

## Raymond Georis Inaugural Lecture More Europe – and the role of foundations

Brussels, 12 November 2012

Dear colleagues, dear Erik, dear Gery, dear Raymond,

Thank you for this invitation – it is a great honor, however it has cost me *sleepless nights*, too... (One of the things I admire so much about Raymond: he never had sleepless nights...)

As a foundation-emeritus, and speaking only on my own behalf, I can promise you both: a slightly ‘external’ perspective, that allows for a bit more critical views, and loyalty to the sector I have once belonged to; and loyalty to Europe, that goes without saying.

Most of you will know the book about Raymond Georis, called the ‘Quiet European Gardener’. Reading it again, the, I had two reactions: Renewed and never-ending respect about what he has achieved, and, a rather surprising late discovery for me: This enabler, quiet gardener, actually has been radical, visionary, if not revolutionary in his thinking. Why? Two examples:

- Radically critical: When he criticized foundations, or better, a certain practice not unknown to us, he was in fact very outspoken in warning against ‘lack of transparency’, ‘walls of silence’ even.
- Radically visionary: As a *European* foundation leader he stated: ‘Foundations are handicapped by their national status’, while Europe, he dared to predict, ‘is providing an umbrella enabling nation states to eventually disappear’.

Well, here we are in the midst of my topic, ‘More smart Europe’ to overcome the crisis, instead of national if not nationalistic bargaining; and the role of foundations.

As former director of the *European Cultural Foundation* – I ultimately love to quote Raymond’s imperative: ‘Build networks of foundations who would partner in projects important to the process of European unification.’

The message couldn’t be clearer. And more challenging. Indeed, his vision was (is) ‘more political than philanthropic’, as the authors of the book say. Raymond took risks, and the greatest was to ‘go European’ without any hesitation.

We cannot complain about an absence of risks today; but even in view of the persistent unresolved crisis of Europe the ‘gardener’ Raymond refuses Voltaire’s resignation, when in ‘Candide ou l’optimisme’ he finally concluded: ‘Il faut cultiver notre jardin’. No, Raymond calls for courage in Europe and the foundations’ firm commitment - from the midst of his garden.

The last time I was invited to address an EFC assembly was at the AGA in Budapest 2005, shortly after the failed referenda on the constitutional treaty in France and the NL: Another deep crisis (yet definitely less existential than the one of today). When being invited again for today, I felt: My dear, I have to play the *'Kassandra'* again, *post-fest*.  
Good reasons to check my papers of 2005:

I must admit, I was – despite of friendly applause - not very successful with my call - back then:

- I had tried to argue that next to economic efficiency, we wouldn't succeed in building complex Europe in a satisfactory way if we wouldn't understand the need for the *'cultural project Europe'*. I presented a plea for this *'cultural project Europe'* which would strive for an new *'political culture'* – against the backdrop of the crunch of the EU as a project of the *'elites'*.
- But weren't foundations part of the elites? Were they, we, unwillingly part of the failure?

I called for a *new responsibility of European foundations* to jointly invest in new fundamentals for this cultural project Europe, building on shared European public and republican space, and supporting visionary leadership, also for developing *'policies for culture'*, in partnership with the European institutions.

(Here again, Raymond's contribution to one of the most successful broad programs, Erasmus, needs to be recalled.)

We have made progress regarding cultural policy development at European level, yet, I am afraid, the plea for the *'cultural project Europe'* proved to be a rather vain hope. Political culture has even more deteriorated, hasn't it?

And as regards *a possible non-elitist campaign of (in principle) elitist foundations - for shared trust in Europe*, I am not sure whether they have taken a more united and powerful stance - would you agree, Raymond?

Sure, there have been projects, and good ones, but probably substantial impact was hard to achieve, and rare, measured against the magnitude of the challenge. Why?

Partly due to the limited space for non-local, non-regional, non-national cooperative action in the very statutes of foundations as long as they were read as being carved in stone no matter how the environment has changed.

In 2005, I said, 'citizens have pulled the emergency break (the train was running too fast, too far and nobody knew the destination)'.  
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Then came the Nice-Treaty, a tool, 'only', not a constitution;  
for sure not robust enough for tackling the 2008 finance crisis.

Power migrated back, uncontrolled, to member states, and more precisely to a few big ones, and in the end we are still and again facing a massive economic, but also a political, cultural crisis...

(Remember Raymond saying 'Europe is providing an umbrella enabling nation states to eventually disappear...'? *Sleepless nights?*)

Re-reading my Philippika I conclude that failure has become more dangerous. Gottfried as 'Pocket Cassandra' said in 2005:

'The coming decade will be characterized by an ever more cut-throat level of competition between global players as well as between the rich, the less rich and the poor member states.' I was speaking about 'splits' in society, referring to impoverishment and unemployment. Spare me to recall today's horrifying figures from Spain, Greece and Portugal....  
*Nightmares...*

'Europe is not an affair of the heart', I said, 'nor do people believe that it delivers'. It may be worse today.

