



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. Barmaz's Reasons (for creating a new organisation)

The IRF has examined the reasons stated by Barmaz for creating a new organisation (as per his proposal) and have determined them to be factually inaccurate, and based on either ignorant assumptions about the IRF, or obvious lack of experience and knowledge needed to successfully manage an international organization.

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

IRF response - This is true - because the IRF is not yet a member of GAISF. GAISF membership has always been the IRF's goal, but it is not an easy process. The IRF first had to attain the growth necessary to satisfy GAISF requirements, which we now have. Recently, some of our members were informed that they must have GAISF recognition to continue to receive government funds, so our GAISF application has been moved forward to be one of our highest priorities. Recent changes to the GAISF system have made membership 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 like FIRaft 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", a recognition that any Italian sport organization may obtain 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 Boris Purjakov) who failed to attend 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. Our events are consistently better organized every year with improved systems, better-trained personnel and more intensive and exacting venue oversight. It is well known among those who attended, that the Japan WRC was our best ever, easily matching or surpassing any event offered in the adventure sports world.

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 Barmaz’s 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 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 – For our major international events, the IRF is reliant on submitted bids – modeled after the bidding system used for the Olympic Games. 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 that was held in the U.A.E., 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 balanced approach is what the IRF is after. More events in Europe are desired.

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

2. 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 Barmaz 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 then severed all further contact.

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

3. Nothing New - Theft of the IRF Blueprint

Barmaz's plan for a new organization is nothing more than a poorly constructed blueprint taken from the IRF's 20+ years of experience and constant evolvement. It contains nothing new or wonderful, it simply attempts to duplicate our R6 and R4 formats (including the recent changes to our H2H discipline which were explained to him before he decided to form a breakaway group), our Guide Training program, our committees, our strategies, and focuses. In short, Barmaz wants to recreate the IRF under a different name and put himself at its head.

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 obviously he does not think the IRF is weak... he simply does not agree with the majority of our members. The IRF welcomes and encourages intelligent, thoughtful debate and the free flow of ideas. If Barmaz wants to lead our members, then he should be willing to earn it... to debate and defend his positions in an open forum, and make an honest attempt to win the majority to his side. Instead, his avoidance of the democratic process, and his liberal use of deception, fear, and misinformation, plainly illustrates the true meaning of a 'weak' organisation.

4. 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 ask Barmaz a simple question. Where is your proof, where is the evidence to support your 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, with a vote by the entire IO committee of 105 active members. Olympic rafting cannot be fast-tracked by Barmaz's friends during closed door meetings.
- b. *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 indeed a few individuals from these countries who do not represent an IRF member organisation (or any organisation) and a few others 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 outrage that he is attempting to distort facts and associate their countries 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 organisation, predicated on misinformation and deceit.
- c. *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, his proposed organisation will not be accepted as a part of the ICF. In practical terms, this means that neither rafting or his movement will be accepted by GAISF or the IOC as a part of the ICF. Barmaz will need to follow the same membership requirements, processes and timeline for recognition that the IRF and all other applicants are required to follow... except Barmaz will be starting from ground zero with no history, no experience, no knowledge, and a handful of misfits to support him.

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. If the ICF is not successful in an attempt to absorb a paddle sports organisation, then they will actively try to undermine and divide it - especially if the organisation grows to the point where the ICF considers it a threat. This is verified by the very public battle they waged (and lost) to try to keep the International Dragon Boat Federation out of GAISF, and their current battle with the International Surfing Association over the control of SUP. In both cases, the ICF had no interest in these paddle sports until after they became developed and their federations sought to be recognised as the governing body.

The ICF 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...ICF leaders are well aware that his desire to divide rafting will make the IRF less of a threat.

- d. *Barmaz states that recognition by the ICF, means that his movement will be 'indirectly' recognized by the IOC.*

This statement is nonsensical fallacy. It is a simple basic fact that the IOC does not indirectly recognize sports federations. If the IOC does not directly recognize an organisation, it cannot participate in the Olympics. Barmaz is attempting to gather support by pretending that a vague association with the ICF will somehow open a magic pathway to get rafting into the Olympics.

