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## Special FIRA-AER Congress

EDITO



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### EUROPE UNITES TO RE-ELECT JEAN-CLAUDE BAQUÉ

What could have turned out to be a rather laborious 89th FIRA-AER General Assembly in fact proved to be far more than just a formality. The 44 candidates proposed by their unions to the Board of Directors were elected almost unanimously by the 44 nations (out of 47) present. The election of the Chairman of the Board was a brief affair following a unanimous decision by all present. This was a wonderful display of appreciation for Jean-Claude Baqué who has decided to give up his regional and union-related activities in order to devote his time, in-full and independently, to the affairs of European rugby, which he has served since 1996.

Just like his wonderful predecessor Albert Ferrasse, who sacrificed the global status of FIRA in order to establish a new structure based on geographical zones, resulting in the creation of the European Association, Jean-Claude Baqué took an ecumenical approach (in conjunction with the 6 Nations and the IRB) in his bid to strengthen FIRA-AER's foundations. Under his watch it acquired the standing of a pilot association and achieved full independent status, which included having its own headquarters. This status also extends to politics as the association is now recognised by the European institutions and sits on various consultative bodies. The next aim is to reach a target of 1, 200, 000 players (+20%) by 2015 by means of a project initiated in Prague by the Elite Educators. The curtain opener of this General Assembly was devoted to the next U18 Justin Bridou European Championship. The Committee from the Alps have broken the record in terms of the speed in which they have prepared the event. For the first time since its inception the organisers left the meeting armed with all the practical and sporting elements required from those nations taking part.

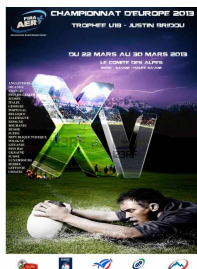
This edition details, in chronological order, the work carried out at the General Assembly. All areas (sporting, administrative, finance, regulations, ethos) were extensively covered at this General Assembly, which at the outset was described as "historic", and which most certainly lived up to that description.

**HENRI GATINEAU**



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## U18 Justin Bridou Trophy : The Alps comes out on top!

The opening of the 89th General Assembly was devoted to what Jean-Claude Baqué described as, "Our leading light youth competition: the U18 Justin Bridou Championship", adding that "Spain has set the bar very high" and expressing his hope that the Committee from the Alps would follow suit. This objective was indeed achieved and even surpassed in terms of the organisation of the event.

The Chairman of the alpine organisation committee, Gilbert Celli and his 200 volunteers succeeded in their task, thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of the participating nations, of providing all of the sporting and material elements (presented on a USB key with the FIRA-AER manual) relating to this competition, which according to Michel Arpaillange enjoys "global consensus". The triptych "one nation, one club, one community" aptly describes this event which provides enrichment on several levels (cultural and sporting exchanges and tourism). In terms of infrastructure the event will involve

3 departments: Isère, Savoie and Haute Savoie, comprising 59 clubs, 15,000 players and a stadium with a capacity of 20,000 for the final. There will be 12 international-level referees and 52 assessors, accommodation tailored to everyone's needs and a cultural week. All of this will be carried out to the highest standards to ensure the success of the 36 matches played by 624 players and 24 nations over the ten-day period. Jon Davis, Director of operations for the 6 Nations, described the competition as "perfect", adding that the organisation he represents is "Proud to be involved." This all augurs well for the extension of the contract which has almost reached its term!

Since the inception of this championship this is the first time that all issues (matches locations, dates, times, accommodation) have been resolved in time for the winter General Assembly. The Alpine organisers therefore justly deserve the compliments paid by Jean-Claude Baqué and Jon Davis. All matches will be filmed, some will be televised and all players will be covered by insurance. Medical back up (doctors and emergency services) is also guaranteed. What more could we ask for!

