

**13<sup>th</sup> HISTORICAL NORDIC MEETING 2009**  
**Skokloster, Sweden**  
**Saturday 19 September 2009**



**FESAC CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS**

I would like to start by thanking my hosts from the three Swedish organisations, SVEVAP, SVHS and Göta VHS for their kind invitation and hospitality.

The intervention of the preceding speakers inspired me to start with three observations rather than the introduction that I had prepared.

Firstly it was Tor Karstensen's simple diagram, showing the balance achieved by two opposing forces. To this I would like to add that we should apply the maxim "Attack is the best form of defence". So far we have been reacting to generally useless proposals by people in authority who know nothing about our subject. It is time that we take the initiative and move the battle lines onto their ground. We have to think ahead and be proactive, proposing reasonable changes to legislation that could be implemented at EU and national level. We can do this if we put our minds together and build on the contacts that we have already established.

Secondly I was pleasantly surprised by the presence and presentation of the Danish lawyer Janus Fürt We, the veterans, are not getting younger. If we are to survive into the future we need young blood with initiative. Our Danish friends are very fortunate to have on their Board a combination of youth and legal dynamism. I encourage every organisation represented in FESAC to introduce such enthusiasts to their Boards. We need drive, energy and legal agility to tackle the delicate issue of collectors' rights.

Finally, before I pass on to FESAC's message I would like to comment on the issue of the transport and transit of arms within EU member states as raised by a number of speakers. The subject clearly attracts considerable interest. The EU Directive establishes an EU Firearms Pass for the transport of arms for sports shooting and hunting. Collectors are not mentioned. It is not surprising that we had been forgotten. Hunters represent a political force in their countries while sports shooters often bring back success that Politicians love to ride on. What force do collectors represent? None at all in terms of size. However if we promote our true role as curators of national heritage, running a parallel role to national museums and collections, then we can gain the positive attention of our authorities. It is for this reason that FESAC has established closer ties with ICOMAM, the international body that represents military museums throughout the world. I will propose to my Board that we study the possibility of an "Arms Collectors' Pass" that could be established on the same lines as the EUFP, provided that this idea is supported by the majority of country delegates.

Now I come to the main issue that I intended to report upon in this meeting: the recently-approved amendments to the EU Arms Directive and our national governments' obligation to transpose such amendments into national law by the end of February 2010.

Let us firstly consider that these amendments have reaffirmed the recognition, at the highest level, of arms collectors' contribution to the preservation and research of an important part of our historical and technical heritage. In spite of the constant attack from persons who speak with emotion rather than logic, we have prevailed thanks to FESAC's diligent negotiations and the support received from member countries. From the onset FESAC sought to build bridges with the persons who were entrusted with proposing changes and pushing them through the various EU institutions. We started off with Mrs Kallenbach proposing draconian changes that would have severely limited our legitimate activity and ended with Mrs. Kallenbach engaging in dialogue with us and eventually admitting that she had learnt a lot from us and that we represented serious collectors who acted with responsibility.

The Directive declares that collectors and museums that keep arms for reasons of study and research fall outside the scope of the Directive, as also do those arms that are kept by such persons. In other words the provisions of the Directive do not apply to our activity as collectors and to the arms that we choose to collect. It is that simple. And we have to ensure that our national governments do not attempt to complicate matters by using the EU as an excuse to implement undesirable legislation. It is true that national governments may impose stricter laws than the minimum established by the Directive (hence Great Britain's senseless drive to ban almost anything). However it is equally correct to say that the Directive should establish the spirit that should guide our respective legislators.

We are therefore obliged to lobby our respective authorities to respect the spirit of the Directive. However before we attempt to do that, we must first understand the underlying principle in order to be in a position to lobby our national authorities. ***If they wish to achieve tangible results legislation should not be based on the artificial barriers separating the various categories but on what persons satisfy the criteria required to own arms.*** One thousand arms of all types in the possession of a responsible collector are not a threat to society but one pistol or edged weapon in the hands of an irresponsible person certainly is! This logic is rock-solid and it is upheld by statistics from around the world.