Dear colleagues, we did NOT manage to make democracy more flexible and resilient; to balance the social and economic project, markets and public responsibilities, freedom and equality, Europe and globalization.

Mind you: This 'we', that failed, doesn't mean politicians only, or business leaders, academia etc., it includes us, the foundations as well, doesn't it?

However, you have probably not invited me for spreading fatalism. And most of us don't see a complete void of perspectives; on the contrary. I'll try to be self-provokingly positive - in the spirit of Raymond, and call for action.

I dare so facing the risk again, that in another 7 years from now you would see me giving up – with not much more than an ultimate shrug.

Hence: Two main points: 1 on policy in Europe, 2 on foundations

1. On policy: We don't have a chance – lets grasp it

- a. Vis-à-vis the poisoning complexity and incalculable dangers of today's economic-political-cultural crisis of Europe it seems like *we don't know anything* really about lasting 'solutions'; we apparently have no real clue how to overcome the crisis, in particular the economic and financial crisis, says the skeptical pessimist.

This is not true, says the cautious optimist, *in fact we do know already quite a lot*, enough to move on towards safe grounds, and there is more tacit agreement amongst stakeholders than visible on the surface.  
(I come back to this in a second!)

Moreover: This knowledge is growing thanks to a remarkable collective *learning process*.

Stupendously growing *consensus* echoes that we *need to act* – and to engineer the *critical tools* to set positive change in motion – together, in the midst of the struggles of interests and particularities.

Here is the role for foundations to come in - with their capacity for leverage, for pioneering, creative kickstarting, launching unorthodox solutions. (I try to be more concrete a bit later.)

- b. Content: Time doesn't allow for deep content analysis here. And, honestly: Who am I?

But allow me to recall at least briefly the shapes of possible consensus:

Firstly, there is much agreement based on analysis and public debate, that the fundamental key for change lies in the smart *transformation of our economic system*, and in the undoubted necessity to transform its *governance*.

- It is about new balances, about re-strengthening public policies, also in the interests of healthier (financial) markets; about limiting risks and excessive 'gambling';
- about regaining more fairness and equality in distribution, if only for macro-economic reasons (for cynics);
- about re-defining and reaching new models of growth;
- about proper transnational governance- structures related to common economic and currency areas, etc.

Whether we call it transformation of *capitalism* or not: a vast majority shares the basic agenda for change, a majority of qualified experts agree on an impressive set of concrete demands for transformation.

The difficulty seems to lie in political implementation. How to win the battle against particularism?

The second challenge is the *transformation of our democratic governance in Europe, from national to trans-national participation and control*, legitimate, credible, and effective.

Again, there are viable and meaningful proposals.

- They reach from further empowering the European Parliament to more elements of direct democracy;
- and to more direct voting as regards the executive (the Commission, its President) and its control,
- while limiting the powers of member states to block decisions (say in security- and defense- issues, if not in EU external policies) –
- in combination with more flexibility in forming partial alliances in certain matters.
- There are issues that need very cautious negotiation and communication, for example EU wide social standards, or political and fiscal governance for shared economic and currency areas.
- Enlightened democratic leadership is required; based on the 'choice of the best' for tasks in Brussels.

In a nutshell, democracy has to be extended and transformed.

Whether it needs another Convention or not is one of the major questions in the next months.

Thirdly: Related to these transformations Europe needs to gain power to proactively *shape globalization* and to develop new ways of protecting its own interests - and the common good in a cosmopolitan spirit.

- c. If any set of proposals, for which we have enough evidence of what needs to be done in greater detail, were to be coined simply, in one word, it is all, I think, about *redefining our competitiveness in relation to our ability to cooperate*: about cooperation and competition.

## 2. On the role of foundations in this context

Let me recall a lesson from Raymond Georis, aware of the progress he has helped to reach in European cooperation; it is twofold:

- Stay extremely dedicated and courageous, if not radical in terms of needed foresight;
- But try to achieve your goals in a modest manner, communicate wisely!

Foundations should *NOT* be modest when addressing root-causes of disintegration of Europe; they should, on the contrary, vigorously help fostering integrative objectives. Raymond's European confession – for thousand reasons – was very clear. Today, this courage of 'the gardener' is needed even more, and the skills to forge coalitions.

Foundations cannot, I think, approach this fundamental challenge in our European environment only through philanthropy, as Raymond stated, but as potentially influential political animals - intelligently and freely reasoning stakeholders of the public good.

An important part of this is self-critique.

Self-reflectiveness of foundations today:

It is not sufficient to repeat that 'foundations always strive to initiate change' without saying what change means today. Change starts with listening to most critical reflections and unmistakable provocations even, for example (often heard nowadays): 'The foundations' world has arrived in the eye of the storm. Its name is 'capitalism' (or however un-ideologically you may call it) with its enormous achievements (including foundations) and its dangerous risks, if not subordinated to democratic rationales.'

