

# Renewal Document aita-iata

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Draft 1.3 of 30 June 2014

## *Status of this document*

The present document (“the Renewal Document” or “the Document”) highlights some proposals (“the Proposals”) regarding the structural renewal (“the Renewal”) of the *association internationale du théâtre amateur – international amateur theatre association* (“aita-iata”). The Proposals have been discussed within a renewal working group (“the Renewal Working Group”) as well as within the Executive Board (“EB”) and Council of aita-iata. The Renewal Document will be the basis of a **formal proposal** regarding the Renewal of aita-iata as it will be submitted to the organisation’s General Assembly (“GA”). Under its present form, the document should therefore be seen as a *working paper* that needs fine-tuning to finally “evolve” into a **Renewal Memo**, which will be the basis of the Renewal proposals to be made part of the aita-iata constitution. The Renewal Working Group, EB and Council have - in principle - agreed to the general terms and principles elaborated in the Document, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

## *Context*

During the course of 2012 and 2013, Dirk De Corte, former EB Member of aita-iata (1995-2001) was asked by representatives of the organisation to lead a process regarding the restructuring of the organisation. At an EB meeting in Berlin (February 2013) a workshop was held with all EB-members, which, amongst others, focused on the following questions: *What is aita-iata’s biggest problem at the moment? Why is it a problem? What’s our agenda? What’s our destination? How do we measure success? What do we bring to the world? Does that matter and to whom? Is what we bring scarce and difficult to imitate? Are we doing today what we need to do in order to still matter tomorrow?*

As a result of this workshop, EB decided that during the upcoming Congress in Monaco (August 2013) a workshop with a larger group should be held (“the Monaco Workshop”). This workshop should address one basic question: *what are the problems our members currently experience as most cumbersome and therefore need to be addressed urgently*. This workshop, which was attended by 40 people from all over the world, identified *networking* as the main strength of the organisation whereas *cultural diversity* was perceived as the biggest opportunity. The participants furthermore mentioned the following weaknesses: the *heavy structure* of the organisation, its *exclusive elitist image*, the fact aita-iata is *not a worldwide organisation* and the *information flow*, which was judged as being *too slow*.

During the Council meeting immediately following the Monaco Workshop, Council decided that a Renewal Working Group would be formed, which Dirk De Corte was asked to lead. Other Working Group members were Merja Laaksovirta, President; Rob Van Genechten, President-Elect; Villy Dall, Treasurer; and Aled Rhys-Jones, Interim

English Secretary who was also charged with co-ordinating the group. Other people occasionally attended the meetings of the Renewal Working Group.

The Renewal Working Group subsequently met in Ghent (November 2013), Røddekro (January 2014), Monaco (March 2014) – together with EB –, and Venice, Florida (June 2014) – together with Council. The present Renewal Document is the draft of the ***in principle agreed proposals*** as discussed and agreed (either in full, in principle or partly) during the Venice, Florida (June 2014) meeting.

### *The Proposals*

The Renewal Proposals are the following:

- 1. The Congress should be split into a formal General Assembly and a "Forum" open to everyone with an interest in amateur theatre*
- 2. The International Festivals should be granted Membership status (with voting rights in GA).*
- 3. Associates should be granted Membership (with voting rights in GA)*
- 4. Aita-iata should no longer have 3 "Language Secretaries" but 1 "Secretary". The operational languages should be a joint responsibility of the Council.*
- 5. The present "three-tier structure" (GA-Council-EB) should be simplified into a "two-tier structure" (GA-Council).*
- 6. The number of Councillors (15) should be reduced to preferably 7 (or, maybe, 9)*
- 7. The GA elects 7 (or 9) Councillors into the Council, with Council electing President, Secretary, and Treasurer.*

As the proposal is to grant Membership to both Associates and International Festivals, it is also the opportunity to put the whole voting system under scrutiny (at present Full Members (i.e. National Centres) carry 6 votes, Affiliate Members carry 2 votes).

**Full agreement** was reached regarding proposals #1, #2, #3, #4 and #5. **In principle agreement** was reached on proposal #6 (see below). Proposal #7 needs further discussion as two "variants" of this proposal emerged (see below).

