

PRESS RELEASE

Rome (Italy) – 14 May 2009

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Opening the 20th Annual Conference of the European Foundation Centre

FIGHTING POVERTY Creating Opportunities

in Rome (Italy) from 14 to 16 May 2009

On Thursday (14 May 2009), the President of the Italian Republic – Giorgio Napolitano – addressed the opening session of a major International Conference in Rome, where more than 600 delegates from at least 60 different countries are exchanging ideas and experiences, looking at how foundations can contribute to tackling the causes and effects of poverty.

“**Fighting Poverty – Creating Opportunities**” is the main theme of the 20th Annual Conference of the European Foundation Centre (EFC), taking place in Rome from 14 to 16 May 2009. The Conference seeks to highlight how foundations are in a unique position to promote innovation, to develop effective solutions, to support the empowerment of people living in poverty and contribute to creating new opportunities – both in Europe and also in other parts of the world. The opening plenary session was held at the Auditorium Parco della Musica on Thursday 14 May.

Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, officially opened the Conference. He said: *“Poverty is one of those issues that require motivation and mobilisation at all levels, from the person-to-person generosity to the structural action of the European Union”*. He highlighted the need for *“a wide involvement of actors, resources and energies which go well beyond the sphere of state action”* and insisted that *“there is simply no way in which complex goals can be achieved without the concerted efforts of different actors, both public and private”*. He stated that foundations can *“contribute to the dynamism of a society and to preserving its cohesion”*.

Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, addressed the Conference by means of a specially recorded video message. President Barroso stated that the EFC Conference in Rome comes at a very important moment, and it sends an important message. He said: *“The economic crisis we face today is touching individuals, households and communities in every part of Europe. (...) This crisis has been unprecedented. The impact has been sudden. Its reach has been wide. But we are not powerless. The many speakers coming together at this Conference show how action against poverty is not only possible, it is indeed happening today. There are examples from across Europe where people are coming together in a spirit of solidarity and social justice, and are indeed making a difference. (...) I wish you an excellent Conference, and I hope that you will be able to serve as a source of inspiration and a source of hope for Europeans, at this time of intense pressure.”*

Emmanuele Francesco Maria Emanuele, President of Fondazione Roma, explained how in order to implement effective policies, it is necessary to find ways to measure and understand poverty, to identify its roots and analyze the problem, starting from the assumption of its complexity. He noted that the increase in global wealth seen during recent decades did not succeed in downsizing poverty throughout the world. The importance of initiatives by civil society is widely recognised, but there is a need for European foundations to work more closely together.

Sibongile Mkhabela, Chief Executive Officer of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, highlighted the importance of empowering local communities so that they can set their own agendas and decide for themselves how they wish to address and solve their own problems. She called on foundations to contribute to bringing about a new reality based on social justice and solidarity.

The opening plenary session was chaired by **Emílio Rui Vilar**, President of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and also the current Chair of the European Foundation Centre (EFC). He stated *that “the world as a whole has the resources to deal with poverty”* and called for a *“better and more rational distribution”* of resources, with the aim of eradicating poverty, just as slavery had been abolished across most of the world. *“When human dignity is at stake, mitigation is not enough. So we must reinvent ourselves and redefine our roles. And face our responsibility and task on the redistribution of resources that will make the world a more human place for all men and women to live.”*

The Chair of the EFC said foundations must show that they are “trustworthy organisations”: *“Now is the time to return to basics: to become more efficient and effective using the variety of resources at our disposal and better defending our principles. (...) It is our collective duty to overcome the chaotic chain of events we face nowadays and to leave a better legacy for future generations.”*

The EFC Conference in Rome will continue until Saturday (16 May).

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The full text of **President Napolitano’s** speech is included below (in Annex).