## Competitions : Improvements at Elite level require changes at youth level



In his introduction to the meeting devoted to competitions (Men's and Women's) Michel Arpaillange stated that "seven World Cups have been played since 1987. Six have been won by countries from the southern hemisphere with only one being won by the northern hemisphere (England in 2003). We therefore need to improve our standard. Any significant improvement will require a new approach at youth level".

We are not going to go into every detail of the various competitions from the Camps U16/U17 (35 nations) to the Seniors, the tournaments U17 CB (8 nations), the U18 (32 nations), the U19 category (which is very dear to the IRB, and in which Portugal and Italy will participate in the Junior World Rugby Trophy in Chile), U20 (8 nations), Senior 7s and XV's. With regard to Sevens rugby, however, it is worth noting the involvement of Société Générale in the organisation of an U19s tournament in

April 2013. This event will take place over two days and plans for a similar competition for women in 2014 are underway. For the Women's World Cup 2014, a qualifying tournament will be put in place following visits to the countries concerned. The first two countries in the Madrid tournament will be added to the first four from the 6 Nations. France is the host nation for the event. A plan to improve all competitions (over one year rather than two) will be examined and implemented by the new Board.

As the IRB world rankings of 96 nations impacted unfavourably on European nations, Jean-Claude Baqué and Michel Arpaillange encouraged the European nations to take up the gauntlet in order to progress and improve their rankings. They are advocating the creation of inter-hemisphere tournaments which could have the knock-on benefit of leading to commercial opportunities. Another way to improve could be to organise matches at club level (cross border competitions) based on geographical zones. The first step in this direction has already been taken with the event won by the Germans from Heidelberg. The Black Sea initiative is also already up and running. Jean-Claude Baqué encouraged countries to set up their own initiatives stating that, "we can help you with ideas, structures and referees. We will give you as much help as we can with regard to making contacts".



## Extension of partnership with Société Générale



In his opening address to the Board of Directors and the Ordinary General Assembly, Jean-Claude Baqué expressed, to Caroline Guillaumin, Communications Manager, his pleasure at being asked to speak on this special occasion and in such convivial circumstances. He spoke of the friendship they shared, describing it as a partnership in the true sense of the word. He thanked her for her help in the past and anticipated her help in the future (the contract has been renewed up to June 2016 with an increase of 22%). He thanked the bank for its sponsorship of the U19s Sevens Tournament which bears its name and assured it of FIRA-AER's total support in the staging of this event.

Ms Guillaumin, expressed her delight at the extension of the contract and at the bank's firm commitment to youth rugby and also to Sevens rugby which is to be included in the Olympic Games. She reminded the audience of Société Générale's firm commitment to rugby worldwide (major

partner of the World Cup 2015) and expressed her personal pleasure at being able to attend the General Assembly.

Pierre Camou, who was next to speak, also expressed his pleasure in welcoming the FIRA Congress: "FIRA represents a dream, the dream of human rights and the possibility to live together as equals" He announced that "France does not want to overshadow FIRA but rather to lead the way towards autonomy and to ensure that FIRA remains truly European and continues to be a central force in future achievements". The Chairman of the F.F.R. congratulated Jean-Claude Baqué for the manner in which he represented FIRA-AER and the work he carried out during his 78 years, at the final session of the International Rugby Board Council.

Jean-Claude Baqué thanked the two speakers for their words and announced that he has given up his work in the Pyrenees and at national level in order to devote himself solely and independently to FIRA-AER.

## Finances show a surplus in 2012



Before starting his two-fold presentation (accounts 2011-2012 and the budget for future competitions), General Treasurer, José Maria Epalza highlighted that 75% of expenditure related to the sporting sector and that this figure is on the decline. Jean-Claude Baqué responded by stating that the IRB was pleasantly surprised by this and noted that, apart from the two Board members and the two FIRA staff who receive a salary, everyone else participated on a voluntary basis.

