

Dear José, dear friends,

good morning and welcome to Salsomaggiore Terme this Executive Council meeting.

First of all let me send a strong hug and a warm wish, which I am sure you share with me, to Al Levy who was unable to be with us in person due to his post-operative recovery, but I think he can be connected with us via zoom and participate in our work.

This today is the last meeting of the legislature, as the new Executive Council will already be installed in the next one according to our Statute.

It is therefore time to draw some conclusions, even if today we are still called to make important decisions, as you can see from our demanding Agenda.

This has been a four-year period tormented by absolutely unexpected and unpredictable events which followed one another and shocked the whole world bringing grief and suffering.

Events that are still developing today and whose effects unfortunately afflict us and leave us in a situation of uncertainty, of insecurity, causing great fear for the future.

At first events due to an adverse fate which, just when we were happily convinced that we were finally close to their epilogue, unfortunately and unexpectedly others have been added, due exclusively to the will of man in his worst manifestation of "homo homini lupus".

After a 2019 full of satisfactions and successes, which culminated with the big event in Wuhan, where we celebrated a sumptuous World Championship, the Covid19 pandemic, which started as an evil twist of fate right from Wuhan, has brought us to our knees for more than two full long years. Even today, the cursed virus is not completely eradicated and has not abandoned its detrimental effects, even if a light has begun to glimpse itself and has allowed us to be here today all together to celebrate our World Championship.

Saying that it brought us to our knees is perhaps an even minimal representation of the effects the pandemic has had on us. Two years completely eliminated from our calendar that have canceled our activities. Our affiliated National Federations and their Clubs equally unable to carry out their own. The bridge players bewildered, many of them have almost abandoned, others have taken refuge in online bridge. An instrument that certainly is and can be an excellent vehicle for the development of our discipline, but which has nothing to do with bridge as we understand teach and disseminate it, source of commonality, socialization and contact. In other words, another game, pleasant, interesting, attractive, with certainly flourishing prospects, to be developed and strengthened, to be kept under our control, but which is still another game.

The pandemic has cut off the economic resources of Federations and Clubs, or their inability to carry out their business and to organize competitions and above all for the consequent heavy and massive reduction of members.

The essence and existence of the WBF is based on the affiliated Federations, Those of the Federations on the Clubs those of the Clubs on their members who attend them to play

bridge. This is a virtuous circle that must be defended with the sword when attacked by adversity and disintegrating forces.

From pandemic to war. The execrable, unjustifiable and unacceptable invasion of Ukraine by Russia, with the support of Belarus, plunged us back into a state of discomfort and extreme suffering, mortifying our hopes of recovery, aggravating the socio-economic situation and offering dramatic perspectives that the whole world had banned from its memory since the end of World War II.

We are all experiencing anxious moments with the hope that common sense can prevail over selfish and arrogant partisan interests.

In addition to the measures we have been forced into by the pandemic, we have had to make other hard-hitting decisions.

The ferocious aggression of Russia that we have condemned and still condemn in no uncertain terms, has led us to exclude the Russian representatives from these championships. We did it with extreme bitterness for the penalty that was inflicted on absolutely innocent players, but we did it firmly and without any hesitation precisely to demonstrate our full and absolute solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

As I said in my welcome to the captains' meeting, Ukraine is not physically here with us today, but we certainly feel it here with us in spirit and we renew them in a great, sincere and fraternal embrace of all our solidarity. With the hope that in the next World Series there will also be our Ukrainian brothers to rejoice with us, all together, in our beloved discipline.

2019 was the first year of the legislature and was characterized by a great fervor of activity, the results of which were extensively reviewed and discussed at our Wuhan meeting and I do not want to bore you with arguments known to all and with results that are now consolidated.

In 2020 and 2021, despite the painful cancellation of our sports calendar, we were not inert. The Management Committee met periodically and took important decisions and introduced the new disciplinary rules.

Unfortunately, the indiscriminate advent of online bridge competitions, due to the epidemic and the related restrictions, have reopened the painful scourge of cheating.

With the introduction of new safety systems, which constitute a huge deterrent and a concrete prevention tool, it has been practically eliminated in the live competitions we organize.

We have spared no resources and investments and here in Salsomaggiore (and we would have done so since 2020 if the pandemic hadn't forced us to cancel the competitions, for the first time in our history, all the tables are under constant surveillance by cameras and it is therefore possible to immediately detect any irregular behavior and promptly remedy it.

With the new disciplinary regulations, we have enhanced our range of action also on online competitions organized within our jurisdiction, our Zones and our NBOs. Obviously, here the speech is rather complex, it cannot be dismissed with simple statements of principle and we will have the opportunity to talk about it in depth during our meeting.

We gathered the Executive Council via Zoom and also celebrated our Congress. The congress provided the election of the three members of the Executive Council pertaining to it, thus completing the provisions of the new Statute which is now in force in its entirety.

On the economic and financial level, we have best faced the crisis that has hit us, also providing considerable financial support to our affiliates with the reduction of membership dues and with completely satisfactory results. I obviously leave it to the Treasurer to illustrate the economic results and our financial situation.

In conclusion, I think we can say that we are satisfied with what we have managed to do and achieve and I want to express my gratitude to you all for your commitment and for the support and trust you have given me.

Thanks for your attention

Gianarrigo Rona