### *The 7 Proposals in detail*

Underneath we elaborate each proposal and explain under "Aim" to which extent it meets the concerns of the Monaco Workshop in particular and the overall feeling of Renewal Working Group members, EB and Council in general. Under "Comments" we provide additional comments and some issues to be taken care of.

- 1. Congress split into a formal General Assembly and a "Forum" open to everyone with an interest in amateur theatre*

Aim:

Simplify structure and create more openness

Comments:

The present “Congress” will be split into a formal General Assembly, where only members have voting rights (other attendants continue to have speaking rights, but no voting rights), whereby such General Assembly will deal with "legal" issues only. Those legal issues are: approving budgets and accounts, accepting new members, expelling members, electing councillors, dismissing councillors, changes in the constitution and dissolution of the association<sup>1</sup>. The aim is for this GA to take *half a day* at its maximum.

Alongside the GA, a “forum” will be held that will be open to everyone *with an interest in amateur theatre*, i.e. members as well as non-members of aita-iata. The organisation of this forum will be the responsibility of the Council. It is meant to be a gathering where ideas can be exchanged, visions regarding amateur theatre developed, and "grass-root idea generation" can occur. It will be the Council’s responsibility to take the outcomes of the forum into account when drafting action plans and deciding on strategic directions aita-iata is to take.

Participation is in principle open to everyone, however, for practical reasons, participants will have to register in advance. Preferably, participation to this event is free of charge.

A correct name for the “forum” is still under discussion. The more neutral “Forum” could be preferred as previously suggested names such as “Conference” or “Convention” seemed to arouse some controversy, misunderstanding, and, more importantly, different connotations and expectations depending on cultural and linguistic contexts. In any case, “Congress”, the term that is currently in use has to be replaced to clearly mark the split between “legal” and “content” debates.

## 2. *The International Festivals granted Membership status with voting rights in GA*

Aim:

Allow those organisations realising aita-iata’s mission to connect people through amateur theatre to have a formal place in aita-iata’s decision-making bodies. During the Monaco Workshop, “*Networking*” was labelled to be a key strength and, most importantly, the concretization of the organisation’s mission.

Comments:

Granting Membership status to international festivals should not be confused with granting international festivals the label of *Official aita-iata Festival*. Indeed, all Official

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Belgian law of non-profit associations (*associations sans but lucratif, verenigingen zonder winstoogmerk*) these competences have to remain within the GA. Aita-iata asbl-vzw is a non-profit organisation registered under Belgian law (5 March 2003)

aita-iata Festivals, could, through that very title, automatically obtain the status of Member of aita-iata with voting rights in the GA.

In order to have a maximum inflow of international festival members, the “threshold” should not be too high, nevertheless taking into account the *international* character of the festivals.

### 3. Associates granted Membership status (with voting rights in GA)

Aim:

Create more openness. Deal with the notion of “exclusivity” of the organisation.

Comments:

At present, Associates, although paying a fee do not have voting rights in the General Assembly. The proposal is to grant them 1 vote, whereby the same proxy mechanism for other members is valid to them: a voting member can carry only one vote from another member and proxies can only be carried by members who are “physically” present at the General Assembly.

Although we realise that granting such voting rights to Associates might cause controversy with the Full Members, we believe that it is a sign of openness and addresses the *exclusivity* notion as raised in the Monaco Workshop. Moreover, it also provides access to groups from countries with no National Centre and equally takes away the “pressure” from such groups to “represent” a national amateur theatre activity where these groups have no ambition to do so.

By substantially enlarging the organisation and by creating a (possibly and hopefully) strong “Associate Member category”, one may need to build in certain mechanisms that “protect” the rights of members from all categories.

