

Bringing European Springmakers Together

A look into the past, present and future of the European Spring Federation

By Wallie Dayal
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Were it not for the selfless dedication, untiring devotion, personal initiative and financial subsidies of its founders, committed officers and proponents, there would be no European Spring Federation (ESF).

This year, the ESF can look back on a proud history of 14 years, during which it has been providing an indispensable service to the spring industry in spite of occasionally destabilizing national, cultural and individual differences, and significant financial odds. The ESF is one leg of the three-legged stool of primary representatives of the global spring industry: ESF, Europe; Japan Spring Manufacturers Association (JSMA), Japan; and Spring Manufacturers Institute (SMI), North America.

Unlike JSMA and SMI, the ESF is often faced with elephantine challenges rooted in the cultural diversity of Europe that can look insignificant from across the ocean. True to form, to some insiders, the future of ESF looks bright; to others, it appears bleak. One thing is for sure: The ESF has fulfilled an important and necessary role in the global spring industry and is the focal point of hope for the future economic prosperity of many springmakers.

Nine countries contributed 11 perspectives to this article. From within ESF they include reflections of first president Dr. Bernt Schroer, Wilh. Brand KG Federnfabrik, Germany; immediate past president Michael Parkinson, Airedale Springs Ltd., UK; presiding president Michel Guillemet, Lachant et Quesnel, France; board member and treasurer Piero Longoni, Mollificio Lombardo spa, Italy; board member Dr. Federico Visentin, Mevis spa, Italy; long-time member Peter Hagens, Hagens Fjedre A/S, Denmark; and long-time board members Timo Parmasuo and Robert Paajanen, Meconet Ltd., Finland. In addition, spring colleagues from other parts of the world – JSMA president Tsughiro Maeda, NHK Spring Co., Ltd., Japan; SMI



past president Pete Peterson, Peterson Spring, North America; and Institute of Spring Technology (IST) chief executive Arthur Hooper, UK – extend their congratulations, insights and suggestions.

Economic Environment

International business was just beginning to focus on globalization at the time the ESF was founded. Then, European springmakers wanted to collaborate on many fronts, such as standardization, vocational training and exchange of statistical data. During the 1990s, the ESF was indeed able to encourage many such projects and was very successful at bringing European national associations together. It was a time during which the concept of globalization became central to the future for many business managers. As a result, a great number of mergers and consolidations took place, and small and medium-sized enterprises developed an increasing need for information about domestic competitors as well as those in other countries.

Since then, massive forces of unforeseen change have shaped the world economy and with it the spring industry. Once

booming, the economy turned lackluster in 2000. As profits decreased, cost cutting intensified, and the events of September 11, 2001 inflicted another serious blow to the global economy. For all companies, this resulted in a second round of even more severe cost-cutting measures. In this environment, the large companies formed by mergers and takeovers turned out to be unwieldy and inflexible. Simultaneously, the idea of globalization increasingly lost luster.

ESF History and Accomplishments

Piero Longoni, Italy, Mollificio Lombardo spa, ESF treasurer and member of the board: “The national board members of ANCCEM, the Italian spring association, were the first to promote the idea of the European Spring Federation. At their behest, a meeting took place on October 19, 1984 in Menaggio, Como Lake. Italy was represented by Giovanni Manenti, president of ANCCEM; Germany by Dr. Bernt Schroer of the VDFI, the German spring association, and the UK by John Bennett, general secretary of SRAMA, the UK spring association (now the UKSMA and IST).

“The founders strongly believed that European and later worldwide standards would be of great benefit to the spring industry. In an industry that has an overwhelming number of small family-run companies, a European federation would represent strength in numbers, an ability to do market research and standardize employee training. Moreover, it would then be possible to solve technical problems at universities in several countries.