The video message of **President Barroso** can be seen here: www.efc.be/aga/AGA2009/diary.htm

For more information about the **EFC Conference 2009**, please see www.efc.be/aga

The Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation (NEF) has just published the results of a mapping exercise looking at funding for actions against poverty in the European Union. It can be downloaded from the NEF website: www.nefic.org/documents.php

In case you have any questions about the **European Foundation Centre** please contact:
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Notes to Editors

- The European Foundation Centre (EFC), founded in 1989, is the leading membership association representing public-benefit foundations at European level. It is based in Brussels
- The EFC currently has 237 members including community and independent foundations as well as corporate funders spread across 40 countries. A majority (86%) are based in Europe.
- The EFC develops and pursues activities in line with its objectives: creating an enabling legal and fiscal environment for foundations; documenting the foundation landscape; strengthening the infrastructure of the foundation sector; and promoting collaboration, both among foundations and between foundations and other actors, to advance the public good in Europe and beyond.
- The EFC has established a range of Interest Groups and Forums which facilitate cooperation and exchanges of good practice among members across a wide range of fields of activity including: diversity, migration and integration; human rights and disability; protecting the environment; HIV/AIDS; global health challenges; social investment; central and eastern Europe.
- The EFC hosts the secretariat of **Donors and Foundations' Networks in Europe (DAFNE)**, which supports cooperation among national networks covering 22 European countries.
- The EFC coordinates the **European Forum on Philanthropy and Research Funding**, which was launched in 2007 with the support of the European Commission and other partners.
- For more information about the EFC and its members please see: www.efc.be

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ANNEX

Giorgio Napolitano

President of the Italian Republic

Speech to the opening plenary session of the Annual Conference of the European Foundation Centre

Rome (Auditorium Parco della Musica), 14 May 2009

I am very pleased to welcome to Rome the participants to the Annual General Assembly of the European Foundation Centre, and I would like to thank the organisers for choosing Italy this year. I hope I can take this also as recognition of the important, not merely domestic role that Italian foundations are playing. It is a role I can perceive whenever I visit the towns and regions of my country where the intervention of foundations, and more amply of the non-profit sector, has left its mark. Associations and voluntary work involve millions of Italian citizens mindful of the collective good and interested in sharing commitments and civic values.

Foundations are one of the forms in which this organised concern for the common good, however defined, expresses itself. I am aware that the Italian foundations sector is now one of the largest in Europe, and it is also extremely vital, since almost half of the foundations existing today were born in the last decade. However impressive this recent growth may be, this phenomenon is also deeply rooted in the culture of the Italian society. There has always been – here as everywhere in Europe – an important tradition of philanthropy, of giving, of charitable action, both of religious and secular imprint, without which several features of our heritage, as well as of contemporary society, would be unthinkable. Scientific research and higher education, the arts and culture, health and social welfare, these are the typical spheres where European foundations have left an indelible mark.

Undoubtedly, the precious role played by the institutions you represent is now facing challenging times, in a period of economic crises when needs and demands are increasing exactly at a time when generating enough resources to meet them becomes more difficult. This is particularly true if we look at the demanding theme you have chosen for this year “Fighting Poverty, Creating Opportunities”.

Considering the history of both ancient and modern philanthropy, the choice of focussing on poverty is not surprising indeed. Yet this subject commands today renewed and novel attention. The crisis the world economy is experiencing is hard and, unfortunately, we may still have to see many of its poverty-creating consequences. Poverty and impoverishment have not been topping the political agenda in the last decades, but they are now again at the centre of public debate. Today we risk not only being unable to bring up those who still are under the line of poverty; we risk seeing others go down. We must then ask ourselves if public policies have not a concurrent responsibility in this process, be it for their technical faults, or because the drive toward equality and solidarity, which had for a long time been a driving force of most European political cultures, has lost vigour.

Poverty is one of those issues that require motivation and mobilisation at all levels, from the person-to-person generosity to the structural action of the European Union. It is noteworthy that the EU has also launched one of its soft policy tools on this issue, the Social Protection and Social Inclusion Process, with the aim of promoting the integration of the goals of social inclusion and poverty reduction in the national policy agendas. The basic idea here is that society still harbours mechanisms which literally produce poverty. Public policy must therefore dismantle these mechanisms, creating instead forms of empowerment for those who risk being left behind.