### 4. No longer 3 "Language Secretaries", but 1 "Secretary". "Language issue" is joint responsibility of the Council

Aim:

Simplify organisational structure

Comments:

At the present moment, the EB has three elected secretaries dealing with aita-iata's three official languages, French, English and Spanish. They are part of EB and Council, and form 4/7 of the EB (President, Vice President, Treasurer and EB Member for Children and Youth being the other members). Although working in three languages is a severe task for an organisation with a small budget, at this stage we do not question the necessity to have three working languages. We believe, however, that communication is essential for the functioning of the organisation and as such a joint responsibility of the

Council, for which one person, “the Secretary”, oversees the delivery of this process. Communication channels should be as direct and short as possible. We judge a direct communication between the aita-iata secretariat, the regions and indeed **all the members of the association** to be vital. (During the Monaco workshop “communication” clearly emerged as a concern of the participants)

*5. Present "three-tier structure" (GA-Council-EB) replaced by "two-tier structure" (GA-Council).*

Aim:

Simplify organisational structure. Make communication easier.

Comments:

At the moment the agendas of EB and Council often overlap. It is often the impression that work is “doubled”. Although the Council is formally taking decisions, the “translation” between *taking* those decisions (Council) and *executing* them (EB) is often confusing. That is why the creation of one entity, alongside the GA, should be preferred. By law (Belgian Law on non-profit organisations) a Council is mandatory, an EB optional. Therefore the EB will cease to exist, which will transform the present three-tier structure into a much simpler two-tier structure.

*6. Number of Councillors (15) to be reduced to 7 (or 9)*

Aim:

Simplify organisational structure. Make communication easier (because of reduction of Councillors).

Comments:

With the abolition of the EB, the Council becomes the only executive body. Under the renewed structure, it should be a flexible, efficient, body working in solidarity with only one aim: *the joint interest of amateur theatre all around the world*. In order to allow the Council to work effectively, it is proposed that the present number of 15 Councillors is reduced to 7 (or 9).

*7. GA elects 7 (or 9) Councillors into the Council, with Council electing President, Secretary, and Treasurer*

Aim:

Simplify organisational structure. Create transparent structure. Allow for more openness in the organisation as well as making the organisation less *exclusive*.

#### Comments:

At present the Council consists of two groups of members: the Executive Board and the “Representatives” from the regions. It is the regions that determine which representatives are sent to the Council whereby the GA formally appoints such representatives. On the other hand, the Executive Board consists entirely of people *individually* elected by the GA: President, Vice-President, Treasurer, EB Member for Children and Youth, French Speaking Secretary, English Speaking Secretary, and Spanish Speaking Secretary. Although elected individually, these people jointly form the Executive Board. This structure of the Council is therefore based on *representativity* of the various regions, somewhat disregards the fact the certain members are not belonging to a region, and stresses *representativity* more than *solidarity*.

The newly proposed structure essentially focuses on *solidarity* between Council members and deals with the *diversity* issue (which is, under the old structure, a *result* of the *representativity*, not an *aim* in itself) in a different way.

Our proposal is to have 7 (or 9) Councillors elected by the Council. Those 7 (or 9) Councillors jointly form the Council. The Council members will elect a President, Secretary and Treasurer and, although not required legally, could choose to elect a Vice-President. One can stipulate that, in case of absence of the President, the oldest/youngest (or whomever Councillor) chairs the meeting. So under this proposal, the GA no longer elects individual posts but a group of 7 (or 9) Councillors.

The proposal has some consequences:

- Councillors can come from all membership categories (Associate Members also) and need no longer belong to a National Centre or a Region, neither do they have to be supported by a National Centre or a Region to put forward their candidacy. Any member of the association can indeed be a candidate for any post. This clearly meets the request of *openness* and *inclusiveness* as came out of the Monaco Workshop.
- The “prestigious” election campaigns of president (and, to a lesser extent, other posts) will cease to exist. Focus will be on *solidarity* and the work to be done jointly, not on the prestige of a position.

The Renewal Proposals fundamentally differ from the present situation in three ways:

1. Whereas under the present situation, the EB cannot have more than one citizen from the same country<sup>2</sup>, in theory all 7 (9) Councillors could come from the same country. In practice though it will be extremely unlikely that 7 (9) people for one country would actually stand as well as those 7 (9) getting a majority of votes in the GA, as the resident country of these candidates would only have a limited number of votes anyway.

