don't forget that the FISTC is the result of many compromises made year by year. It is fragile and the equilibrium can be broken at any time which would then lead to the end of the FISTC as it is now and to the possible creation of another additional federation that would then split our sport even more.

*Thank you very much for your attention.
Franco MANNATO*