An array of spring association representatives gathered for the ESF International Spring Congress in France on Oct. 3-5, 2001. They included: (back row) Kjell Svensson, Ewes Staljader, Sweden; Michel Guillemet, Lachant et Quesnel, France, ESF president; (middle row) Robert Paajanen, Meconet, Finland, FSA president; Ron Abels, Avek Haarlem, Netherlands, DSA president; Peter Hagens, Hagens Fjedre, Denmark, DFF president; Piero Longoni, Mollificio Lombardo, Italy, ANCCEM president; Max Huges, Williams Hughes, UK; (front row) Dr. Hans-Jochem Steim, Kern Liebers, Germany, VDFI president; Elodie Dormoy, former ESF general secretary; Michael Parkinson OBE, Airedale Springs, UK, ESF past president; and Pete Peterson of Peterson Spring, U.S., SMI past president.

“At the same time, the founding committee was well aware of the historical residue that fuels respective likes and dislikes between European nations. The Germans, British and French have had their differences, and Italy played, and continues to play, an important role in the association’s life. The committee also had a keen awareness of conflicting interests within an association of competitors.

“In spite of the challenges, the founders forged ahead and formed the ESF to give springmakers a different view of the world and provide the European counterpart to the SMI and the JSMA.

In its 14 years of existence, the ESF has accomplished a great deal, and much is yet to be done. European standards have been developed, and more ISO standards are to be released soon. Had it not been for the ESF, European springmakers would not have contact with SMI or JSMA. There would not have been any conventions for professional exchanges and for getting to know springmakers from other countries on a personal basis. There would not have been any organized visits to spring manufacturers in different parts of the world.

“The ESF started with three members; today it has seven. I have been an ESF board member since the founding of ESF and treasurer since April 1998. I am hopeful that the Federation’s new status, which makes it eligible to receive funds from the EU, will enable the organization to solve outstanding technical problems in the spring industry with even more energy and vigor in the coming years.

“The most important personal message that I would like to share with my colleagues in springmaking is: Let’s do our work while observing all dimensions of professional ethics.”

Dr. Bernt Schroer, Germany, Wilh. Brand KG Federnfabrik, first president of ESF: “I was a co-initiator and founding member of ESF. Since 1984, members of the VDFI and ANCCEM often met to talk and hold annual meetings. Some of these meetings took place in Germany, and Mr. Koradi helped bridge the language gap by providing interpretation. He was also an active contributor to the meetings. Between 1984 and 1986, a number of meetings were organized and held in Menaggio at Lake Como, Italy. Other national associations in existence at that time, like the UK, France and Sweden, had been invited.

“Relationships and friendships developed and evolved. Often, the discussions focused on company strategy, product lines and respective activities in the international arena. Many participants wanted to know more about European competitors, the products they offer and the markets they serve.

“From 1989 to 1992, I was able to serve the ESF as its first president, and I enjoyed the excellent support of John Bennett. Thanks to his extensive consulting and persuasive efforts, we were able to jointly establish associations in Spain, Austria and The Netherlands. Moreover, we were able to support the formation of the Danish association. Even before ESF came into being, our Scandinavian colleagues had been in the habit of communicating with one another. However, these communications were irregular, ad-hoc communications that occurred without benefit of an association operating in accordance

with articles and bylaws. Kjell Svensson of Sweden and Peter Hagens of Denmark provided outstanding engagement and support.

“One of the most important issues for springmakers who attended the meetings was to build up their knowledge base about the spring industry. They wanted to learn more about other European springmakers’ core business areas. To that end, questionnaires were developed that could be answered by every springmaker, and benchmarking for various business segments was discussed at length. We also addressed spring-specific items and association issues. A decision was made to initiate projects in the area of norms, quality and joint research. A dictionary containing spring technology and material terminology in the most important European languages was created. Later, the member associations made quarterly reports about market development, sales development, employment forecasts, profit expectations, material prices and other matters.

“To satisfy their respective curiosities, springmakers made reciprocal company visits in an environment of mutual respect and trust. Personally, I was particularly interested in finding out the areas in which my colleagues had developed high levels of competition. This kind of ‘inside information’ generated enormous respect among colleagues and helped prevent misplaced investments – in particular, unjustified capacity expansion.

