

IFEES: Introduction

by Claudio Borri¹

Dear colleagues and friends of SEFI,

Dear colleagues and friends of the worldwide community of the International Federation of Engineering Education Societies,

the Founding and current President of IFEES is addressing you this morning as a SEFI guy and Immediate Past-President of the society: it's therefore my very special and great pleasure to welcome all of you to this session of 2nd SEFI conference of Engineering Deans, which opens the doors of the European community of Engineering Educators to the entire world.

IFEES wishes to pay a tribute of gratitude to SEFI and to its current President:

- to SEFI as one of the initiators and great contributors to this new world-wide organisation
- to its President, Joerg Steinbach, for having accepted the task of bringing all of us together again, 2 ½ years after the Florence meeting

The gratitude of IFEES to SEFI is very tangible if one looks through the audience and attendees gathered in this lecture hall: the President of ASEE, and Dean Emeritus of IOWA, J. Melsa, with the Deputy Director for Int. Programmes of ASEE, H. Hoyer; the Dean of Arizona, T. Peterson; the President of IGIP, N. Kraker; the President of the Russian Association for EE and Rector of Tomsk PU, Y. Pocholkov; the President of the African EE Assoc., Funso Falade, from Nigeria; the President of BEST, Oemer Antal, from Istanbul (with N Wojewoda, member of Board of BEST); Jose Carlos Quadrado, President of ISEL Lisbon; Jean-Eric Aubert, Lead specialist of the WBI for the capacity building; the Dean of Engineering and Vice-President of NU of Singapore, S. Ramakrishna; the former Rector of Istanbul TU and Board member of EUA, G. Saglamer; the Director of University Relations of HP, L Morell, the Director of the Product Lifecycle Academy of Dassault Systemes, X. Fouger; all these personalities have responded to my call and accepted to contribute to this session. I wish to express all of them my deepest thank you!

(Slide 1)

What is IFEES and what's its motivation ? One more EE education organisation to run conferences allowing busy academics and professionals to travel around the world and enjoy nice time at beautiful places?

¹ Prof. Ing., Dr.-Ing. H.c.; President of SEFI (Société Européenne pour la Formation des Ingenieurs, Brussels (2005/07); Founding President of IFEES (2006/08); Full Prof. of Struct. Mechanics, Univ. of Florence, Italy

Let me explain you why it NOT like that:

A few years ago, in March 2003 in London, on the occasion of the “Commonwealth lecture” upon invitation by her Majesty the Queen Elisabeth II, a “visionary” lecturer, the future Nobel Price laureate for Peace, Muhammad Yunus, choose, as the theme for his speech , the most daring of all Millennium development goals; nothing less than: *“Halving poverty by 2015: we can actually make it happen”*.

In his presentation the speaker was drawing the attention to five issues which, he said, “need to be urgently revisited”, in the conviction, matured working with poor people, *“...that they can get themselves out of poverty if we give them the same or similar opportunities as we give to others.”* (end of citation). Which are the chains Yunus is talking about and what has the whole to do with education in science and technology? Well, he identifies One of these chains exactly in...

.... recognising the role of globalisation and (education in science) and technology in reducing poverty (information technology, etc.)

What more, which higher goal can we (Engineering Educators) imagine to set for but to contribute to loose these chains, by joining the vision of such a great mind? it was this speech which convinced me about the immense power of education in science and technology and how far information technology can help in such ambitious goals.

YES, October 9th 2006 may enter in the annals as true historical day for the HE in Science & Technology: 35 organisations of major stakeholders of EE (nowadays grown up to 45) decided to join their efforts, in order to ensure a suitable Higher Education in Science and Technology for the future of well-trained and culturally-sensitive engineers. In a few words, I like to resume the **key-question** posed by the 21st century global economy to engineering educators and EE stake-holders as: **“How can Education in Science and technology help to reduce poverty, to boost socio-economic development and to take the right decisions for a suitable, sustainable and environmental compatible development ?”** ... and this should become our ultimate goal in IFEES! (slide 2)

The creation of a world-wide network of Engineering Educators and EE stake-holders allows to answer such formidable basic questions, as previously formulated, as it can drastically rise the horizon of target and

ambitions: i.e., to pass from the day-by-day EE issues and problems² to the “actual impact” on the world-wide development & socio-economic growth.

To answer the **key-question** above, a global approach is needed: this can only be afforded by a “team” which has its roots in all regions of the world, i.e. which is enabled to think globally and then act locally. If IFEES will not deal with such primary questions and limits its activity to the “routine” ones, none of the major key-actors or decision makers will give attention and/or invest resources for IFEES. IFEES was borne to deliver a major contribution to “change” the world (of course in such extent as its mission and competences determines), i.e. as much as EE can contribute to these changes. I do not personally believe, this to be a too ambitious target: it is the only true reason why IFEES birth makes sense.

In this line of developing primary partnership to develop joint initiatives with major organisation worldwide dealing with social development and education, in a few moments we will be listening to the speech of J-E Aubert, a good friend of IFEES and leading expert of the World Bank Institute; The WB Inst. and IFEES have already expressed the intention to cooperate on major EE subjects as they have recognised how those regions where education in science and technology is most developed and sustained, this might have a great impact on the political stability of the region (F. Leautier, former Vice President of WB and Chair of the WB Inst., Washington DC, Jan. 2007)

All IFEES Officers, (the President, the 4 Vice-Presidents, the Exec. Committee members, the Secretariat members in Washington) are committed to promote, to develop and to put in place initiatives to mobilise best human resources (key-actors) and gain them to the common target of IFEES: only through the “top people” world-wide IFEES will become influential and have then impact on major changes. Corporate support (both from the industrial as well as from the professional point-of-view) belongs obviously to this strategy.

In this context, I do believe IFEES shall build-up a network of high value connections/cooperation with “top-personalities” around the world, seating in key-positions of organisations and, obviously, NOT only in the EE sector: from the economy sector to social sciences, from political sciences to peace keeping, from banking to financial investors, IFEES shall carry-out its mission hand-in-hand with all of them. I have imagined this could happen by introducing in the immediate future the role of “IFEES testimonial or

² i.e. issues like curriculum development, quality assurance and accreditation, mobility and recognition of titles, joined curricula, international dimension, ethics and gender issues in EE, employment & attractiveness of EE, ...

Ambassador” and I gave you at the very beginning one of the possible examples of great personality who ideally very well fit in this role.

One way to reach this is always to involve students and student organisation in IFEES strategy definition and IFEES events. The archaic vision of students as “customers” or (even worse) “end products” of EE process shall definitely be abandoned. We need students on our side, as their visions will also be attracting attention and support from the corporate world.

Allow me here to also clearly tell you what IFEES shouldn't become:

- An “empty” container of “wishful thinking” and an organiser of new conferences and workshops, increasing the tremendous number of events in the sector. We don't need it! therefore: ACTIONS and PROJECTS, instead of academic talks !
- A network of EE allowing the members to travel worldwide and not only continentally
- An organisation from which one can expect revenues in terms of personal career and/or visibility and success

Now, let me introduce the session....