

## Luisa Coutinho's address to the EWF General Assembly

EWF, was created in 1992 with the strategy of having a legally established organization, and a call for its secretariat was launched. Portugal was one of the member countries answering this call (ISQ) and was the selected proposal. The first General Assembly was in Paris, hosted by Institut de Soudure in October 1992.

The start was difficult, as some members were quite suspicious that we wouldn't be able to do the job.

Olga and I, in part time, had the task of organizing an administrative support to the EWF members, Technical Committees and Working Groups. We needed to assure the meetings were properly organized and conducted, with all necessary documents, duly updated, circulating on time.

The first training guideline was approved in 1992 as well as the Rules to operate the EWF Quality System. From then onwards, bit by bit, more members, more guidelines, more ANBs joined the System. The initial fees to be paid by the members to maintain the Secretariat were set.

The first year, when accounts were presented, was 1993, and the income was 75000 Ecu with the expenses being approximately 78000 Ecu. In the first years the activity closed with negative results. In 1995 ISQ proposed to separate the EWF finances from ISQ's.

With shortage of funds, it was not possible to provide a decent service to EWF members using the System and above all it was not possible to invest in the continuous improvement it required. The T&Q system was under a dead penalty.

So, what does a manager do to avoid the collapse of an organization? Finds other markets and other businesses but in this case EWF was an organization that couldn't go to the market on itself, thus many obvious options were forbidden.

The solution was to try EU funding from collaboration projects.

The first attempt in 1997 was a project from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme, the Weld On Project.

Due to a problem in the organization running the Leonardo EU projects, the final payment was not received when expected. What was the result? A year with even more problems in the accounts. The GA decided EWF would not coordinate EU projects.

During this period, negotiations with IIW were in course to open the use of the EWF System to non-European countries with big markets and strong welding institutes/associations, which was expected to generate the necessary income. Everybody knows this didn't happen, on the contrary, the costs increased, and the income was far from the foreseen.

It soon became evident that the EWF system wouldn't be sustainable with an income based only in members' fees. Fixed fees. This would only be possible by generating an income related with the activity, thus in 2003 a variable fee was established. This was nevertheless not enough to face the extra costs related with more guidelines, more members, more meetings... In a continuous scenario of financial problems, I decided to focus on getting extra income from EU projects. This activity increased significantly in the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme (2002-2006). The Leonardo Programme was again where we focused our efforts since its objective was to promote education, training and qualification of personnel in Europe. One of the successful proposals, was to create a data base of examination questions. This was the start of what we have today.

In 2003 EWF was participating in four Leonardo Projects, in the first Research and Development project by invitation of ISQ and submitted 10 project proposals.

Also, from 2003 onwards the EWF System activities achieved some stability with more than 20 training guidelines and qualifications, certification systems for companies and personnel, 44 countries using it- 30 European members, plus 14 outside Europe, through the agreement signed with IIW in 2001.

By then EWF was a legal organization registered in Portugal, following a resolution of the EWF General Assembly in 2001. This required a

reorganization of the legal and finance procedures, thus a new Constitution, Byelaws and the nomination of a local responsible. The EWF BD transferred the responsibility for managing EWF, finances included, to the EWF management –myself! This was endorsed by the GA. I would like to thank the members for the trust deposited in me. It was quite a responsibility which some years later, 2012, was shared with Rute and Italo.

A couple of facts deserve to be mentioned since they were milestones in achieving the success, we have in EU activities these days.

ISQ and TWI were the members that supported EWF in starting activity in RTD EU collaboration projects. I already mentioned the first one with ISQ in 2003. By invitation of TWI, EWF was involved in two Collective Research Projects in 2008.

But we wanted to go a step further and coordinate EU projects. One of the problems we had was that, neither the Commission nor the experts evaluating projects accepted EWF as the coordinator of large RTD projects. EWF was not known.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework, in 2006, EWF was participating in one big RTD project, coordinated by TNO, Econweld. TNO decided to withdraw from the project halfway and EWF accepted the challenge of coordinating a first large EU project and inherited this coordination in a very poor state. The Commission was quite suspicious that we would be able to perform well. A professional team, strongly committed, proved EWF was perfectly capable of coordinating projects. From then onwards, no more comments were made on the Evaluation Forms of the EU project proposals referring the lack of proved competence from EWF.