“I have always been an enthusiastic supporter of the ESF, which was not only important to me personally; it has also enabled us Europeans to deepen our contacts with our Japanese colleagues. Moreover, it has helped us shape and improve our approach to individual U.S. companies. Pete Peterson and Jim Zawacki of SMI played a very significant role in this.

“Within Europe, the high degree of candor, trust, fairness and contacts among the respective companies built bridges inside and outside the ESF. At the same time, some national associations conducted intense discussions about the future of the spring industry over the course of several days.

“There were times when a larger measure of generosity of cooperation would have been desirable. However, the diversity of cultural, national and business interests sometimes stirred up a fog that reduced vision to near zero. While some members generously invested time, effort and money in the organization, others insisted on precise calibration of the scales of give and take. Another group wanted to make sure that their advantages far outweighed their commitment to the organization. Because the ESF is a federation of associations, funding our budget was our foremost challenge at that time.

“It was a personal disappointment to me when cost issues increasingly became the primary concern of the federation. This was particularly galling when good topics were crowded out. By neglecting to focus on the benefits such projects could have brought the national associations or their members, ESF members made a grave mistake. In my opinion, and I am sup-

ported in this by several of my colleagues, the benefits should have been the key to the discussions and taken precedence over cost issues. Instead, only those research and development topics were discussed for which a subsidy could be expected from the European Union in Brussels. This approach went against my grain because research is future-oriented. It should be based on an existing need rather than on expected subsidies.

“Financial concerns also spoiled opportunities that could have sprung from the excellent advice of Robert Hendrickx,

ESF secretary for several years and former top manager for Bekaert. He was able to think outside the box. He could anticipate trends and had ideas about the further development of spring materials. It is sad that

his ideas and potential contributions were buried in the mountains of paperwork with which he had been burdened.

“Unfortunately, the ESF did not develop in line with my personal expectations. Nevertheless, it is of primary importance that the ESF affords colleagues from all parts of Europe an opportunity to meet and discuss bilateral and multilateral issues of personal concern. The ultimate success of a federation of associations depends on many factors. Among them are a strong president and an equally strong secretary. Together, they must lay out the parameters of the federation, and ensure that they are accepted and continually shaped by the members. In any federation, this is no small task. In a multi-national federation, it is complicated by culture, language, distance, priorities and worldview. This complicated and complex dynamic poses dangers in areas where businesspersons are specialists.

“Savvy executives gravitate to the efficiency model. Ideas that can demonstrate a clear and reasonably immediate benefit get support from company owners. In federations or associations, it does not work that way. As a result, administrators end up with the task of forming and shaping a federation in place of each and every one of its members. In short, an association must be formed and shaped by all members, not merely administered by a few people. By nature, multinational associations have the tendency to have a more static administration and, as my experience has shown, they have permanent financial problems. In the mid 1990s, I gradually reduced my involvement with the ESF.”

Peter Hagens, Denmark, Hagens Fjedre A/S, long-time ESF member: “As I am the head of the Danish Spring Federation (DFF), Hagens Fjedre A/S joined the ESF two years after its formation. For all European springmakers, the ESF held the enticing promise of common norms for tolerances and materials. Such common standards, springmakers knew, would make the business of springmaking much easier in the entire European region. Common norms would make it much easier to advise customers and would not only introduce a new kind of transparency into the market but also expand it.

“Common standards would eliminate products that look identical on first blush but are cheaper and subject to other quality standards. In the absence of European standards, products

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- Dr. Bernt Schroer

are built to respective country standards. For example, while the more expensive product of country A is made of an alloy containing more chromium and less iron, the cheaper product of country B contains more iron. Less sophisticated customers who make purchasing decisions based on price and buy the cheaper product discover sooner or later that the tensile strength of the springs is below expectations.

