



24 January 2018

IRF Response to Mr. Danilo Barmaz

The IRF firmly rejects many of the statements made in the letter, proposal, and 'manifesto' that Barmaz has recently sent to several of our IRF member organizations. Many of these statements are intentionally misleading and factually incorrect. When considered as a whole, it brings into question Barmaz's truthfulness on every level. Our response to these inaccuracies are detailed below.

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1. IRF Meetings With Barmaz

Barmaz is completely untruthful in his statement that the IRF was not willing to work with him.

- a. IRF President Joe Willis Jones met with Barmaz on several occasions to discuss his ideas for fast-tracking rafting into the Olympics - meetings at ERC and WRC events, and making three separate trips to Italy to meet on this subject. At no time did Barmaz seriously consider working with the IRF. Instead Barmaz was focused on recruiting Mr. Jones to abandon the IRF, and to provide him with the names of IRF leaders who also might be interested in abandoning the IRF to help create a new organization.
- b. Barmaz was invited to become a member of an IRF working committee tasked to pursue IRF membership in GAISF (a prerequisite to IOC recognition). He refused to participate.
- c. Mr. Jones offered to create an IRF Olympic committee and offered to appoint Barmaz as the head of this committee so that he would have the full backing of the IRF to pursue his ideas. He rejected this proposal.
- d. Mr. Jones met with Barmaz and an IOC member to discuss the best way to get rafting into the Olympics. An agreement was made to closely work together on this objective. Barmaz later refused to honor this agreement.
- e. Mr. Jones wrote to the ICF to open a dialog on how the IRF and the ICF could work together on this project with Barmaz's participation. Barmaz became furious that Mr. Jones required that the IRF be part of negotiations with the ICF and severed all further contact.

The IRF has a complete record of all emails sent between Barmaz and Mr. Jones, and a recorded conversation of one of their meetings that provides evidence of these facts. Several other IRF BOD and members also reported that Barmaz attempted to recruit them, and asked that the conversations be kept secret from the IRF.

2. Nothing New, just a Blue Print of the IRF

Barmaz's plan for a new organization is a blue print taken from the IRF's 20 years of experience and constant evolution — it is nothing new or wonderful, it is theft — of our R6 and R4 formats (including the recent changes to our H2H discipline), our Guide Training program, our committees, strategies, and focuses.

Barmaz opines that the IRF is a 'weak' organization that should be abandoned; while ironically, he attempts to recruit IRF members to join him. Our members ARE the IRF, so clearly he does not think the IRF is weak... he simply does not agree with the majority. If Barmaz's desire is to lead our members in a different direction then he has always had the opportunity to stand for office in the IRF and ask to be democratically elected by our members.

3. Vague Promises, Misleading Information and Suspect Leadership

Barmaz offers no verifiable proof of his promises. We are expected to take him at his word. If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is... so we simply ask, where is the proof, where is the evidence to support these claims?

- a. *Barmaz states that the IOC and ICF have 'shared and approved this project'.*
This is untrue. Barmaz does have an Italian friend who is a member of the ICF BOD, and an Italian friend who is a member of the IOC. These individuals do not represent the entire IOC and ICF. In any case, ICF and IOC decisions to approve new sports and policies are public record and can easily be verified. No such record exists. Furthermore, IOC decisions on new Olympic disciplines are decided many years in advance of the Olympic Games, by a vote held by the entire IO committee of 105 active members. This is not a decision made by Barmaz's friends during closed door meetings.
- b. *Barmaz says that in April the ICF is going to 'recognise their movement', but that it will be independent of the ICF.*
In other words, this organisation will not be a part of the ICF. As an independent organization, this also means that Barmaz's movement would not be recognized by GAISF or the IOC. He will need to follow the same process and timeline for recognition that the IRF is forced to follow... except he will be starting with no history, no experience, and no knowledge.

Let's be clear... the ICF has never expressed interest in rafting and has never supported raft racing at all. Any interest that the current ICF leadership might show Barmaz now is purely to support their own hidden agenda and goals. The ICF leadership has adapted the radical belief that all paddle sports belong to them. They openly reject all paddle sport organizations that are not under their direct control, and actively work to undermine and divide such organizations. This is verified by the very public battle they waged to try and keep the International Dragon Boat Federation out of GAISF, and their current battle with the International Surfing Association over SUP. They would love to see the IDBF, the ISA, and the IRF fail. They do not want to see the IRF recognized by GAISF or the IOC. Barmaz plays directly into their hands as his desire to divide rafting furthers this aim.