The figures were presented to all nations in attendance so there is no need to go into them in too much detail. There are, however, a few points worthy of mention: The first year of the commercial company started negatively, however it was quickly turned around; the senior teams are to receive an increase in aid (16%) as will the U18s (3%); FIRA-AER invested €513,000 of its own funds (22% increase) in the organisation of competitions despite a 10% increase (€1.8 million instead of 1.7) in

funding from the IRB; While 2011 ended with a budgetary deficit (minus €48,000), 2012 ended with a surplus of €40,000; Profit came in at €97,000, however it is estimated that €360,000 will be required to meet future needs; The IRB's contribution of €180 000, will be put in a reserve fund by FIRA-AER; The IRB balances its accounts in December at the end of the calendar year, whereas FIRA-AER does not do so until June, at the end of the sporting year.

The auditor's report certified all accounts, without exception to be above board and in compliance with standards. The report was favourable in all areas.

A decision on an eventual increase in aid to countries will be taken at the next Executive Committee meeting.

## Jean-Claude Baqué elected Chairman



The Assembly continued its work while the election was taking place, with Daniel Mitrea from Romanian acting as intermediary Chairman. The vote resulted in the election of 44 members. There are 13 new members representing 33% of the overall board. (See internet site).

The only candidate for the Presidency, Jean-Claude Baqué was elected to the cheers of those assembled. His immediate words were "For those of you who have participated in our development and our no longer concerned ...", then gathering himself he went on to deliver this emotional message: "The heart has reasons that reason cannot understand. I want to be with you. To devote myself entirely to you for whom I have such affection. That is why I want to continue".

Following this he addressed the new Board of Directors, stating that "the massive vote you have received from your peers is a vote of recognition. You are a true team. You have been chosen by

your unions and elected according to our democratic principles".



## A well-balanced and functional management team



The Executive Committee, composed of Jean-Claude Baqué, Jean-Louis Barthès, Drazen Colnago, Jonathan Dance, Martin Davies, José Maria Epalza, Archie Ferguson, Stephen Hilditch, Bernard Jargeac, Vyacheslav Kopiev, Raul Martins, Octavian Morariu, Dany Roelands, Tullio Rosolen, was appointed in accordance with FIRA bylaws. The choice of the ten Vice-chairmen represents a balanced geographic spread with from Portugal : Amado Da SILVA ; England : Benjamin Calveley ; Spain; Javier Gonzalez Cancho ; France: René Hourquet (Pierre Camou having voluntarily given up his position) ; Russian : Vyacheslav Kopiev ; Poland ; Jan Kozlowski (who is to represent FIRA-AER on a permanent basis in Brussels) ; Romania : Octavian Morariu; Georgia : George Nijaradze ; Scotland: Bill Nolan ; and finally from Italy: Zeno Zanandrea.

Jean-Louis Barthes was re-elected to his position as General Secretary and will be assisted by the newly elected Gilbert Celli from San Marino who has proven his credentials following his organisation of the Justin Bridou Champion. The José Maria Epalza/Ole Nielsen duo will continue in their roles as General Treasurer and Deputy General Treasurer. As Jean-Claude Baqué put it, "why change a winning team"!

From his well-balanced team, for whom he takes full responsibility, Jean-Claude Baqué expects "total collaboration in order to become stronger and more progressive" The objective, he suggested is to "create a strategic plan which it will be up to us to develop and put into action. The last plan was a 90% success. The new members of the Board should bring a more dynamic approach. I will be consulting extensively with the IRB, the Vice-chairmen and the 6 Nations. We need to take advantage of everyone's knowledge and ideas. Every Vice-chairman will be expected to tell me what they want, what sector they would like to work in. I want to create an impressive team to develop the game. The composition of the Committees will happen only after all of these consultations and reflections have taken place. My only regret is that we have no women on the team"

## A target of one million two hundred thousand players by 2015



In his address on competitions, Michel Arpaillange had already broached this particular subject by stating the need to "strengthen our competitions in order to catch up on the southern hemisphere (2 working groups, 6 Nations and all European countries) while remaining aware of the economic realities involved". He probed the issue further with Douglas Langley in their address on the Prague Conference and the "Get into Rugby Europe" initiative. Their idea is to use the occasion of the World Cup in England to work on relationships between clubs and primary schools, using club coaches trained by FIRA-AER who will provide the funding and skills required.