“At the other extreme, customers use the standard differences between countries’ specifications to their advantage. By requiring the cost structure of country A coupled with the feature structure of country B, customers have sometimes backed springmakers into unprofitable deals by playing off one competitor against another. Fortunately, this does not happen very often.

“Uniform standards help everyone, and the ESF has developed and implemented an entire series of EN norms. No fewer than 28 EN norms are now on record.

“But the ESF provides more than technical progress and strength; it is a forum to promote social contacts, to exchange ideas and to learn more about other springmakers’ respective specialties.

“In the last 10 years, the ESF has made substantial, solid progress. Some would argue that progress has been slow because ‘other people’ have stood in the way. Alas, there is a good measure of truth in that statement because all progress is based on a healthy balance of give and take. To live is to compromise, and to attain a goal it becomes necessary to be willing to concede one’s position for the greater good.

“Because many ESF members do not speak each other’s language, the federation used interpreters during the early years, but that made the meetings very long. In the interest of time, interpretation was discontinued. Now, ESF members communicate with one another as best as they can and, amazingly, that works rather well.”

Timo Parmasuo and Robert Paajanen, Finland, Meconet Ltd., long-time board members: “News of the ESF was carried to Finland by Scandinavian colleagues. We were intrigued by the ideas of increasing our knowledge of the spring business in other parts of Europe, the possibility of locating new partners, technology transfers and common European standards. To make it possible for us to become members of ESF, our company started the FSA, the Finnish Springmakers Association.

“We have appreciated the ESF and its activities. Over the years, we have noticed that the character and approach of this multi-national organization is shaped by the commitment and

engagement of the presiding president and by its individual, active members.

“Although the ESF has lived up to some of its aspirations, it has not entirely developed in line with our expectations. We would have liked to see more collaboration in the form of educational seminars, common strategies at the European level, and work on trade conditions, raw material tolerances and other technical matters. To increase and maintain appreciation of the ESF, it needs to have programs that generate the interest of

national associations and of the companies that belong to these associations.

“The Finnish association and our company need the ESF to help us track spring developments in other European countries. To that end, one of the most important aspects of ESF is the meetings, seminars and annual congresses it provides at which personal exchange of information can take place and at which relationships are established and solidified.”

Dr. Federico Visentin, Italy, Mevis spa, ESF board member: “*Did we do it right?* This is the key question we keep asking ourselves as board members of the

ESF. There is always a lively discussion, and every time board members change, the ideas and opinions presented take on new dimensions. Today, it is even more important to have the ESF than it was 14 years ago when the Federation was established because Europe has become more important as an economic and political region. Soon, there will be a new wave of expansion as the European Union enlarges to 25 countries.

“Perhaps the charter of the ESF as a federation of national associations requires amendment because, at present, membership is geared primarily to national associations. While it is possible for individual companies that are located in countries that do not have national associations to join ESF, this opportunity is not well known. Under the current charter, Spanish companies, for example, could join ESF directly. At the ESF board level, we need to have some serious discussions about opening the doors to those parties interested in ESF membership that are not national associations. Our next board meeting will be in Germany under our currently existing charter.”

“The ESF gives springmakers the opportunity to build relationships with colleagues and with competitors. These relationships make the entire European spring industry stronger. Every springmaker is subject to price pressures, and there are no easy answers. However, with good information networks and relationships, it is easier to find solutions to difficult questions.”

SMI and Springs

“I thank SMI for sending me *Springs* on a regular basis. I always respect your editing of *Springs* in an eloquent and sophisticated manner, starting with the “President’s Message” by Roy Vinderine. Taking this opportunity, I would like to express sincere congratulations to SMI on its 70th anniversary. I also thank you for your invitation to contribute to an article about the history of the ESF. I take pleasure in having this opportunity.”
~ Tsuguhiro Maeda, JSMA president

“Persuading the SMI to re-brand their high quality *Springs* magazine as “The International Magazine of Spring Manufacture” has brought about a very positive response and increased involvement by ESF members.”
~ Michael Parkinson, ESF immediate past president

Beyond ESF

Michael Parkinson, UK, Airedale Springs Ltd., ESF immediate past president: “Beyond the ESF we are more clearly recognized as the voice of the European Springmaking Industry. We have established much a much closer relationship with North America and Japan, in recognition of the increasingly global market in which we operate.”