- c. *Barmaz says that by being recognized by the ICF, his movement will be 'indirectly' recognized by the IOC.*

What is 'indirect' IOC recognition? The IOC does not indirectly recognize sports federations. If the IOC does not directly recognize an organisation, it cannot participate in the Olympics. This is a simple basic fact. It is very misleading to pretend that a vague association with the ICF will open a magic pathway to get rafting into the Olympics.

- d. *Barmaz lists a handful of countries “ready to sign”.*
Having checked with our members from these countries, we have discovered that this list is very exaggerated. There are a few individuals who do not represent an IRF member organization and who have fallen foul of IRF Race Rules or Bylaws that the IRF has reprimanded, and so are interested in his proposal as a way to seek revenge. The majority of our members who Barmaz has contacted have emphatically rejected his proposal, and some are expressing anger that they are being used in this way – especially because they realize that his proposal is inaccurate and would create a division in rafting. They do not want to abandon the IRF to start over with a new organization, based on misinformation and deceit.
- e. *The vast majority of our members have NOT been approached by Barnaz to give their opinion; only specific individuals who Barmaz believes are dissatisfied with the IRF.*
Clearly, his goal is not to form a genuinely democratic organization of rafters, but to band together only with individuals that agree with him, or are gullible enough to be persuaded by his distortions.
- f. *Members of the Serbian Rafting Federation have reported this week that Purjakov has ejected 6 clubs from their federation (at least half of its voting members) right before their election - all clubs which were very unhappy with his leadership and wish to replace him. Purjakov has disregarded several IRF Bylaws and race rules and is very unhappy with the IRF for enforcing these rules.*
- g. *It is ironic that the IRF was created specifically because of problems in Italy.* In 1994, a rafting championship that was hosted by Barmaz and his Italian organisers was so unfair and chaotic, that the attending countries decided to create the IRF to prevent such a disaster from reoccurring.
- h. *It is noteworthy that the most tragic accident to occur in IRF competition history happened in Italy under Barmaz’s leadership when a competitor drowned at the 2010 ERC. This caused the IRF to completely revise our competition safety rules because we realized that some of our members could not be trusted to provide adequate safety without strict guidance.*
- i. *In Barmaz’s proposal, he pretends to compare the ‘Italian model’ for guide training with the IRF GTE system.* The reality is that IRF certification fees are a THIRD of the cost of the fees he proposes – IRF certification fees are assessed for 3 years, not 1 year.

4. Rafting and Olympics

Mr. Peter Micheler, (head of the IRF International Relations Committee and former IRF President), who is very knowledgeable about the Olympic system and the ICF, and has been passionate about getting rafting to the Olympics since he first hosted the founding meeting of the IRF, spoke at length at our 2017 Congress about the realities of getting rafting into the Olympics. ([See relevant sections highlighted in the Congress Minutes](#)) If you are interested in the Olympics we strongly suggest you read this.

In summary, Mr. Micheler explained that reaching the Olympics via the ICF is a distant and improbable possibility. The ICF is allowed to take approximate 325 athletes to the Olympics.

Among these athletes, 16 Gold medals are distributed - 12 in Sprint, and 4 in Slalom (taken from Sprint in 1992). Flatwater Sprint completely dominates the ICF, and it will never give up additional Olympic Sprint medals for any new discipline.

Any change to this scenario must come from the IOC, by them awarding the ICF with additional athlete slots for whitewater. This is VERY unlikely to happen anytime soon and probably not at all. The IOC does not want the Olympic field to grow any bigger than it already is. But if more slots are awarded, the ICF has several other disciplines that are ready and waiting for this opportunity (Boater Cross, Downriver Sprint, Free style, Kayak Polo, etc). Rafting would be at the very bottom of the list.

On the very slim chance that our R4 might be able to reach the Olympics through the ICF, the IRF has been willing to negotiate with the ICF, and has approached the ICF to open a dialog on how this could work for the benefit of all. The ICF has shown absolutely no interest. Their first interest is in preserving and protecting their current Olympic disciplines, and they have aggressively attacked any paddle sports organization that they see as a threat to the status quo.

5. Duel Membership

It has been implied that if our members join a new international *rafting* organisation they can remain a member of the IRF. This is untrue. GAISF and the IOC specifically require only one organisation to be the federation governing its sport on a world level. To do otherwise creates a severe conflict of interest that is damaging to the sport. IRF Bylaws and membership applications follow this common practice, stating that our members “acknowledge the IRF as the sole governing body of international rafting.”

6. Guide Training and Education

The IRF's GTE program is seen around the world as THE gold standard for guide training and certification and many Italian guides desire this certification. It is less expensive than the Italian system and recognized around the world rather than only in Italy. The Italian fees are much more expensive primarily because they are also used to support race activities, a practice that most Italian guides strongly disagree with but have no say in.

