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6

SIX QUESTIONS TO

# OLIVIER PORTRAT

EFTTA-CEO





During a short trip to the Bavarian Alps and a visit at the fly fishing legend and our SCALE partner Rudi Heger this fall, I was lucky to meet Olivier Portrat. Olivier has been a fixture on the worldwide fishing scene for decades. Being the son of a French diplomat he has always been a nomad and his journalistic, photographic and of course fishing skills are internationally renowned and appreciated. What few anglers and fishermen have noticed, however, is that Olivier currently holds the position of CEO of EFTTA (European Fishing Tackle Trade Association), replacing his predecessor Jean-Claude Bel since the year 2020.

Portrait is a linguistic talent, speaks fluent German, English and French, and is also proficient in Italian, Spanish and Dutch, so that the diverse communication combined with his expertise and cosmopolitan background perfectly qualify him for this position.

If the opportunity arises to meet such a veteran of the journalistic fishing scene, it goes without saying that this must be taken. So I had the pleasure to ask Olivier 6 questions in a short interview, that seem to be of enormous importance for us anglers in Europe and maybe partly worldwide.



“Hello Olivier, first of all, congratulations for you on the election of the EFTTA CEO and thank you very much on behalf of the editorial staff for your time with us, and of course also in the name of the European readership of SCALE Magazine.”

**1. “Would you please explain to our readers what EFTTA actually represents and which (also political) functions it holds? The meaning and effect of the pan-European functionality of an association probably seems very far off for the individual angler.”**

„EFTTA represents the interests of the European angling industry. The main focus of this work is to cooperate with the EU (Commission & European Parliament) in order to secure the long-term future of angling in the best possible way. This is important because the future of the angling industry has never been so threatened as it is today. These dangers are of political, economic and ecological nature.

If the EU were to make appointments with private individuals, it would be suffocated in a confusing flood of appointments. Therefore, the EU is calling for interest groups to organize themselves into an association. This will provide a clearer overview of the situation. The positive aspect is that we fishermen can also be heard in this way. But the same applies to our opponents. European decision-makers can get their own picture of the situation and thus make well-founded decisions on this basis. Without our own association, we anglers would not be heard in Brussels. An association such as EFTTA is therefore essential for a sensible continuity of angling within the EU”.

2. “EFTTEX, as the exhibition organ of the European Fishing tackle Trade Association, has received increasing negative criticism in recent years (SCALE also reported on this in two issues). The organisers were criticised for outdated management, very limited media coverage, ignoring key social media figures and thus failing to address the entire younger generation of anglers as well as the potential customers of tomorrow. Also, many well-known manufacturers, such as Shimano, have stopped exhibiting at EFTTEX in the first place. As the new CEO of EFTTA, where do you want to take EFTTEX to?”

“I have only been in office since December 2019. One of my first projects was the EFTTEX – I wanted to take this, Europe’s largest angling trade show, and turn it into a more attractive and modern event that would bring a breath of fresh air and involve the angling youth of Europe.

The exhibition should have been held in Prague in June. Because Prague has the beautiful Moldau River I and my friend Ross Honey (WPC, WCC & WSF) set out to create an international street fishing competition parallel to EFTTEX.

At the same time I had secured a budget to invite at least 2/3 of the European social media (bloggers, influencers etc) and the representatives of the printed press. In this way, this trade fair for dealers also reaches the consumers directly – an added value for the exhibitors.

The aim was to inform all these „players“ in the angling industry about the importance of EFTTA’s work in Brussels and to make them understand why we need the support of all anglers, why the survival of angling depends on our work in Brussels. But then came Corona. We had to cancel the fair and postpone it until next year ...”



**3. “Even if the topic may have become a tiresome one for many people, the current events around COVID-19 determine our everyday life worldwide. Thus also the practice of sport fishing. From an economical point of view, this may have devastating effects, e.g. for tour operators, guides and possibly also the gear manufacturers. Do you see the pandemic as a current reason for the economically oriented outcry or do you consider it from a different point of view?”**

“The first European „lockdown“ was very strict, especially in southern European countries. In Italy, France and Spain fishing was simply forbidden. This was of course a catastrophe for the local fishing stores and the wholesalers who supply these stores. But since then the tide has turned. Fishing has been allowed again, and an amazing phenomenon has developed throughout Europe: More people have gone fishing than ever before!