Tsuguhiro Maeda, Japan, NHK Spring Co., Ltd. JSMA president: “The year 1989 in which the ESF was founded reminds me of a world epoch-making event – the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Eastern European countries and emerging countries, including China, began to participate in world trade after that event. Since then, globalization of the world economy has progressed with remarkable speed. In Europe, the tremendous challenge of enlarging the European Union and solidifying its politics, economy and currency has progressed quite successfully.

“In anticipation of such major surges that would realign the global business environment, spring leaders in Europe’s key industrialized countries had set out to establish the ESF for the common purpose and benefit of the European spring industry. I believe that this historically distinguished event that showed so much foresight should be highly appreciated not only today, but also in the future. Moreover, I would like to express my profound respect to the leadership of the immediate past president, Michael Parkinson, and the current president, Michel Guillemet, who both have built the present organization base and offered the opportunity of collaboration with the SMI and the JSMA.

“So far, the JSMA has had five meetings with executive members of the ESF. The agenda started with recognition of the status quo and extended to the international standard ISO, quality control of spring products, employee education, and other spring-related issues. These opportunities provided a valuable learning opportunity for JSMA. It is a great honor for us to have such a friendly relationship with the ESF.”

Pete Peterson, North America, Peterson Spring, SMI past president and unofficial ESF-SMI liaison: “To my knowledge, there has not been an overridingly important external threat that would have forced ESF members to work together at all costs. Instead, cultural and language differences combined into a complex amalgam that posed major challenges for the organization.

“Although I do not understand the history or the present dynamics of ESF very well, I would like to offer a suggestion for the future. Perhaps my observation could help some ESF members gain a new perspective. My recommendation: Lighten up!

“I have observed that many ESF members think that it is a waste of time and money to have a meeting unless there are some pending heavy issues requiring serious debate and decision. SMI takes a different approach. Members get together twice a year and spend a good deal of our time building personal relationships. These relationships provide us with con-

tacts and interfaces to address and solve business issues. I think our “lighter” agendas have accomplished quite a bit.

“Easy social interaction among all SMI members requires less effort for us Americans than for Europeans, primarily because approximately 95 percent of us speak English as our first language. The other five percent come from two groups: Some are members from French-speaking Canada, who speak English at our meetings; the others are those who speak the Texas dialect of English, which the rest of us understand provided we exert a little effort and good will.

Back to an example from ESF history: At one point four or five years ago, ESF looked as though it were going to fall apart from internal dissension. The next big meeting was in Stockholm, hosted by the Swedish members. The Swedes did a terrific job of entertaining (I have heard it was a rather wet time in Stockholm), and things were patched up. Maybe ESF ought to meet in Stockholm every fourth meeting.”

Arthur Hooper, UK, Institute of Spring Technology (IST) chief executive: “The ESF, like all international organizations, is a highly political organization. The following thoughts and observations are my personal ones and not made in my official capacity as company secretary and council member for the UK Spring Manufacturers Association (UKSMA) or, indeed, as chief executive of the IST.

“As far as I can remember, the ESF was born out of discussions between UKSMA and VDFI some 15 years ago. The aims of the Federation were, and remain, to promote collaboration between European springmakers on commercial and technical matters. There are, of course, a number of difficulties that need to be overcome. Language and culture do affect the processes of an organization. Most European springmakers, however, accept the need for pan-European cooperation.

“I personally have always supported the federation, on the grounds that springmakers share the same problems wherever they are based, and have attended most ESF executive meetings in one capacity or another.

