



EUROPEAN BRIDGE LEAGUE

Yves Aubry
President

DEVELOPMENT AND STATE OF THE EBL

This is a large topic to be covered in such a short time

The EBL is an international sport Federation, Member of the WBF and thus recognised as a sport by the International Olympic Committee.

As in any other sport, the main goal is to organise regular competitions.

But this is not the only objective of the EBL.

It is also to promote and develop Bridge in all its aspects in Europe, of course with the cooperation of all the European Federations.

Today, I will not be able to present a complete inventory of the state of the EBL and of its projects. I would like to focus on 6 topics which will be all presented in detail during the group sessions. These 6 topics represent important points in the politics led by the EBL since the election of the new team in 2010.

Within these topics, some results have already been achieved, all have projects under development and long term goals.

1) CHAMPIONSHIPS

The EBL organises 3 championships per year:

- In June, the European Team Championships, in the even years, and the European Open Championships in the odd years
- In July, the Youth Championships – Pairs in the even years and Team in the odd years
- In November, the Champions' Cup involving 12 teams.

The EBL supports the Small Feds Games that are held every year in September or October.

a) European Team Championships

- With the exception of 2006, the Championships are always held during the second half of June
- The evolution during the last years has been to reduce the number of playing days. It was 14 days until 2008; we changed to 11 days in 2010 and 2012 and now to 10 days starting this year.
A more reduced period (1 week) would only be possible with the creation of 2 divisions. Some years ago, a majority of NBOs was against this project and the current Executive Committee is not in favour of this change; this is a subject that will be developed tomorrow morning during the workshop.
- The number of registrations for the 3 series fluctuates and is particularly linked to 3 factors:
 - the location of the Championships that can be more or less attractive in terms of geographical location but essential in terms of financial costs (Travel, accommodation);



- the location of the World Championships in the same year. If it is located in Europe (Warsaw and Verona in 2006, Dublin and Lille in 2012), participation is less than when the World Championships are located outside Europe (Pau and Pekin in 2008, Ostend and Philadelphia in 2010);

	Open	Women	Seniors
2006 Warsaw	33	22	169
2008 Pau	38	25	20
2010 Ostend	38	28	23
2012 Dublin	34	19	19

- the period between the announcement of the Championships and the date of the Championships. This allows a large promotion period. Unfortunately, during the last 3 years, the locations have been changed at the last minute (Greece → Ireland; Italy → Belgium; Spain → Croatia).
- 2014 shows a positive start. Opatija is a location that will certainly suit all players, the playing conditions are perfect, hotels and restaurants with a high quality standard and the World Championships will take place in China. I hope that we will have a large number of participants in Opatija.
We have some news in 2014:
 - the number of boards per match has been reduced from 20 to 16. This will please the players, the journalists, the staff, the managers, the restaurants and last but not least the Seniors who claimed to play the same number of boards as in the Open and Women.
 - the Championships will start on the Saturday evening with the Opening Ceremony and the first playing session will be on the Sunday morning.
The EBL has been listening to the players and to the Federations.
The non-professional Open players who have few chances to participate in the second round-robin will only apply for one week of vacation. This is the same for the Seniors who play on a seven-day period.
 - the Opening Ceremony which is the most opportune moment for all three series (Open-Women-Seniors) will take place on the Saturday evening. The two Closing Ceremonies on the Saturday evening and the Tuesday evening will take place immediately after the end of the last match.
 - the last issue is the duration of the Championship for Women. Traditionally but also at the players' request, this Championship is always played as a complete round-robin. If the participation is low, the Championship will be played on a seven-day period as for the Seniors and this could have happened in Dublin in 2012. We have to avoid the days-off (4 days for the Women in Malmo/Sweden in 2004).



2014 should let us surpass the number of 23 teams and in this case the players would play on a ten-day period. We fixed an early registration deadline for the 1st of April and in case of a low registration, this Championship will have to be reduced to 7 days.

- 2016 candidacies:

So far 3 countries have shown their interest but we received no official candidacy as of today.

Tomorrow, during the workshop, I will remind you of the conditions to fulfil to be a candidate in the organisation of any EBL Championships.

b) European Open Championships

- These are Transnational Pairs and Team Championships (Mixed, Open, Women, Seniors).
- These Championships welcome not only European players but also players coming from the 8 zones of the WBF. American and Chinese players have already been nominated as European Champions.
- The participation fluctuates and depends on the country in which the Championships are being held. It is of course easier to have a large participation in France (Menton/2003), Italy (San Remo/2009) or in Poland (Poznan/2011).
- As it is open to all players, the question of the programme is very important. Some changes occurred in Ostend in 2013 but they did not prove to be workable and others are scheduled or are to be scheduled for Tromsø in 2015.
- News in 2015:

The EBL will go to Tromsø in Norway and this will be the location situated the most in the North where the EBL has ever organised any Championships.