- e. *The vast majority of our members have NOT been approached by Barnaz to give their opinion; only specific individuals who Barnaz believes are dissatisfied in some way with the IRF. Clearly, his goal is not to form a genuinely democratic organization of rafters, but to band together with anyone he can find to 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 their president, Boris Purjakov (a supporter of Barnaz) has ejected 6 clubs from their federation (at least half of its voting members) without a vote from their Congress, right before their election - all clubs which were very unhappy with his leadership and were going to vote 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 and organized by Barmaz and his friends 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 Val di Sole, Italy under Barmaz's leadership when a competitor drowned at the 2010 ERC. This preventable tragedy 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 distorts the truth by pretending to compare guide certification fees between the 'Italian model' and 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.

5. 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 inter-workings of 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 the 2017 IRF 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 that you read this.

In summary, Mr. Micheler explained that it is an extremely remote and highly improbable possibility that rafting would reach the Olympics via the ICF. The facts are these: The IOC allows the ICF to take approximate 325 athletes to the Olympics. Among these athletes, 16 Gold medals are distributed - 12 in Flatwater Sprint, and 4 in Whitewater Slalom (taken from Sprint in 1992). Flatwater Sprint completely dominates the ICF — its history and the vast majority of its leaders are from this discipline — and Flatwater Sprint will never give up additional Olympic medals for any new discipline.

Therefore, any change to add additional ICF whitewater disciplines to the Olympics must come from the IOC, by awarding the ICF with additional athlete slots. This is VERY unlikely to happen anytime soon and probably not at all. The IOC has made it clear that it does not want the Olympic field to grow any bigger than it already is for a large number of reasons. But if their view were to change, and more slots were awarded to the ICF, the reality is that the ICF has several other disciplines that are already waiting for an Olympic opportunity (Boater Cross, Downriver Sprint, Free style, Kayak Polo, etc). Rafting, is NOT an ICF discipline, so it is not on the wait list: and should it be added to the list in the distant future, it would be placed at the bottom.

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 them, and has approached the ICF to open a dialog on how this could work for the benefit of both organisations. The ICF has shown absolutely no interest in this. Their first interest is to preserve and protect their current Olympic disciplines, and they have aggressively attacked any paddle sports organization that they see as a threat to the status quo.

6. Duel Membership

It has been implied that if our members join a new international rafting organisation they can still remain a member of the IRF. This is untrue. GAISF and the IOC specifically state that only one organisation can govern a 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 clearly that our members “acknowledge the IRF as the sole governing body of international rafting.”

7. 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.

Barmaz strongly criticizes the IRF for not offering guide insurance as part of its certification program. He clearly has not examined the issue, and is naïve to think that what works in Italy can simply be copy and pasted everywhere else. Worldwide Insurance that covers guides in all countries is prohibitively expensive – coverage requirements and medical costs vary significantly, and in many countries, insurance for guides is simply not needed or required. It is far easier and less costly for insurance to be managed country-by-country rather than by the IRF.

Forcing rafting guides to pay for something they don't want or need may work in Italy (where an FIRaft license is mandated by law through CONI), but the IRF system is designed to work on an international scale. There is no international law that mandates that river guides must be certified. The GTE program must work alongside a multitude of different national laws, policies and government institutions. And our goal is not to use the program as a moneymaking scheme, but to keep our fees as low as possible so that the certification is accessible to everyone who has the skills and knowledge to earn it. For Barmaz to criticize something that he knows nothing about is not a good indication of his leadership skills.

8. Final Thoughts - Questions members need to be asking themselves:

1. Is the IRF actually doing a bad job? (Sure – the IRF can always improve, and we do, every year. This remains one of our top goals. The standards of our competition events and of our GTE system have both leaped ahead in recent years due to this commitment)
2. Are the promises and claims Barmaz makes for his proposed organisation realistic or true? Where is the proof?
3. Do the leaders/supporters of his proposed new organisation have our member's best interests at heart? What is their true motivation?
4. How will this proposed organisation fund itself?
5. Why has Barmaz decided to put energy and manpower hours into this divisive project (and lobbying our members to join him), instead of working with us to achieve GAISF membership or IOC recognition?
6. Is Barmaz's attempts to divide us more likely to help or hurt our common goal to have rafting recognised as the legitimate sport that it is?