“The ESF is important to me professionally because it provides a central point of contact for the Institute in its role as a research provider because research funding in Europe is dominated by the EU commission. We have recently been instrumental in writing the technical details for an ISO standard on compression spring tolerances by acting as co-coordinator for the SMI, ESF and the JSMA, and it is in areas like this that I believe the future benefits will lie.”

Parkinson, UK: “The ESF has continued to work with European standardization, and we have seen progress with international standardization, although in both cases that progress has been unacceptably slow. We have also had a taste of benchmarking through the work that was done on the People Skills Scoreboard, bringing together the ESF, SMI and JSMA, and achieved something which other more well-known organizations have failed to do.”

ESF & the Future

Dr. Visentin, Italy: “With an eye to the future, the German association is organizing an event with the theme, ‘How Do We Envision the Spring Industry in the Year 2010?’ I think we need to sponsor seminars, and invite university professors and economists to speak about their vision of the spring industry in the year 2010, and we need to invite national associations and individual spring companies to come to this event. We need to go to press about this topic and dispel the notion that small enterprises need not participate because of their small size. The possibility for collaboration and joint venture always exists. Perhaps the vibrant, newest generation of springmakers is more open to the world and to building relationships between companies and will attend in record numbers. Seminars and events are very important, and it is wrong to try and identify an immediate payback for every event. New or enhanced relationships, knowledge and technology enhancements can be gained every time. But there is an even more important question that must be asked: What am I losing by not attending?”

“Relationships, networks and competitive strengths are sacrificed by trying to go it alone. Understanding the competition, understanding what other springmakers are doing, is becoming increasingly important for the survival and success of every individual company. For nearly all European springmakers, strength in numbers is indispensable and it does not stop at the national level. If there is no spring industry leverage at the European level, springmakers have missed the boat; everyone has missed something, and European standards are history.

The ESF is a lifeline to springmakers, and its primary benefit is the opportunity for building relationships, and understanding colleagues, the competition and industry issues and pressures. To be sure, springmakers have their day-to-day responsibilities, and free time is hard to come by. At the same time, the ESF and the strength of the European spring industry depend on people who can muster the dedication and will to foster relationships and initiatives among European springmakers – and on ambassadors who reach out to other spring associations like the SMI and JSMA.

Parmasuo and Paajanen, Finland: “Going forward, perhaps the ESF could dedicate a task force to other key issues in the spring industry such as education and human capital development through exchange programs. Another task force could perhaps focus on the central management of European Union issues. Technical issues need ongoing attention at the European level, and all members could benefit from concentrated focus on business issues, such as contracts, liability, price devaluation and electronic inquiries.”

Parkinson, UK: “If the ESF were to fail, it would place Europe at a clear disadvantage alongside the JSMA and SMI. Through the hard work of the past few years, those organizations look upon the ESF very favourably. I hope that the ESF will do its part to foster this view in the future.”

“Today, it is even more important to have the ESF than it was 14 years ago when the Federation was established because Europe has become more important as an economic and political region.” - Dr. Federico Visentin

Dr. Schroer, Germany: “It is possible that the ESF as the federation of associations we have known will cease to exist in the near future. However, a reshaped association that is an initiative of proactive international springmakers who pose important innovative and strategic questions in a joint search for answers will take its place. This reshaped association will be an association of colleagues who have achieved the highest levels of performance in their respective specialization; a group of colleagues with a joint interest in striving for even more efficiency and dynamics in their specialties.

“As component suppliers ranging from tier one to tier four, springmakers are experiencing increasing pressure from large customers. Only improved performance in our core businesses and awareness of the product portfolios of our key competitors will secure springmakers’ long-term survival.

“It is imperative that springmakers keep the following question in mind at all times: *Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing it correctly?* For nearly every springmaker, reducing the number of products offered must be one consideration, and specializing to focus financing and specialty skills another. Our customers expect to receive a broad spectrum of products from as few suppliers as possible. This pressure demands a product scope that does not permit high performance in all special areas. However, if good companies that have the required strategic understanding bundle their financial resources in core areas, they have an opportunity to offer a broader product offering with more opportunities for long-term returns. This can only work within the framework of good, collegial attitudes, friendship and good will. The ESF has provided the framework for a rich learning experience for European springmakers. The future will tell how we apply the lessons we have learned.”