The Championships will take place during the Midnight Sun period. The Norwegian Federation will present to you tomorrow their progress in organising these Championships. It is a really professional approach and Norway has already collected public and private funds that will allow the organisation of these Championships within excellent conditions.

One problem: everyone is aware that the cost of living in Norway is very high and that Tromsø is distant. In this context, the EBL and the NBF are working together in order that a part of the funds shall be refunded to the players as a discount on the entry fees.

- Candidacies for 2017:

I had some discussions with Mr Medugno for the FIGB to be a candidate for 2017. After Poznan/2011, Ostend/2013, Tromsø/2015, a return to the Mediterranean coast would be attractive for the European players.

c) Champions' Cup

- The date has now been fixed in the calendar. The Champions' Cup starts every year on the second Thursday of November. So you can include it in your national calendar in plenty of time.
It takes place after the World Championships and before the ACBL Championships.
- In 2014, the Champions' Cup will be held in Milan in the FIGB Headquarters.



- The Rules & Regulations Code has been created with a compromise and states that each qualified country must not send its national team but the winning team of the main Team competition in its country.
- Due to some deviations, the Rules & Regulations Code will probably be reviewed in 2015.
- The format shall also be modified
- The candidacies are open for 2015 and 2016.

d) Simultaneous Pairs

- The Simultaneous Pairs are held in November. The National clubs could register by emailing to Anna Gudge at anna@ecats.co.uk. It is up to each NBO to award their own Master Points to the winning pairs. European Master Points are also being awarded.
- The 2014 event will be taking place on Monday 24th and Wednesday 26th November. The National clubs can play on either day or both. The entry fee is 4€ per player and the NBO gets 1 € credit against its annual dues for each participating player from its country. Please help us to publicise this event within your clubs so that they can enter this fun event.

e) Small Feds Games

This event is supported by the EBL and takes place every year generally in September or October.

It is dedicated to NBOs counting less than 500 members. 22 or 23 countries are eligible and the participation varies from 12 to 16 teams.

In 2014, the Small Feds Games will be held in Jurmala (Latvia) and in 2015 it will be located in Cyprus. Czech Rep. is candidate for 2016 and Bosnia for 2017.

f) The new objectives

- Number of championships
The EBL Executive Committee does not intend to increase or to reduce the current number of the EBL Championships.
Some proposals have been raised (in particular by Pierre Zimmermann to increase the Open events open to all) but have not been retained.
- Format of championships
 - The Team Championships have been reduced (10 days in 2014)
 - The Open Championships have 2-week duration (one for the Mixed, one for the Open/Women/Seniors). It can be noticed a low participation in Women & Seniors Series because the majority of players wants to play in the Open Series.
In Ostend, we offered them the possibility to play Open and then Women or Open and then Seniors but this option did not lead to a significant increase of players.
The WBF and EBL Seniors Committees are in favour of distinct Seniors competitions apart from the Open Championships. But this option would have a significant cost because it would be one more Championship.
 - The Champions' Cup probably also needs a refitting to make it more dynamic
- Dates of Championships
I made all possible efforts to stabilize the dates to let the NBOs integrate them in their national calendar
 - Team and Open : second half of June



- Youth events : July
 - Champions' Cup: Start on the second Thursday of November
- These dates allow having no overlapping either with the WBF calendar or with the ACBL calendar.
- Signature of Championships
The objective is to know the Venue and to sign the contract two years before the edition of the same Championship and, whenever possible, with a NBO and not with a town or a resort. In Ostend in 2013, we already knew that the next Open Championships would be in Tromsø.
 - Prize-Giving & Closing Ceremonies
 - Preservation of a certain protocol but clearly lighter in the Open Championships.
 - Ceremonies starting immediately after the end of the corresponding last matches.
 - Cancellation of the dinners at the end of the ChampionshipsEven if the cost of the ceremonies, in the EBL contracts, is at the expenses of the organising Federation, I am attentive to their cost cutting.
In fact, only one important Ceremony has been maintained in the EBL Championships that is the Opening Ceremony during the European Team Championships (next one in Opatija in 2014).