Nevertheless we must be extremely careful in the way we deal with our authorities. We have to be diplomatic and avoid confrontation that only serves to close doors shut. Our dealings with the EU prove my point. Our strategy has paid dividends. Only recently I received a phone call from Mr. Lizzi in the Home Affairs Committee of the EU who sought our opinion on the implementation of the UN Protocol's mandatory marking of all firearms and ammunition: I explained that since collectors and the arms they keep were excluded from the provisions of the Directive, such marking should not apply to collectible arms, especially when one considers that most already bear marks that identify their source and year of manufacture, and in cases where this is not available there exists sufficient references to identify such arms.

We must be equally careful with the media and not shy away from it. Let us avoid the sensationalist journalists and focus on those who are ready to feature reports based on logic and common sense. Invite them to your shows and meetings, provide them with material and keep in regular contact with them. Remember that the media often influences our authorities and ever more establishes their agenda.

We should also work hand-in-hand with organisations that represent sports shooters and hunters but not necessarily join them. Having a dedicated working group, silently preparing a common approach away from media attention will give excellent results. I speak from experience in my participation in ESSF meetings on behalf of FESAC and collectors. Our concerted efforts and voice were almost certainly responsible for the positive outcome of the negotiations held with the EU.

Now is the time to take up our issues with our respective authorities. We have to lobby hard and FESAC is there to back you. Please keep in mind that the voice of an international organisation often reaches further with national authorities. I augur that member organisations will keep me informed and report back on obstacles they encounter.

Finally I conclude with a few words about FESAC's mission and what it can do for your organisations and for your members. In reality FESAC is what YOU make of it through YOUR active participation and particularly through YOUR participation in its annual meetings and seminars. You must make your voice heard directly and in the presence of other delegates. That is how good ideas take root. Moreover your presence during the Seminars, in which important guests are present, will serve to send out an important message to such persons. They will see a united front that will not accept attacks on any part of its community.

This is the first time that I am meeting my Swedish colleagues in FESAC. I am honoured to be among them and I sincerely hope that they will grant us the honour of their presence at the next FESAC meeting that will be held in Leeds, UK during May 2010.

I end by thanking my hosts from SVEVAP for presenting me with a lovely publication about the Swedish Mauser rifles. It is a book that I will treasure in my reference library.

Stephen A. Petroni  
Chairman FESAC.

## **ADDENDA**

FESAC Chairman's contribution to the Technical Meeting held on 20 September.

I firmly believe that these annual NORDIC meetings offer the opportunity of fruitful discussion and conclusions in view of the fact that the participating countries have so much in common. Thus regular exchange of ideas will help you to tackle issues in a concerted manner. I support your initiative to the point that I would be ready to recommend similar gatherings by other groups of neighbouring countries with a common history or situation.

I would like to venture a suggestion that these yearly meetings should be given a theme and that the host country should aim to invite at least one person from the national authorities or media. This could generate positive and far-reaching results that our members thirst for.

One issue that appears to surfaces with some regularity is our members' occasional reluctance to finance their representatives' presence at such international meetings. This could partly be the result of insufficient communication with our members to report on what we achieve through these meetings. In most cases you would find that it is always the same few who grumble and criticise our presence at international events. Blind jealousy is often the motivator but other well-meaning members could be influenced. I assure you that such emotions are not restricted to the Nordic organisations. We all get our good share of them. Try offering an ordinary member, drawn by lot from interested parties, the opportunity of participation and seeing first-hand the work that we do on our members' behalf.

I appreciate that it is common among collectors that every cent is diverted to the budget for the purchase of new additions to their collections. This is understandable. However we are not collecting stamps or coins. The collection of arms is a serious undertaking that requires each collector to invest in the protection of his investment. Just as we are ready to pay for a good gun safe or for adequate insurance cover, then we should all be ready to support the common cause through the contributions that we pay to our organisations and FESAC. Remind your members it is a small expense that they cannot afford to avoid.

On behalf of FESAC I once again thank my hosts for the opportunity to deliver FESAC's message.

Stephen. A. Petroni  
Chairman FESAC