Maeda, Japan “I would like to make the following suggestions for the international spring industry: First, hold periodical international conferences in order to build up common recognition of the future issues of spring products. Second, establish the mid- and long-term priorities of the international standard of ISO. Third, start establishing a TC (Technical Committee) for springs in the ISO. Although there are TCs for many other machine elements in the ISO, there is, regrettably, no TC for springs.

“On April 10th 2002, a very fruitful meeting was held in Düsseldorf, Germany, attended by the ESF, SMI and JSMA. JSMA members were invited to the dinner party hosted by the ESF in the evening. We received a warm welcome from members of ESF, which was so impressive that unforgettable memories are etched into our minds. I sincerely hope that the circle of friendly relationships that was built last spring will continue to grow and blossom in the future.”

Michel Guillemet, France, Lachant et Quesnel, presiding president of the ESF: “The goals for the future of the ESF are first, to achieve what has already been started, particularly

the ISO international standard for compression springs in conjunction with the JSMA and SMI.

“Second, we need to adapt to the world economic situation by engaging in actions that concern all spring manufacturers worldwide. It is clear that the ESF must be flexible in light of current world economic conditions. As a result, a number of issues must be taken into consideration that have been requested by springmakers or national associations, such as general conditions of sales, and payment conditions, which vary from country to country and can create difficulties for companies when customers’ requirements are exaggerated. General conditions of insurance, which must allow coverage of all risks, including civil liability for defective products (recall of vehicles) is another area of general concern. Furthermore, the ESF could address relationships between customers and suppliers, especially in the automotive sector, by drawing up a charter of fair and equitable relations between the parties; as well as explore possibilities for training of employees between various countries.

“Third, we need to enlarge the ESF by facilitating membership of East European countries’ national associations. Along these lines, the ESF board has already expressed the possibility that an East European springmaking company join the ESF under the condition that the company make every effort to form a national association in the Eastern European country.

“Another goal is to develop the relationship with JSMA and SMI by creating a world spring committee in which two or three board members of ESF, SMI and JSMA participate, and a world congress every three or four years. At such a congress, representatives of spring companies could build and renew relationships, and discuss issues concerning the spring business. Certain issues could be addressed and analyzed by technical and business experts.

“In my opinion, the ESF is faced with the challenge of being attractive to national associations. This can be met by solving short-term problems for their members and by initiating contacts between continents in order to get a worldwide vision for spring activity on a long-term basis.”

Concluding Thoughts

Considering the differing views, past, present and future, reflected by the prism held up to the ESF, it is most likely that the future of the ESF will continue to be strongly influenced not only by the developments in the global economy, but also by the strength of alliances and relationships.

Perhaps a number of national associations had set their expectations from the ESF too high. The current harsh economic environment has forced national associations to cut costs and, as a consequence, some have resigned their memberships in the ESF. In the short term, this implies that the ESF merely functions as a platform for springmakers from various European countries to meet to and to exchange information primarily for their own benefit, sidestepping any benefit to their national associations.

However, all things change and, in all likelihood, this is a temporary state of affairs. Lone rangers, be they individual companies or countries, can’t withstand the surging tides that whip the world economy for long. The vision, plans and good will of ESF executives and members point in the direction of a vibrant future for mutual benefit. That positive momentum will most likely revitalize the ESF so that it will indeed play an even larger role in serving its constituents, and in fostering collaboration between national associations in specific European regions as well as between individual springmaking companies. Moreover, the ESF’s importance as the official representative of the European spring industry and the peer of the JSMA and SMI is on the rise. Springmakers worldwide can rest assured that European springmakers and the executive members of the ESF will ensure that the three-legged stool of ESF, JSMA and SMI has a solid footing and forms a home-base advantage for the spring industry.

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