2) **TRAINING**

The organisation of the teaching of Bridge or seminars for TDs is not one of the specific “objectives of the League” as stated in the Statutes (Article 11).

But during my candidacy as a President in 2010, I included it as an objective because from my point of view it is clearly inside the frame of promotion of Bridge.

a) TD's courses

The basic teaching is of course within the competence of the NBOs. But we are lucky to have an international code that is similar to all countries and that allows to gather Tournament Directors from all European countries to improve their skills.

Since 2010, the EBL organises each year TD's courses on two levels:

- Regional Course: one or two yearly that allowed to train more than 100 TDs coming from 30 countries,
- EBL TD's main Course: occurs every 3 years (last edition in Bad Honnef in 2013) and gathers the best European TDs , it maintains a continuous improvement for the EBL TDs already nominated and gives the opportunity to nominate new TDs, after a theory and practical exam, who will be able to work in our International Championships.
Several new TDs nominated in 2013 have already worked in Ostend or will participate in 2014.

b) Teaching Seminar

In contrast to TDs, the teaching systems are different from one country to another. There cannot be any EBL system valid within all Europe.

The EBL has already organised some Teaching Seminar and some cooperation projects between countries were planned but not realised.



For 8 years and since the last Teaching Seminar in 2005, we have experienced a great development of the Web which can be a tremendous vector of teaching for Bridge. So the EBL will organise an EBL Teaching Seminar during the first half of 2015.



3) DEVELOPMENT

Inside this topic, I will only speak about the objectives that are included in our Statutes that is to say the number of NBOs members of the EBL and the number of their own Members. Since 2010, there has been no affiliation of any new country to the EBL. Gibraltar made an attempt of approach.

One country has been struck off, the Liechtenstein.

The following countries have been suspended, **Armenia/Struck off**, Montenegro and Georgia, for not fulfilling their obligations to pay their membership dues.

The declared memberships remain just below 400 000 including youth members with France and Netherlands counting 180 000 in total. The number of members per country is stable but everywhere we are concerned at the increasing age of the members.

We have also a problem in counting the members. The number of members per country is declared and the method of counting can be different from one country to another.

Some countries declare all the members of their clubs, some only the members who participate in the national events organised by their Federation and others declare a mixture of these two methods. This has of course a financial impact on the EBL and for the equity between the countries.

The EBL reduced the cost of membership to its small federations (those under a membership limited to 500) by capping the annual fee at 500 € (previously 820€).

4) YOUTH

Young people are the future of the Bridge. We shall all, in each country, give priority to the development of Bridge for youth.

1) Championships

a) National Team Championships

They are held in July on the odd years for the 3 categories (Juniors, Girls & Youngsters). Globally, they gather 50 teams coming from 25 countries with a stable evolution in Juniors, an increase in Youngsters and a decrease in Girls, this last category has some difficulties in standing out at the international level.

- Format

Within the EBL tradition, it is played as a complete round-robin.

From 10 days in 2011, the duration of the championships was reduced to 9 days in 2013 and starting 2015 it will be a seven-day period (matches from Sunday to Saturday preceded by the Opening Ceremony on the Saturday evening). This has been possible thanks to the change from 20 to 16 boards in the matches.

The next Championships will be in Tromsø in 2015.

- Costs

The costs of the Championships in Tromsø will be similar for the players as the previous one with a limit of 65 €/day/person in a double room and with full board accommodation.

As far as the travel costs are concerned, some solutions are being investigated to limit the impact of the long distance.



b) Youth Pairs Championships

There are being held in July on the even years.

Until 2010, there were 3 categories: Juniors, Girls and Youngsters.

In 2012, we introduced a Mixed Championship on a two-day period which turned out to be a success and which allowed an increase in the participation (that was indeed the aim) in the Girls category.

c) EBL Youth camp

For many years, young people were requesting the restoration of the EBL Youth camps which were following the Youth Pairs Championships. On the other hand, some NBOs wish that the EBL Youth Championships would not exceed one week in duration.

The 2014 Championships will be held in Burghausen in Germany. They are open to all players under 25 and cheap accommodation has been negotiated. The EBL Camp will be located in Burghausen during three days at the end of the Championships and the German Bridge Federation will also organise a DBV camp for 3 days after the EBL one.

2) Youth Calendar

The Junior Calendar is really overloaded:

- The EBL organises one Championship every year
- The WBF organises one Championship every year
- FISU or EUSA organises one Championship every year

Many countries organise also a Youth event.

Camps are organised by the EBL, the Nordic and Baltic countries. Several courses are also organised.