Throughout Europe, millions of „new“ anglers have been created by Corona – somewhere understandable, because fishing is „social-distancing at its best! This trend is most spectacular in Central and Northern European countries. Many of the big European wholesalers were already sold out in early summer!

The good thing is: this trend will probably continue. But there are also losers and in many ways fishing tourism is more of a loser than a winner, especially in France, Italy and Spain. I wish the companies & guides concerned a lot of staying power – there will be rosy times again!

An astonishing side effect is that the fish of the Ebro, for example, have never had such peace and quiet from anglers – and this will undoubtedly have a positive effect on fish stocks in the long term ...”

**4. “What is your assessment of the ecological situation of our planet and therefore inevitably the future situation for us sport fishermen, who are all dependent on ecology? So what do you think is a future-oriented, contemporary angling, if we want to include factors like climate change or environmental and habitat destruction in this vision?”**

“The ecological situation of our planet is unfortunately disastrous. For 150 years we have been systematically overexploiting nature – and now we are paying the price in the form of rapidly advancing climate change, among other things.

On the part of EFTTA, we in Brussels are fighting for free migration routes in our rivers and are vehemently resisting additional waterway construction, while at the same time promoting the dismantling of power plants. But in the context of the nuclear phase-out and the search for „sustainable“ energies, thousands of new hydroelectric power projects are in the planning phase! For us at EFTTA, any hydroelectric power associated with damming is an ecological disaster and anything but sustainable.

Massive, mostly agricultural caused insect losses make it difficult for many fish species to thrive. Invasive species, some of which are extremely protected (cormorants, otters!), make the situation even more difficult – unfortunately there are countless construction sites here too.

I try to make myself heard by the decision-makers in Brussels by always pointing out that we anglers have a vested interest in healthy biotopes, as only then can our fishing sport be crowned with success. We anglers are nature conservationists and not nature users!





**5. “The fishing industry itself seems to be developing rapidly, despite the crisis it has been called. It is estimated that the European fishing sector has a turnover of at least 20-25 billion euros a year (sea fishing alone generates 10.5 billion euros in turnover and 100,000 jobs within the EU – see the study by Kieran Hyder), and in the USA this figure could be quadrupled again. How can we make our hobby sustainable and nature-friendly?”**

“This is in our very own interest, today more than ever before, because the EU has declared war on plastic waste. We at EFTTA welcome this „war“ – it is unfortunately necessary. Whoever expresses a different opinion, I would ask them to ask their children about this issue and the answers regularly that such a „war“ is essential. The youth of today are aware of this problem, often more so than the older generations ... Whenever possible, I urge the industry behind the fishing business to be more ecological and „greener“ on its own initiative.

Currently, research is underway to find out what percentage of the plastic waste in the European oceans we fishermen are responsible for. Unfortunately, these investigations are currently based on the number of pieces and not on the weight of the plastic found. If a 300 kilo synthetic fishing net is found on a beach (which professional fishermen often deliberately dispose of in the sea, because it is cheaper than any professional disposal!), then this amounts to as much in the statistics as a few centimeters of fishing line! This is of course extremely unfair towards us fishermen, that’s what I am fighting against in Brussels.

Would the plastic waste that we anglers dispose of - against our will! – be rated by weight when fishing, we would hardly appear in these statistics as waste producers at all. A plastic bottle contains far more plastic than what the average angler loses in his life in fishing line over getting snagged. No angler is out to lose his equipment, because he has to pay a lot of money for it!

The EU Commission is currently working on a list of banned disposable plastics. Last winter, plastic fishing line was suddenly on this list! It is important to know that not only nylon lines are made of plastic, but also braided lines are made of plastic-polymers. In short, if the plastic fishing line remains on this list and the list becomes legally binding after a vote in the European Parliament & Council, then the use of modern fishing line would suddenly be banned throughout the EU, to which we anglers have no sensible alternative! That would be the end of fishing and 100.000 jobs in the EU!