As we know, poverty and inequality are strictly linked, so measures to reduce poverty and anti-exclusion measures are both required. This is crucial in order to prevent those at the bottom from being locked out from mainstream society. And it is even more crucial in our countries, where the diversity of the social fabric, in terms of national and ethnic origins, religions and cultural backgrounds, has increased, and where the risk of translating diversity into a factor of exclusion is always present, aggravated by the rise of a public rhetoric which does not hesitate – also here, in Italy - to include intolerant or xenophobic overtones.

The crisis we are passing through, then, puts at risk not only the economic welfare of our societies, but also the quality of our social and political life. We must re-launch a novel growth cycle not only without impairing the levels of equity and cohesion we have reached – but strongly improving them. This is something our societies have to prove to be possible. We walk on a tight rope, but this is the only sensible rope for Europe.

We know now that no society can even start moving in that direction without a wide involvement of actors, resources and energies which go well beyond the sphere of state action. Let me say, in the light of the experience I gained in the course of a long commitment to the cause of Europe and of social welfare, that there is simply no way in which complex goals can be achieved without the concerted efforts of different actors, both public and private.

Today, and for the foreseeable future, it seems to me that foundations can, both individually and as a system, contribute to the dynamism of a society and to preserving its cohesion. We can quite plainly maintain that foundations are an essential ingredient of working liberal democracies, thanks to their support of pluralism within society, and indeed for their being themselves engines of pluralism. They are, as the Italian Constitutional Court declared in 2002, essential actors in the articulation of social liberties. Where democracy is not the rule, real foundations do not exist.

I mentioned Europe often. Europe is an ideal and a process. The current period presents itself, we must admit it, as difficult for those whose goal is a truly integrated political Europe. To many, today's Europe seems to have lost its ideal drive, its capability to advance even if through contradictions. We must not undervalue its great accomplishments, but our duty today is to take seriously the reasons of the still evident inadequacy of European institutions and common action, and to investigate the possible remedies. A new surge of serious politics, mindful of the true potential of the Union, is certainly one of the key factors. But another fundamental factor is the building up of a real European civil society and public sphere, which will over time evolve into a real body politic.

At the same time, I am fully aware that you do not limit your attention to Europe. Since foundations have, among their best traditions, an attention to global problems, you are going to look at poverty in the world, and to how the efforts of foundations can contribute to changing the picture. I am not going to elaborate on this subject, yet I would like to express my serious concern that some of the signals of new development we have been discerning over the recent years may be suffocated by the current economic situation, particularly in Africa. Ninety million human beings, according to recent IMF estimates, run the risk of falling under the threshold of poverty as a consequence of the present economic crisis. In the affluent societies, we may experience times of hardship. Our countries have always unfortunately included relevant pockets of poverty and we must devote resources and energies to prevent them from increasing, in the present difficult situation. We should now give a new impulse to the fight against old and new poverties in our countries, but we cannot forget that we are, on the whole among, the rich of this planet. We have responsibilities then.

These times ask not only for a sustained flow of aid, but even more for new ideas and policy styles, for global governance tools, for a real willingness to cooperate on an equal footing. All the more so since we know that some of the root causes of poverty in the developing world have to do with their lack of democracy and the disregard for the fundamental rights and basic needs of people.

In order to face the challenges of old and new poverty, of intolerable inequalities within and among countries, mere conservatism and national defensiveness are no answer. We need to elaborate innovative strategies; we need to experiment with new methods. Foundations can be useful in playing this role. Designing and trying new solutions does not belong exclusively to politics: this is a function that in highly differentiated societies must emerge from dialogue and collaboration among all social players.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am sure foundations will embrace this demanding mission. I would like to conclude wishing your assembly a fruitful work, in the hope that your ideas, suggestions and projects could contribute to face some of the present dramatic social challenges. Thank you.

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N.B. This is the prepared text as provided by the office of the President of the Italian Republic