All of this shows the dynamism of the NBOs and the attention they pay to the Juniors but this also represents a high cost for the Federation.

2 subjects are to be developed during the Group sessions.

3) Youth Fund

The EBL has created a Youth Fund. However during the EBL Youth Committee meetings there are always debates as to the application of the Fund. We will have discussions again on this topic during the group sessions.

5) **COMMUNICATION**

We are in a world where Internet has assumed a great importance. The Web is already the main tool of communication.

1) EBL Website

The EBL & WBF Websites have been renewed and are taking advantage of the recent technological progress.

But now we have to keep them up to date.

A group session on this subject is scheduled on Saturday.

2) Social Media

Bridge already has a presence on social media but this has to be expanded. A lecture on this subject is planned on Sunday. But an action plan has already been made for the Championships in Opatija in June and especially for the Youth Championships and Camp in July in Burghausen.



3) Daily Bulletin

Each Championship is associated with a Daily Bulletin printed on paper but also posted on the Internet. In the future, the paper is likely to disappear because nowadays everyone travels with a Smart Phone or a tablet.

Starting with Opatija in June 2014, the paper Daily Bulletin will run alongside images on the Internet with photos, videos and interviews of players at each EBL Championship.

4) Broadcasting of matches

The EBL together with the WBF broadcast some matches via BBO at the present time. This system is free for the spectators but it has a cost for the WBF and the EBL.

The WBF received a financial proposal from Our Games to broadcast the matches of the World Championships with a financial income for the WBF. In the future, we can expect to have this system implemented in the EBL.

6) FINANCES

The EBL Treasurer, David Harris, will present a detailed explanation to you after my presentation.

In summary:

The EBL had slightly positive financial results in 2012 and this is also likely in 2013.

This has occurred in spite of the difficulties in finding a country to host the Championships and in paying a financial contribution.

Income

- The dues have been slightly increased for most but they have been maintained for the Federations with less than 500 members
- The fees of the Championships have not been increased and some have been reduced.
- The EBL has no institutional sponsor
-

Expenses

- The establishment of a working office in Lausanne and a drive towards satisfying the Swiss Authorities as to our legitimacy have increased the EBL operating costs.
- From now on, the EBL pays 3 salaries not all full time: Maurizio Di Sacco in Italy, Fotis Skoularikis in Lausanne and Catherine Vitry in Brittany.
- The new Website, its maintenance, and these projects generate and will go on generating new costs.
- The TD's Course runs at a lost (voluntarily so that the cost is affordable for the TDs)
- The EBL has a Youth Fund of circa 520 KE established to provide the necessary financial resources to fund any youth projects.



These slightly positive financial results would not be possible without a reduction of our expenses:

- Since 2010, I have reduced to a minimum the number of the staff in the Championships and the salaries with the per-diem have not been increased.
- The costs of Opening and Closing Ceremonies have been greatly reduced.
- To participate in the costs' reduction, the EBL committees meetings now take place mainly during the Championships
- The two annual EC meetings are being held during the Championships in June and during the Champions' Cup in November and only the EC Members who have an active role in the Championships are invited during the entire period.
- The Youth Championships that always ran at a deficit are now moving towards breaking even.

But the EBL has some costs that I don't want to reduce:

- I will never reduce the technical aspects of the Championships with the services offered to the players. The EBL will continue to offer the best of technology, comfort and enjoyment at the Championships.
- Of course, the EBL has to offer more services on the Website and on social media even if this service has a certain cost but we will keep it under strict control.
- The costs of the NBO Officers' Seminar every two years, the Teaching Seminar and the TD's Course are shared between the NBOs and the EBL. These are ways of encouraging relationships and exchanges of views in an informal manner that cannot take place during the formal proceedings of the General Assemblies.

VARIOUS

I have been spoken of several topics most of which will be discussed in greater detail during other presentations or group sessions.

I could have spoken about the EBL for 3 hours or even more...

Other current topics that are not part of this Seminar are:

- The EBL Statutes need reviewing,
- The EBL Eligibility Code given that the situation of some players or countries are the source of discussions or jokes,
- The selection of professional players,
- The new Anti-Doping rules,
- The relations with the IOC and its new President, Mr Thomas Bach
- The calculations of the dues,
- The discipline and ethics,
- The professionalism of the EBL,
- Bridge tournaments or even Championships on the Internet.

With all my colleagues from the EBL Executive Committee, we are here during these four days to do our best to answer your questions, listen to your views and also to benefit from your various experiences.

Thank you for your attention.

Yves Aubry

EBL President