

FESAC ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND SEMINAR TERNI 27-31 MAY 2009

The Foundation for European Societies of Arms Collectors (FESAC) held its annual conference for board members, country delegates, observers and consultants in Terni, Italy on 28 May 2009. The conference was followed the day after by a seminar during which high-profile guests delivered a series of incisive reports on current arms legislation in Italy.

The success of this year's gathering went beyond expectations. The delegates carried out their customary tasks in an efficient manner inspired by an atmosphere of courtesy, friendship and appreciation. The appreciation for the hosting country's effort was unanimous.

The Italian representative in FESAC, the "Amici del Museo delle Armi Terni" (AMAT) organised the entire programme of meetings and events for delegates from thirteen European member states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway and for the first time ever ROMANIA which is now officially a FESAC member. Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland are also FESAC members but could not attend.

On Friday May 28 General (Res.) Guido Pesce inaugurated the FESAC conference at the Hotel Michelangelo. The AMAT chairman and directors welcomed the country delegates and the FESAC president Stephen Petroni who then presided over the meeting.

Following the reading and approval of the Minutes of the last FESAC meeting held in Malta in June 2008, each country delegate read the respective country report while FESAC consultant Jas van Driel presented a report about the EU Directive Amendments and their implementation in member states. The Board then moved on to discuss specific issues and action plans were drawn up. The meeting was concluded with the election of the Board officials. Stephen Petroni (Malta), Albrecht Simon (Germany) and Pit Kaiser (Luxembourg) were re-appointed President, Vice President and Treasurer respectively while Hanny Papendorp-Spruijt (Netherlands) was appointed Secretary.

The day was concluded with a pleasant dinner at Canottieri Piediluco in the beautiful setting of the lake. FESAC delegates and their Italian hosts welcomed the official guests who started arriving in time for the next day's Seminar.

In the morning of Thursday 29 May, delegates who had received special FESAC conference commemorative postcards were invited to go to the hotel lobby where postal employees provided stamps and stamped the cards with a special cancellation postmark for the occasion.

The delegates and their guests then returned to the conference hall of the Hotel Michelangelo for the FESAC Seminar entitled "*The European Directive on Firearms and its relevance to Italian Law*".

The Seminar was widely attended by representatives of political, administrative, military, law enforcement and cultural institutions who presented their views on the transposition of the EU Arms Directive amendments into Italian law and the difficulties created by the archaic nature of the latter. Following the greeting by the Deputy Mayor of Terni Feliciano Polli and interventions by FESAC President Stephen A. Petroni AMAT President General Guido Pesce, the guests who had the floor read their presentations in the following order:

- The Hon. Luciano Rossi - MEP and President of the Parliamentary Intergroup "Friends of the Firearms, Hunting and Fishing" on the importance of working across political lines to achieve positive gains for enthusiasts;

- Dr. Luigina Di Mattia - Director of the Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo, on the protection provisions of the Code of Cultural Heritage (Legislative Decree 42/2004) and the preservation of historical heritage from the First World War (Law 78 /2001);
- Dr. Pierluigi Borgioni - Police Vice Superintendant and representative of the Ministry of the Interior, on the national catalogue of antique arms and in particular edged arms which are excluded from the EU Directive;
- Dr. Nicola Miriano - former Prosecutor of Perugia and expert in the weapons field, on the references of the European Directive 2008/51/CE, the classification of arms, ammunition, reloading, shooting activities and the computerisation of records, the psycho-physical requirements for the purchase and possession of arms as well as the use, transport, storage and safekeeping of arms;
- Dr. Biagio Mazzeo – Judge of Genoa and legal adviser of the “Arms and Ammunition” journal on the the collection of firearms which may be also used for shooting sports;
- Mrs. Catuscia Marini – MEP on the EU Directive and Italy’s role in arms commerce.

President Petroni re-affirmed the commitment with which serious arms collectors pursue their interests. In his view collectors are curators of our common historical heritage. Their personal efforts to collect, research and preserve such important artefacts put them on the same level as curators of national collections.