We have therefore made representations to the Commission and have convinced them to take plastic fishing line off this list of banned products. In return we promised that we will gladly give up plastic fishing lines as soon as we have a reasonable alternative (which does not exist yet!). This is only a stage win as the plastic line may be back on the banned list at some point – it is EFTTA's job to stay on top of it and stay on the ball.

In the crosshairs are also hard and softbaits made of plastic, lead, but also additives for boilies & attractant feed. I am a little less concerned about these issues as there are very environmentally friendly alternatives – for example soft plastic baits without plastisols and without other toxic substances.

As mentioned at the beginning, I am pushing „my“ industry to become „greener“ on its own initiative, even before any laws require us to do so. The echo is very positive – the proof is in the many environmentally friendly soft plastic baits that are now on the market, and many manufacturers now offer alternatives to lead.”

**6. “And finally the hypothetical question to you: If you were an eco-dictator in Europe, what would your personal goals and strategies in the EU be in favor of fishing?”**

„This is a difficult question, because if you want to be a „good“ dictator, you have to make many compromises, which often dilute the result. I am aware that it is not only us fishermen and our interests that are at stake ...

1. I would be a declared opponent of fish farming in open waters. This is factory farming outdoors, which is accompanied by a high use of medication. The only justifiable form of fish breeding takes place in closed recirculation systems, possibly also aquaponics. It is important that the farmed fish species can thrive without animal proteins, because currently 5 kilos of wild fish (anchovies, sardines etc.) are used to produce one kilo of farmed fish. Salmon & trout and other predatory fish cannot be fattened with vegetable proteins.



2. I would be vehemently against the great pressure that the commercial fishery puts on the biotopes. All fish should be left to sport fishing – every fish caught with a rod is economically (and culinary!) worth many times the value of the same fish that is killed by commercial fishing. We anglers can take fish selectively, without destroying any habitats. We do not destroy the bottoms of the oceans with trawls or other extremely harmful fishing techniques. Also, we anglers are not able to destroy entire stocks – professional fishermen, on the other hand, have already managed to do so in many oceans. The horrible „ghost nets“ are also a legacy of professional fishing! Now one might say that it is impossible to dispense with commercial fishing – but this is not true: Florida has banned commercial fishing with nets and other harmful techniques for a long time! And it has become the state with the richest fish populations in the USA. Nevertheless, the locals don't have to do without fish, because anglers are allowed to sell fish under certain controlled circumstances. Although at first the professional fishermen cried out loudly, in the meantime the added value of Florida's fish stocks has increased: The former professional fishermen now earn better money by renting boats and accommodation to anglers or as guides. Everyone in Florida has benefited from the measures taken – especially nature ...

3. I would take full advantage of the great benefits that fishing has over hunting: In contrast to the hunter, we fishermen are free to leave the creature we have captured alive and release it after a successful act! Accordingly I would reject the German way, which almost obliges the anglers to kill the caught fish. By the way, this course is unique in the EU, in every other EU country you are free to decide on the survival of the captured fish yourself. After all, in the forest the German hunter is not obliged to kill everything that gets in front of his shotgun! And for those who criticize it when we fishermen go fishing for „fun“, I'm happy to ask if they use contraception during sex. Usually this question is answered with a perplexed „yes“ – and then I would say that it is the same with fishing - our driving force is only exceptionally the fish on the plate, because for us the experience of nature comes first, just like with sex – except for Mormons and similar sects ...

4. Last but not least, I would be against hydraulic engineering, especially against the destruction of migration routes by dams. Also I would promote high quality water treatment in terms of sanitation and sewage treatment plants. I do not mind hydroelectric power using ocean currents and the like, the important thing is to keep migration routes open – not only to allow fish to ascend into the rivers, but also to ensure smooth migration“.

**„Finally, also on behalf of our readers, I would like to thank you for your time and wish you all the best and a lot of positive influence on the political, economic and ecological events surrounding angling in the EU as CEO of EFTA!“** (Frank Steinmann)