For the third, the civic sector, it is detrimental to neglect that citizens today often associate foundations dangerously closely with the whole 'crisis-package' - whether justified or not; they discuss the role of private wealth, private acquisition of profit and unjustified 'public' distribution of losses, uncontrolled investment strategies, in short: whether 'the market' has overruled public decision making to a dysfunctional degree, the financial markets in particular that are seen more as a lottery than ruled by the invisible hand.

Critique is of course not new; some major fortunes on which foundations' endowments are based have been perceived as being made by 'questionable business', for example speculation against currencies.

Yet, the case of foundations as such had never been discussed with fundamental distrust; one reason being that criteria for foundations' good work have been continuously developed and shared in public, like the noble fight for foundations' statutes - also on EU level, pushing for standards - of transparency, owning, 'earning', giving and spending, and of administering wealth ethically.

However, dangers today are bigger.

It doesn't ease this suspicion that, paradoxically, foundations themselves – and their beneficiaries - have become victims of the volatility of 'the market'.

Foundations are tested against principles, not only of transparency, but also much broader in terms of the balance between the private and the public interest.

It is thus not any longer only about the classic 'management of risk'<sup>1</sup>, it is actually about the *fundamental* risks related to the state of economy, society and political culture, and the role that foundations can - and possibly have to - play, rethinking our old DNA question for TODAY: What does it mean to use private wealth for the public good ?

What to do?

*In their own interest foundations should contribute – with all their independence - to a European process of regenerating the common good.*

*Impact, sustainability and leverage are the key words:*

- Impact will be crucial; critical mass, pooling of resources and skills, networks and partnerships, alliances with public institutions, in particular the European, next to the foundations' local and regional, national mission.
- Sustainability is needed; European 'projects' alone will not be sufficient; coalitions of foundations, and the EFC should foster a more comprehensive strategy with a perspective of 3 to 5 years.
- Modesty = leverage: Foundations' impact will be limited due to their limited resources compared to the public and business sector; however, it can be substantial, if they use their vanguard and incubating capacity as the core asset.

The content of activities reaches from facilitating targeted

- research and debate to
- support for related practice, and peaks in
- advocacy.

The linchpin is – next to their extremely valuable work 'at home' - to overcome the limitations of purely national approaches and firm support for the process of redesigning European strategies at three levels:

- towards improvement of the economic order,
- towards new fundamentals for trans-national democracy and
- towards new global governance and cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> EFC Belfast 2012 brochure, p. 5

A whole range of projects and programs need to be designed, initiatives supported, stimulated, launched.

These strategies will have internal and external European dimensions, telling the narratives of what has been achieved and what is still up to be reached; and weaving the texture for the narratives of the future, as the first ever voluntary trans-national community that enters new relations with the world.

A new constitutional process will demand huge amounts of collective energies. Citizens will have to be supported and included in the upcoming process of improving the constitutional basis, and institutions and leaders should know that foundations are partners on this path of transformation.

Europe is trying to expand the clout in globalization, and we know this entails strong and extremely smart external relations policies that include soft power to a wide extent. Our communication with other parts of the world has to be enfolded in all its civilian aspects, including cultural cooperation. (I say this also as an advisor to an *initiative called More Europe*<sup>2</sup> – culture in external relations, where civic partners, noticeable foundations, work closely with cultural institutes of some member states and with European institutions.)

In concluding:

Complementing their excellent work at home, foundations should now make a special serious effort and take a European political stance for the next couple of years, which will be quite decisive.

Nobody will seriously expect the European Foundation Centre and its members to re-invent capitalism or democracy – Raymond's Homeric laughter would be heard even across the Channel.

Yet it can, on the other hand, be damaging if business as usual (however successful it may be) will be continued as if nothing had happened around us. Furthermore: A purely 'unionist' position ('enabling the legal and fiscal environment; documenting the foundations landscape') will not be sufficient; practical organizational goals neither ('building the capacity of foundations professionals'), however necessary this is, if disengaged from the political context.

'Collaboration among foundations and between foundations and other actors'<sup>3</sup>, however, points in the right direction: Some kind of *stubborn Europeanization*, more decisive and not only through case-by-case, arbitrary coalition-building.

The big question is: Can foundations gradually overcome what Raymond Georis called the 'handicap of their national status'?

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<sup>2</sup> [www.moreeurope.org](http://www.moreeurope.org)

<sup>3</sup> EFC AGA Belfast 2012 leaflet

Europe needs a step change, and foundations are quite decisive stakeholders; why? They can secure liberal and rational complementarity to state and market strategies. Again the question: Can the independent third sector free enough of its capacities to help shaping the new Europe? This debate starts at home, a debate also on the mandates respectively adjustment for this very critical moment, in foundation's boards:

How best to get involved substantially against the tides of retro-nationalism and decline? It may help to define this agenda for a limited number of years: to unite and deploy more forces in a European laboratory.

Raymond, recalling what you dared to dream about,  
without sleepless nights,  
and how you transformed vision into tangible programs, partnerships and institutions,  
makes our task a little easier.

And after all it is good to recall your communicational miracles – and to enjoy your humor!

Merci. Van harte bedankt. Thank you for all you have done for Europe, and for the foundations' world.