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<sup>2</sup> Under the present situation, it is theoretically possible, though, to have 3 Council members from the same country. This would be the case if two citizens of a multi-lingual country (say, Canada, Belgium or Switzerland) would both be elected for the EB and be regional representative of more than one region, e.g. NARA and CIFTA in the case of Canada, CEC and CIFTA in the case of Belgium and Switzerland

2. As a result of the reduction of council members, regions no longer have a *guaranteed presence* in the Council whereas some regions can be “overrepresented”. In theory, the latter is already the case under the present situation, as all 7 EB members could come from one region<sup>3</sup>. But here again, the GA has autonomous power to decide whatever it feels proper.
  
3. The election of the President (and indeed other EB-positions) is no longer through a vote of GA, but amongst peer Council-members. This also means abandoning the system of a President-Elect, who is elected two years before he/she takes office. Under the new system, however, a person elected into the Council can decide after two years, when he/she has got him/herself familiar with the working of the Council, to stand for the post, which would actually make that person at least as well prepared than under the President-Elect system where, at the moment the candidate announces his/her intention to stand for the Presidency, there may well be no experience in how a Council runs in practice. Under the new system, and if GA and fellow Council members decide so, it becomes possible for a President to be president for 8 years. More importantly, aita-iata abandons the system of “American-style” presidential elections, of which one can argue whether they suit the mission and the style of our organisation at all.

During the discussions with EB and Council it appeared difficult to obtain a consensus around the election of the president by either the General Assembly or the Council. Therefore, at present, proposal # 7 has two variants:

- The “7-variant” (“9-variant”<sup>4</sup>), whereby, as described above, 7 (9) Councillors are elected by the GA<sup>5</sup> and those Councillors elect, a Secretary, Treasurer and a President<sup>6</sup>, every two years
- The “6+1-variant” (“8+1-variant”<sup>7</sup>), whereby the GA continues, as it does today, to elect a President 2 years in advance, and in addition to that 6 (8) Councillors<sup>8</sup>. Those 6 (8) Councillors and the President elect a Secretary and Treasurer<sup>9</sup> every two years

At this point, one still has to decide whether either the 7 (9)-variant or the 6+1 (8+1)-variant is preferred.

Exhibits 3 to 7 show Time Tables that explain how each of the variants may work as well as how the transition between the present situation and the new situation will in practice occur. In order to respect the present constitution it will be clear, however, that the elections scheduled for the 2015 GA (Vice President, English Speaking Secretary for

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<sup>3</sup> 6 if one excludes one of the language secretaries

<sup>4</sup> When 9 Councillors instead of 7

<sup>5</sup> 3 (4) Councillors in year x, 4 (5) Councillors in year x+2

<sup>6</sup> and a Vice-President if Council thinks this to be proper

<sup>7</sup> When 9 Councillors instead of 7

<sup>8</sup> 3 (4) Councillors every two years

<sup>9</sup> and a Vice-President if Council thinks this to be proper

the EB; Regional Representatives CIFTA and NEATA) will continue as planned. Those Council members will all be voted into 4-year terms, expiring in 2019, **2019 being the year when the structural change should be fully implemented.**

### *Next Steps*

Further to the Council meeting in Venice, Florida, the Renewal Proposals will be discussed at various levels: regions and individual national centres. The outcome of these discussions will result in feedback that will, in its turn, possibly, lead to new, amended, versions of the Renewal Document.

Council will reconvene in Peligros, Spain, in November 2014, when a redrafted Renewal Document will be presented, based on the input received between now and November 2014. Subsequently, during a Spring 2015 meeting (or meetings), the Renewal Document will be further fine-tuned and redrafted into an “approval proof” final draft, to be put submitted to the GA in Ypres, Belgium, Summer 2015.

### **Drafted by Dirk De Corte, 30 June 2014**

Exhibit 1: Present Structure

Exhibit 2: Proposed Structure

Exhibit 3: Transition Time Table (“the 7-variant”)

Exhibit 4: Transition Time Table (“the 6+1-variant”)

Exhibit 5: Transition Time Table (“the 9-variant”)

Exhibit 6: Transition Time Table (“the 8+1-variant”)

### **Versions of the Document**

- Version 1.1 of 26 June 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 1.2 of 29 June 2014 (*working version*)
- Version 1.3 of 30 June 2014 (***current version – disclosed***)

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