This project which is also be undertaken by the IRB and England will be of primary importance over the next four years. Thirty one countries have already signed up. All possible means will be employed to attract and retain new players. The target is to reach 1, 200 000 licensed players. This

would represent an increase of 20% by 2015. According to IRB figures there are currently 1, 029, 858 players. In Prague, a pilot project has been introduced. This will commence in Scandinavia in February next and will initially involve three countries, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The linguistic unity of these nations will enhance efficiency and the aim will be to extend the initiative to adjacent countries at a later date.

Jean-Claude Baqué considers this to be a fundamental initiative involving educators and coaches and he promised that "FIRA-AER will give it 120% support". He went on to explain that "we have already experienced the booster effect of the World Cup 2007 in France which increased our player numbers by 30%. All levels of management should be involved in this. All possible technical and financial support will be made available. The IRB also has an initiative underway with the involvement of England. Europe has a great chance to succeed as the framework is already in place. This initiative may also provide commercial opportunities and revive governmental funding", he concluded.

## Regulations : David Carrigy goes the whole hog



Initially it was intended that Regulation 22 would be the sole subject of the IRB representative, David Carrigy's address. However, he ended up giving a rather longer address in which he highlighted the responsibility of the Chairmen and Secretaries General to insure that the regulations are clearly understood and complied with, whether they be in relation to artificial surfaces, anti-doping matters or other issues. The 400-page IRB manual should not frighten us. "If you have difficulties, ask for explanations", he urged. "We have produced a summary in English, French and Spanish which should make this easier for you.

Regulation 8 concerning national representation is essential. Regulation 9 which deals with the availability of players for international matches and insurance matters is equally important. Regulation 11 (advertising within the playing enclosure) provides information on restrictions.

Regulation 16 clarifies that all matches organised officially by FIRA do not require the approval of the IRB. Only friendly matches (clubs and countries) require IRB approval. All regulations apply to both men's and women's games. Regulation 7 concerns foul play in the game. Regulation 21 concerning anti-doping issues is complicated but very important. "You must ensure that your players are aware of their responsibilities. They should be made aware of the regulations and then take responsibility for complying with them".

Jean-Claude Baqué (sponsorship opportunities) and Patrick Robin (deficiency rule) completed this presentation which led on to Regulation 22 (artificial pitches) which we will deal with next.



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## 862 artificial pitches in official use



The Andorran example was the first to be addressed. This is a publicly owned pitch in the city centre, refurbished using 2 million euros provided by U.F.A. This represents two thirds of the overall cost, the government having provided the final third. The pitch was refurbished to host half a dozen international soccer matches. The other dates were assigned to rugby matches since the pitch dimensions meet with the required standards. It can accommodate 3,000 spectators.

Following Pierre Camou's suggestion that football and rugby pitches have different standard requirements, David CARRIGY assured him that the Andorran pitch fully complies with IRB rule 22 and that FIRA has worked with them in collaboration on this. This was followed by a submission from the IRB official supplier who insisted that the product had to comply with both FIRA and IRB requirements in order to insure that safety standards were met by the seven certified manufacturers

who are essentially responsible for the project. The most important consideration is what goes under the synthetic grass. Quality assurance is a key factor. Research and development has been going on in this area for 30 years. FIFA and the IRB have produced a memorandum of understanding on a feasibility study. The length of the fibres has been agreed at 60 mm. A layer of rubber placed under the grass will absorb impact.

