

*Comment from CIVL President Agust Gudmundsson, in response to questions submitted by Cross Country magazine, December 2013. Un-edited.*

*Agust Gudmundsson writes:*

The CIVL is happy to comment on and clarify its position with respect to the cancellation of the Hang Gliding European Championships that were to be held in Arangoiti, Spain in 2014.

There has been speculation and mud-slinging in various social media and rather than get involved in that, we would like to explain the decision in more detail so that pilots can understand the situation.

In the past the CIVL has been criticized for being less than transparent and for making hasty, knee-jerk decisions. We are aware of this criticism and take it to heart in every decision that we make, particularly difficult decisions like this one.

First, it is important to point out that the CIVL has the respect for Juaki Sanchez Garcia as a individual and as an organizer of several successful Category 1 competitions in recent years. He also organises a number of Category 2 competitions most years.

It is exactly this respect for Juaki and his team that keeps us out of the mudslinging game that goes on in the social media.

There was no bid received before the bid deadline for the 2014 HG Europeans. Juaki approached CIVL late last year with a proposal for the competition. It was an unusual bid as the HG Euros with a budget providing for all costs to be covered by pilot entry fees alone.

Because of the lack of bids for hang gliding events in recent times and because the CIVL knows and has seen Juaki's excellent organizational skills in past competitions, the bid was accepted.

Although there was some reluctance in light of the limited budget, we were hopeful that a Category 1 event could be pulled off with low budget.

CIVL was ready to see if it was possible to make a good Category 1 competition with limited funding. In order to make it more feasible CIVL accepted also to have the Jury members remote so only officials from FAI/CIVL were the Steward and Jury President.

The remote Jury was first tested in the HG Worlds Forbes in January 2013, with mixed results as no HG competition has had as many protests in years.

Unfortunately, after the test event last summer, it became apparent there were many issues.

Some of the issues have been seen on various forums. But to be clear there were two main factors relating to this cancellation.

One is the limited budget for the competition. With limited budget the organizer cannot have the staff and facilities needed for safe and smooth running of the organization.

The other was difficulties in cooperation with the organizer, who felt he knew better than the sporting code rules and was not ready to do what is required. Part of that is for sure related to the limited budget, where the organizer understandably is reluctant to add staff when funds are not available.

The final conclusion was the test event was not acceptable, safety was compromised and the organizer was not willing to make the necessary changes needed. In the sporting code the organizer is obliged to implement all safety recommendations of the officials.

Finally the FAI officials of this competition recommended to cancel the main event because of safety and the above mentioned issues. The steward reports are confidential and intended to address issues directly and have direct recommendation for changes needed for the main event.

In this process it was clearly seen the pilot entry fees alone are simply not enough to cover the expenses associated with expected standards for a Cat 1 competition. Be clear that pilots expect (as they should) value for the extra cost of a Cat 1 event. They expect dedicated officials like scorekeepers, launch helpers, goal crew, safety director, weatherman, etc. Few individuals in the competition community are willing and able to serve in these positions for free.

Cancelling an event is a decision everyone is unhappy about. CIVL is not happy having to cancel an event, the organizer is not happy personally or professionally and the pilots are not happy, but sometimes it is necessary to take the right decisions even it is not popular.

Where should CIVL draw the line of what is acceptable and what is not? Such a decision is always debatable as each have their own views and references.

The decision was not made without consideration of the implications. The event is based on Organizer Agreement which has to be taken into account. The organizer did breach the Agreement and accepted the cancellation.

Before making a final decision, we seriously looked into the option of sanctioning the event elsewhere. The last thing we wanted to do was leave pilots without a European Championship in 2014. The possibility of a European Championships in 2014 is still there and we hope to have an announcement on that very soon.

But, complaining in the social media accomplishes little other than to inflame the situation. Getting involved - providing input to your national delegate - or better yet, BE your national delegate, show up at the Plenary and participate, or get involved with the HG or PG committees. This is productive and accomplishes much more than sitting on the side-lines and complaining about decisions of others if you aren't willing to participate.

CIVL is part of FAI, the International Airsports Federation. CIVL overlooks official Hang and Paragliding championships and records at the world and continental levels that are recognized by countries of the world.

FAI and CIVL have set high standards so their events are as stated in the sporting code a safe, fair and satisfying contests. Such high standards have a cost, which might explain why finding competition organizers is harder in times of economic difficulties. CIVL is doing as much as it can to cut down on these costs, but this cannot be done if as a consequence safety is at risk.

Pilots tend to forget the fact that CIVL is volunteer organization. Only one person – the competition coordinator – is part time paid employee handling over 300 competition sanctioning and results every year.

CIVL Officers and Bureau members (all professionally active except one retiree) take on their personal time and holidays to attend meetings and communicate year-long on whatever comes up, trying to build the best sport possible. The CIVL Bureau members mainly current or former competition pilots and/or competition organizers. (<http://www.fai.org/civl-about-us/civl-organisation>)

CIVL has made more effort to involve pilots than has been in the past. The Hang gliding and Paragliding committees are now by vast majority currently active competition pilots of each discipline.

This involvement of active pilots is very important for the competition world and we encourage interested pilots to approach CIVL to participate in the rulemaking process, i.e. guide CIVL to the right path 😊  
CIVL is US not THEM.

Agust Gudmundsson  
CIVL President

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