

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SUCCESS

By Nadine Buddoo

The creation of a new association representing Romanian ground engineering companies marks a steady upturn in the country's economy, according to Romanian Association of Foundation Contractors (ARCF) president Carlos Vazquez.

The 2008 financial crisis led to a period of rigorous austerity measures and political instability in Romania, but the signs of steady economic recovery are now evident in the country's construction industry.

With the prospect of major infrastructure projects in the pipeline and a growing foundations market, the ARCF has been established to ensure the interests of its members are promoted within the European Federation of Foundation Contractors (EFFC), as well as the wider building and construction industry in Romania and across Europe. Founded by seven Romanian foundation construction companies, the ARCF also aims to improve standards of workmanship, and maintain high levels of technical competence, safety and innovation throughout the sector.

"Ultimately, we are aligned with the EFFC's key objectives. We hope to get a quick response from local members as well as involvement from members across Europe which will help us to reach our shared goals faster," says Vazquez.

"Romania only joined the European Union (EU) in 2007. It is very important for us to align all of our norms and regulations to EU standards and this can be achieved more effectively through the EFFC."

This close link to the EFFC is something the ARCF values greatly, with Vazquez

identifying the three main working groups (WGs) – technical, contracts and safety – as useful tools in tackling the industry's key issues and challenges. "By linking all three WGs we create a strong chain that will ultimately benefit all parts of the industry," explains Vazquez.

"If we have a lot of input in contracts, we will protect the interests of our market and improve it. The technical WG highlights all the latest news from the industry and improves our efficiency on specific projects but, at the same time, it's pushing the

companies working in the country to do so under European standards. The health and safety WG makes us more secure in our work and this is something I consider to be very important for all of us."

COLLABORATION IS KEY

This sense of sharing knowledge and best practice is a key theme for the ARCF and the wider EFFC, and it is also something Vazquez notes as an essential part of his career development to date. "My first year as a Terratest engineer enlightened a lot of

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very difficult period, mainly due to the financial crisis. The market was already saturated with big companies, such as Bauer, Keller and Soletanche, as well as other firms, so this made my job even more difficult," he explains.

In less than eight years, Vazquez managed to close almost 50 contracts, making it one of the leading foundation companies in Romania with a total turnover of more than €30M during this period.

He says: "After almost eight years, I can say that I have learned a lot about the industry. I think it is important to continuously move forward and to improve our work. The idea of an EFFC local branch in Romania was born from this concept."

Vazquez's first year as president has been focused on building all of the association's legal and financial facets.

"Now this is done, we want to raise the association's profile among construction contractors and other relevant associations, and to attract other local companies to our association," he says.

FUTURE GAZING

Vazquez's tenure as president will come to an end next year, but he expects the association to continue expanding and attracting members with the shared goal of improving the industry.

Looking ahead, he is also confident about the future of the eastern European market and notes that this can only benefit the wider EU economy. "The fact that Romania is now linked to the EU is key for the development of the country. Personally, I think the country has a promising future," he says.

"The news that we are now getting from our government is encouraging: new metro lines will be developed in Bucharest, and the infrastructure masterplan involving the finalisation of the Pan-European Corridor IV means new highways, railways and roads, etc.

"It looks like the eastern European region is improving its macroeconomic parameters, which is giving stability to the entire EU. All of these aspects positively affect Romania and its public and private sector. This stability will give more confidence to the banks to invest and to offer more credit."

A PRESIDENTIAL CV

After qualifying as a civil engineer, Vazquez joined Terratest in 2005 and was based in the company's design and development department in Madrid, Spain. "In a short period of time I was given a lot of responsibilities at the company and I was in charge of several projects in Spain before starting my international career," explains Vazquez.

As his career developed, Vazquez was tasked with establishing and managing a new international branch of the company in Romania in 2007 and also in Bulgaria in 2012. From the beginning of this year, Vazquez has been in charge of Terratest's central European heavy foundation department which allows him to actively contribute to the company's success in Europe.

"From the outset I considered myself very lucky for the training I received in each department I have been involved with at Terratest," he says. "Being an engineer you have to embrace the idea that every day is a challenge and every new finished project is an important accomplishment for you and your company."

"I remember during my first years of geotechnical engineering I was stunned by the different behaviours of a piece of soil and I told to myself that this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship!"

ARCF ORIGINS

The ARCF was founded by seven key foundations contractors in Romania, including:

- Terratest Geotehnic
- Zublin Romania
- Bauer Romania
- Octagon Contracting and Engineering
- SBR Soletanche Bachy Fundatii
- Keller Geotehnic
- Eurodrill Fundatii