There are 732 (563 in Europe) artificial soccer pitches throughout the world which comply with the highest standards. There are 130 artificial rugby pitches and only 83 of these are also suitable for soccer. The IRB and the governments of different countries (for environmental reasons) could be called on for material aid and the approval of the IRB is essential in this area.

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## Six Nations protocol agreement: France the only dissenting voice



Since January 2011 and following the Lisbon Treaty, the 6 Nations have been keen to participate in European institutions. A document implicating FIRA-AER, the IRB and the 6 Nations was drafted to help increase cooperation with the common aim of developing rugby and collaborating on field studies.

This unbiased document deals with all the relationship difficulties of the past and should prove beneficial to all parties involved. It does not involve signing with the Commercial Company but rather with the Chairmen of the Six Nations. It will be implemented on a trial basis for one year. The FIRA-AER Executive Committee was favourable to the initiative. Pierre Camou, however, expressed his discontent with the agreement stating that "In the name of France and of Liberty, in the name of 78 years of Europe and FIRA, I shall not oppose it; however I shall not sign it"

When put to a vote the protocol was accepted by all nations, with the exception of France.

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## David CARRIGY : IRB-FIRA partnership has never been stronger



It was the job of David Carrigy, representative and spokesperson for the IRB Chairman, Bernard Lapasset, to conclude the General Assembly. He congratulated Jean-Claude Baqué and all the elected members and expressed his desire to get down to working with them as soon as possible. He paid tribute to Raul Martins for his activities on the Board and expressed his pleasure in welcoming his successor, Octavian Morariu. Octavian's father, Viorel was awarded the Vernon Pugh trophy, by a unanimous decision, for his service to rugby.

David Carrigy spoke of the importance of this particular moment in time: "This is a crucial moment for us. The IRB-FIRA partnership to develop rugby has never been stronger. The IRB fully supports the protocol agreement with the 6 Nations which should result in a united voice at European level.

This relationship is fundamental. FIRA-AER has reached new heights both in terms of information technology and organisation. Well done to Russia for organising the Sevens World Cup. The last Consultative Committee meeting was very positive in this regard. Jean-Claude Baqué's report on the role played by the Associations was remarkable. Continue to comply with the regulations, especially concerning the availability of players for international matches. Well done once again for all your work. Enjoy the end of year celebrations, you have earned it."

Jean-Claude Baqué responded as follows: "Thank you, your words express exactly what we want to achieve". With that the reappointed Chairman of FIRA-AER brought the 89th General Assembly to a close with the awarding of the traditional shields to the 2012 champions; Georgia, Belgium, Lithuania, Switzerland, Israel, Cyprus and Bosnia Herzegovina.



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## Stockholm Congress (5/6 July 2013)



Deadline for enrolment is the end of February. Details on fees will be provided to the organisers. A sporting event by young Scandinavians is scheduled. The closing dinner will take place on a boat.

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## 162, 000 tickets on sale for Sevens World Cup in Moscow



The Russian administrative staff gave a comprehensive presentation, accompanied by documentation, of the event which will take place in seven months' time. 11,187 tickets have already been sold. Various events for young people and a music festival are scheduled. Jean-Claude Baqué congratulated Russia on what he described as a "cocktail of sport and culture".

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## Info Summary



1. FIRA-AER medal goes to Claus Peter Bach. The efficient, loyal and long-serving devotee of European and German rugby, Claus Peter, was honoured by Jean-Claude Baqué in an emotional exchange.
2. Vernon Pugh trophy goes to Viorel Morariu. The International Rugby Board awarded the Vernon Pugh trophy, which honours distinguished individuals who have served Rugby, to Viorel Morariu, the former Romanian Chairman, vice Chairman of FIRA and former captain of his national XV's team. Morariu also served as the FIRA representative on the IRB Board from 1995 to 1997. We extend our warmest congratulations to him.