As mentioned above, Barmaz's proposal includes guide certification fees that are triple the cost of the IRF's. The IRF does not expect or depend on the GTE program to support racing. In the IRF, our policy is that each of our programs are required to be self-supporting. This is a standard and practical business approach used around the world. Race fees are used to support racing, and raft guide certification fees are used to support the GTE program.

The IRF does not offer insurance coverage as a part of the GTE certification for a very simple and logical reason. Worldwide Insurance that covers guides in all countries of the world is prohibitively expensive. It is far easier and less costly for insurance to be managed on a country-by-country level. Barmaz is clearly ignorant of this simple fact – a sure indication that he has never examined the issue. Criticizing something that he knows nothing about is not a good indication of his leadership skills.

Questions members need to be asking themselves:

1. Is the IRF really doing a bad job? (Sure – it can improve, and it does, every year. The standard of our events and of our GTE system have both leaped ahead recently – the WRC in Japan was our best ever, easily matching or surpassing any event offered in the adventure sports world!)
2. Are the promises and claims Barmaz makes for his proposed organisation realistic or true? Where is the proof?
3. Do the leaders of this proposed new organisation have our member's best interests at heart?
4. How will this proposed organisation fund itself?

5. Why has Barmaz decided to put energy and manpower hours into this proposal and lobbying our members to join him, instead of joining us by working on our GAISF application or working towards achieving the Olympic goal?
6. How much harm will be done by Barmaz to our effort to have GAISF recognize rafting as a legitimate sport and take rafting to the Olympics by his attempt to divide our members?

Final Thoughts

Barmaz's reasons for creating a new organisation (as per his proposal) are extremely faulty:

Barmaz - International Federation IRF - not part of the international sport world.

IRF response - This is true, and this is because of not being members of GAISF. GAISF membership has always been the IRF's goal, but it is not easy and we had to satisfy the requirements first, which we now have. Recently, some of our members have been informed that they must have GAISF recognition to continue to receive government funds and so this has become urgent. Very recent changes to the GAISF system have made it a much more obtainable goal than in past years. If we remain unified, and work together, the IRF will be able to achieve this goal in the very near future.

Barmaz is mostly ignorant of GAISF and has little interest in it. Italian sports organizations have no need of GAISF recognition because all Italian sports, by law, are supported and funded by the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI). Even still, FIRaft is only recognized by CONI as a simple associate sport, which is easily obtained by meeting a few simple requirements. Barmaz has failed to help FIRaft meet the requirements necessary to be recognized by CONI as a proper sport federation. If Barmaz cannot manage to get proper recognition for FIRaft in his own country, it brings into question how he will manage to do it for other national federations on a worldwide level.

Barmaz - International competitions - Lack of organisational consistency and weak organisational system.

IRF response - Only persons (like Barmaz and Purjakov) who boycotted the WRC 2017 in Japan (to avoid facing questions at the IRF Congress), or have absolutely no experience in running a World Rafting Championship, would believe this.

Barmaz - Licensing system - Weak licenses because of a weak federation.

IRF response - The participants and interest in the GTE system say differently. The GTE system is massive now and working very well worldwide. It has become the Gold standard for raft guide certification – far from the 'weak' system that Barmaz describes. The IRF is constantly being asked to partner with other organizations so that they can benefit from association with GTE certifications. Barmaz is making assumptions based on zero knowledge.

By comparison, the IRF has received many complaints about the Italian system, including complaints about substandard training, guides receiving level 5 certifications after a simple test on a Class 2 river, and complaints that the system is simply used by FIRaft to generate income rather than to ensure that river guides are qualified.

Barmaz - Sustainability Competitions in remote areas - not cost-effective -scarce participation - many major nations are not present.

IRF response - The IRF is reliant on bids being submitted from our members for World and Continental championships. This system is not fully reliable... like bids for the Olympic Games, if few bids are received, then choices are limited. The IRF Marketing Committee is working hard on changing this for the future. For the 2016 WRC in Al Ain, the IRF was successful in its approach to proactively locate and retain a venue host outside of our member channels. This is an option that we plan to use for future events should it be necessary.

Barmaz may not agree, but many of our members prefer the more interesting and exotic locations found in remote areas, especially for the R6. A balance is what the IRF is after. More events in Europe is desired.

Barmaz is completely wrong about major nations not attending our events. All major rafting nations have competed in our most recent WRC's, and this fact is easily verified simply by looking at the competitors list on the IRF website.