

EUROPARC Federation

Report to General Assembly

18th October 2016



Agenda number: 6

Title:

EUROPARC Internal Auditor's Report

Summary:

The report of the activities of the Internal Auditor 2015-16

Recommendations:

To note the report

The Governance Report

Work in progress, again

At the General Assembly in Regensburg last year, I was surprised and very pleased to discover that there were some people there other than myself who were interested in governance. A couple of members introduced themselves to me during a coffee break. They wanted to follow up on remarks I had made. I had mentioned that I was worried that while Council did have a duty to ensure that the organisation flourished, it did not have all the tools to do the job. In particular, it seemed to me that Council needed to seek out people who could bring insights based on experience of how similar federations might work. I had started to look around for sources of appropriate insights, and looked for help and inspiration on where to turn to next. Well, these members offered to email me with a suggestion but, alas, I didn't hear from either of them again. I still want to have some appropriate experiences to offer Council and members when we consider strategies for the survival of the federation. Maybe members know people who have suitable insights that would help me. Please get in touch.

Council had very successful face to face meetings this year. And online meetings have become better, with support from the directorate, using software that has offered a consistently good experience. Last year, to save money we cancelled in person meetings and then endured some unhappy online experiences. Times and budgets and resources have changed, for the better.

The relationship between Council and the Sections is still taking a lot of time to clarify. Maybe it is the case that in a federation such as ours there must always be a dynamic tension, where the structures will be in a state of evolution, adapting from time to time, reflecting current needs.

And in the middle of the year, the Directorate and the President with the support of Council managed to start the process of integration with Fedenatur. This is a significant achievement. It happened very rapidly. It seemed to be painless.

Of course I look at Fedenatur as a source of new experiences and traditions in governance, a resource that our Federation should welcome.

This is important.

We are moving towards an election year, when new people will be sought for Council duties. I looked at the information that the candidates have offered members in the past. Amongst all the enthusiasm for nature and protected areas and sustainable living, I can find only a few candidates showing a breadth of skills and talents that have been learned beyond the usual public sector administrative boards. I look for a resume that shows a range of public and private board experience. I was hoping to see protected area experience mixed with charity and business and community boards.

I believe that if there are more people around the table who have experience of a wide variety of boards, then there will be better meetings. There will be more experiences brought into debates, and more solutions to play with whenever there is a challenging problem to think about.

People with good experience of working with boards will, I have observed, care about evaluation. They will ask whether Council is doing its job effectively, if it is using their time and effort with care and respect.

My predecessor worried about this in his last report, two years ago. In my view there are two key questions: Is Council evaluating its own performance? Is Council reviewing the performance of the chief executive that it has employed?

The President has started the appraisal process of the executive director, and I am pleased to say that members of council are now talking about evaluation and appraisal of the work that they are doing.

I will suggest that they create a Council committee on governance. This small group would organise for the performance of the board to be assessed. There's an additional task which comes through Council being generally charged with running an effective organisation. This usually involves getting appropriate people seated around its discussion table. The excuse that unsuitable directors were selected by the electors is not a very good defence when members want good results from their subscriptions.

So Council will have to develop profiles for board positions. It will have to have a skills audit, and match candidates resumes to the needs of the board. It will offer members a short list of approved candidates. The committee will also work with the Directorate to deliver orientation to new members, to show them how the organisation works and what their obligations are.

My hope is that we can cultivate a set of robust committees where we can develop future board leaders. People need to learn their skills from many different places, and we need to collect not just their expertise but their influence and leadership. We need to grow leaders who have good connections and the ability to control outcomes, people with clout.

Roger de Freitas,

Internal Auditor