1. England, Spain and Poland apply to host the 2014 U18s Justin Bridou Championship. Applications should be made by January 15. The successful country will be announced during the Executive Committee meetings on 29 and 30 January and they will be required to present their proposal at the July Congress in Stockholm.

2. The winter General Assembly 2013 to be held on 29 and 30 November at the Société Générale. Following the customary exchange of courtesies with the head of Communications, Ms Caroline Guillaumin, Jean-Claude Baqué, combined pleasantries and practicalities by setting a date for next year's event. This was enthusiastically agreed by all.

3. Welcome to the new Chairmen and Champions. Javier Gonzalez Cancho, Tim Shepherd, Alfredo Gavazzi and Alan Lawson. England (Men's 7s), Romania (7s div A), Croatia (7s div B), Poland (U20), Portugal (U19), France (Beach Rugby).

4. Three absentees. 44 countries took part in the elections. Liechtenstein, Malta and Armenia were absent.

5. Unanimous approval. The minutes of the General Assembly meeting, the Board meeting in Odense and the Executive Committee meeting in Paris were unanimously approved.

6. F.F.R. support. The F.F.R. is to accommodate FIRA-AER free of charge. It has also provided financial support (fitting out and rent) for the office move.

7. New headquarters. The new headquarters will, of course, be open to all countries according to Gilles Bizot. It is located at 5 de la rue de Liège, 75009 PARIS, and is comprised of 4 offices and a large conference room which can accommodate all Executive Committee sessions.



8. 45 Technical Directors trained by FIRA-AER over the past number of years, according to Michel Arpaillange. Only Andorra (which intends to get one) and Armenia do not currently have an NTD.

9. Information Technology: FIRA leading the way. Bernard Jargeac, who heads up the Communications Committee, was complimented by the IRB for his work at the analysis stage of the next generation IT application on which a six-member committee is working. The team is currently working on requirements gathering with a view to creating a new application.

10. Improvements in the commercial sector. Gilles Bizot dealt with the partnership sector. The Commercial Company is up and running. Contracts with Société Générale and G.M.F. have been renewed. An agreement with the agency Essentially (TV and marketing rights) has been signed. The process of recruiting a salesperson is underway. This person will be tasked with finding partners for men's and women's Xvs and 7s competitions.

11. Raul Martin's report. Raul Martins, FIRA-AER representative at the IRB for seven years, gave a report on the activities he has been involved in before thanking the Assembly for the confidence they have shown in him and before handing over to Octavian Morariu.

12. The Executive Committee in action. The Committee will meet again in Paris on 29 and 30 January and again on 21 and 22 May.

13. Gibraltar may be admitted at General Assembly this summer. Gibraltar's application will be examined at the next Executive Committee meeting. A rapporteur will examine the file on the spot to ensure it is correctly formulated and a decision on Gibraltar's membership will be made in Stockholm.

14. Greece - Member of IRB on a trial basis for one year. Greece's application to become a full-time member which was supported by FIRA-AER, needs to be regularised as it does not currently fulfil all criteria. The IRB will facilitate this process.

15. Armenia suspended. Armenia has been suspended for non-payment of its IRB subscription and for inactivity until such time as it regularises its financial situation. FIRA-AER will take the same action if necessary, should it fails to comply with the FIRA bye-laws.

16. Applications for committees before 29 December. Candidates for the 12 committees (Competitions, Development, Women's, Refereeing, Medical, Legal, Communications-partnerships, International relations, Elite, Sevens, Finance and European institutions) need to have their applications in by the 20 December deadline.

17. 2014 Congress in Croatia. Following Spain's gracious decision to withdraw its application, Croatia (Split) has won the honour of hosting the summer 2014 Congress beating the Czech Republic and Bulgaria in the process.

18. Thanks from the Chairman. Before passing on his best wishes for Christmas and the New Year, Jean-Claude Baqué thanked his close collaborators at the Société Générale, the group of interpreters and all those who contributed to making the 89th General Assembly such an outstanding success.