In conclusion, President Guido Pesce presented Engineer Obrist Ernfried, President of the Italian Federazione Tiro a Segno, with a plaque commemorating the anniversary of the historical "Carcano '91", specially made for participants in the meeting.

The Seminar tackled the legal issues within the complexity of Italy’s many laws and circulars that affect its arms collectors. While the provisions of the Code of Cultural Heritage recognizes the cultural, artistic and history aspect of arms as part of our common heritage of civilization, and hence the pursuit of arms collecting along with preservation and research, Italian arms collector are generally restricted in their activity. While the EU Arms Directive grants the collector a special status by exempting him/her from its provisions, national law does not cede sufficient room or, worse still, imposes irreversible damage on collector arms. Thus the Seminar highlighted the need for change in legislation in order to recognise the collector’s important role in Society.

The presentations will be collected in a document that will be sent to the ministries concerned with proposals to update Italian and to make it consistent, clear, streamlined and less subject to wide interpretation by officials, an occurrence which very often subjects citizens in different jurisdictions to different or opposing treatment.

Following lunch, the delegates and guests were able to appreciate Terni’s industrial history thanks to a guided tour of the famous steel plant of Thyssen Krupp which commenced with a briefing in the office hall. In the evening participants attended an informal dinner in a typical Terni Trattoria.

Every participant was looking forward to the programme for Saturday 30 May that started with a visit to the site of the former Fabbrica d’Armi Terni, now an Italian Army arms maintenance centre which also houses a unique collection of arms from around the world that AMAT has been striving hard to open as a public museum.

The delegates and guests were welcomed to the display by the commander of the “Polo di Manutenzione Armi Leggeri” Col. Morlino. Also present was Lieutenant General Antonio Gucciardino, Director of the Land Armaments General Directorate while General Guido Pesce and General Aldebrano Micheli accompanied the FESAC delegates as they toured the display.

The FESAC President expressed his view that the collection of arms is of international importance and that AMAT's efforts to open it up as a public museum were to be praised. President Petroni offered FESAC's support towards this objective through technical assistance by experts within its member organisations, several of whom are authors of world-renown reference books on arms, to assist in the rationalization of the display. One augurs that this positive endorsement from FESAC will galvanise the new Municipal Council in Terni to move from words to action and give their full support to the project. AMAT is prepared to keep up the pressure until the Museum is a reality.

Following a buffet at the Hotel Michelangelo, in the afternoon the delegates were treated to another exciting event, this time a shoot at the 100m range of Armeria Massarini in the captivating scenery of the Marmore. Engineer Aldo Chiapparino, General Aldebrano Micheli, Dr Mario Gasbarri and CEO Adriano Simoni kindly provided WWI and WWII military rifles from their personal collections. These included the Carcano '91 in 6.5 x52, the Carl Gustaf in 6.5 x55, the Mosin Nagant in 7.62 x54R. In addition, delegates could also shoot a modern semiautomatic Beretta carbine AR70 in .222 cal. Most delegates, as well as Judge Dr. Mazzeo and Lieutenant General Gucciardino participated in the enjoyable shoot. Naturally, the firearms' owners had their say too and enjoyed themselves just as much as their hosts. All participants received a diploma with a AMAT "Certificate of Participation" on which their names were beautifully handwritten by the talented Councillor Aldebrano Micheli.

The evening continued with a visit to the nearby waterfalls of Marmore that offer great scenic beauty. The participants walked all the way down and took the opportunity to snap hundreds of photos.

The eventful day ended with a gala dinner, the now traditional closing event of the annual conferences. This was held in the Terrace Restaurant of the Hotel Michelangelo. The FESAC delegates enjoyed a sumptuous dinner and later Presidents Pesce and Petroni delivered a short speech to mark the occasion and thank the numerous persons who had helped to make this year's event a huge success. Several delegates and guests took the floor to express their sincere sentiments as mementoes were exchanged. The friendship between enthusiasts from so many different countries is a guarantee of co-operation to ensure the preservation of our common historical heritage.

A word of sincerely thanks is due to the FESAC President and his board members and delegates, the many distinguished guest speakers, the AMAT President and his council members and last but not least Aldo Chiapparino who documented the report of this wonderful and unforgettable event.