With the participation and coordination in EU projects, the visibility of EWF increased significantly not only in EU environments but also in European reference companies.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and Horizon 2020 consolidated this activity of EWF, as all our EU members and most of the non-EU have participated in these projects.

The total funding gathered for EWF and its members in the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework programme, was 3.4 million €. In the early years of Horizon 2020 this

reached over 2 million€ in 2015 and, similarly in 2016, it reached over 2.5million €. Approximately half of this funding was used to directly support the EWF.

Now, in 2019, towards the end of Horizon 2020, EWF is participating in 20 EU projects, 11 Erasmus and 9 H2020, which generate an income of 3.5 million € only for EWF.

Thanks to our efforts we have been able to maintain the 'Welding' system despite its continuous decrease in the number of diplomas awarded. More than 100 Leonardo and Erasmus projects aimed at updating, promoting, increasing the impact of the EWF Welding and Joining System.

All this activity created the possibility of investing in new areas, adhesive bonding was one of the first, in 2001, several others followed and more recently Additive Manufacturing became our focus. For this, it was necessary to collaborate with experts in AM, from companies, research organizations, universities, and more than 50 experts were present in the workshops organized by EWF for the definition of the content of the AM professions.

Only in the development of the AM system, EWF invested half a million euros. It is now for our members to assure the return of this investment, by using the system themselves and working towards the enlargement of the EWF market, grabbing a wider market in their own countries. It is not only 'welding' anymore.

The success in managing and participating in EU collaboration projects, doesn't nevertheless mean, we can relax. More diverse sources of income are needed to assure a sustainable business capable of surviving under adverse circumstances.

Other actions have been promoted, as for instance selling results of EU projects, the EMFweld software being one example. A case where the investment is being recovered, by clients in only 9 of our member countries. More can be done, since the know-how gained because of the collaboration with the 'best' in Europe, companies and research organizations, through the participation in EU projects, is an asset of EWF that can be more developed. Actions are being implemented with this goal in perspective

Now EWF is a leading organization in Europe for professional qualifications in manufacturing, recognized by all stakeholders, the European Commission,

EU platforms, industry, universities, institutes, and more recently EWF has taken the first steps towards a wider recognition, the collaboration with UNESCO, the European Training Foundation ETF, responsible for the collaboration between Europe and the other regions of the world, as well as the World Manufacturing Forum are examples of these actions. The recent reference to the EWF AM system in the report from the World Manufacturing Forum –“Skills for the Future of Manufacturing” is an example of an outcome of this activity.

I can't finish this final address to the EWF General Assembly without a special thank you to all EWF members for their support, in particular the ones that have recognized my work, through the many awards I have received: ASR in Romania, TWI in the UK, AWS, IIW recommendations from EWF members, VUZ in Slovakia, Cesol in Spain.

I am proud of what I have achieved in the 27 years of managing EWF and this would not have been possible without the collaboration of a team of high-performance people. You know Rute, Italo and Olga well, who are pillars of the success of EWF.

Seven years ago, I started a process of coaching a new generation of future managers of EWF. My concern was to assure the preparation of a younger team to continue the work we have done, when my time to retire would come. This has been achieved and so, more recently you have come to know a younger generation, namely Eurico, Tobias, and many more who work for EWF, which are making this Association the success that it is, for the benefit of our members.

I will leave you in good hands!

The future is not without challenges, competition is fierce in all EWF areas of activity, innovation is continuous, training and qualification need to be at the forefront of technical innovation, younger generations have different ways of acquiring knowledge, skills and competences. Flexible training paths are the “state of the art”, even in Universities.

Failing to address these issues will mean the end of our Qualification System. The continuous decrease in the number of diplomas awarded is not a good sign.

On the other hand, new professions are appearing, the need for harmonization of professional qualifications in manufacturing is more and more embedded in the minds of all stakeholders, and opportunities are immense.

EFMD is a strong organization, with a great reputation in Europe, with a team of highly competent people and with a good financial situation.

This is how I leave EFMD to you, with the assurance that the basis is set for more 25 years of success.