

EFC 22nd Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference

Resources and Sustainability – The oceans

Opening Plenary, Cascais, May 26, 2011

14h35m Opening of the Plenary

Senhor Presidente da República, Excelência,

Senhor Presidente do Município de Cascais

Dear Colleagues,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentleman,

I will start in Portuguese. Agradeço vivamente ao Senhor Presidente da República a honra e o privilégio que nos concede ao ter aceite presidir à abertura desta vigésima segunda Assembleia Geral e Conferência do Centro Europeu de Fundações, que interpreto como um sinal de apreço pela intervenção da sociedade civil. Agradeço igualmente ao Senhor Presidente do Município de Cascais, a hospitalidade e o generoso apoio que disponibilizou para que a nossa Assembleia Geral tivesse lugar nesta bela vila de Cascais.

Agora falarei em inglês. It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to the 22nd European Foundation Centre Annual General Assembly and Conference in Cascais. This is the third time the AGA takes place in Portugal. As you may remember, the second AGA, in 1991, was held in Arrábida, and the 14th in Lisbon. The European foundation sector has changed and evolved since the beginning of the European Foundation Centre adventure, but I believe that the core values and purposes of its “founding fathers” remain as valid and meaningful today as in 1990.

Resources and Sustainability is the main theme of the conference. The Oceans, as an inspiring metaphor, set the scene for the important debates we are going to engage the next three days. It is not necessary to stress the social, cultural, economic and environmental importance of the oceans, but we urgently need to start changing our essentially earth-centered vision of the world. Indeed, to be accurate, our planet should be named Sea or Water, as the liquid element occupies 70% of its surface.

The Earth and the Oceans constitute two essential history boundaries: the first comprising the majority of our chronology, from prehistoric times to the Modern age; the *mare liberum*, on the contrary, entered history just five centuries ago, and it was the Portuguese who initiated this transformation. Until the Portuguese discoveries, the maritime routes corresponded mainly to the internal seas like the Mediterranean, the Caspian or the Baltic. To connect all humanity it was necessary to conquer the big Oceans.

As Voltaire stated, Vasco da Gama's travel divides history in two parts. Modern Age started with his journey, which main impact was not to initiate Europe's economic dominance in the world, but to act as a gigantic step towards what we now would call intercultural dialogue. Gama paved the way for the first globalization which Magellan, with his circum-navigation, symbolically materialized. But the idea of a shared common good, from which we all are beneficiaries and responsible, has not yet succeeded.

The Oceans, as a source of wealth and power, from energy to transportation, from food and other maritime resources to recreational activities, always follow a defective exploitation of its natural resources. The increasing attacks on biodiversity demand an immediate and articulated approach from all the relevant actors. The new European Maritime Policy lays the conditions and gives hope that we might peacefully share this common space to collective benefit. Just a few days ago, on May 20, in Gdansk, the European Maritime Day was celebrated for the fourth time. It is a new initiative which aims to showcase the importance of seas and oceans for our everyday life.

Dear Colleagues,

This is my last AGA and Conference as EFC Chairman. I believe therefore that this is a timely opportunity to wrap up what I see as key areas of development for the Centre and European philanthropy over the last few years.

First, I feel very fortunate to have been Chairman of the EFC during the celebrations of our first 20 years. What

strikes me most about the first two decades of the Centre is how it has always pursued big ideas.

Second, I will mention four topics:

1. Progress on a European Foundation Statute
2. Increasing visibility and outreach of Foundations
3. Strengthening European philanthropic infrastructure
4. Looking beyond Europe's borders

1. One of the most significant developments in these 20 years - which continues to be a top priority for the Centre - is ensuring a better legal and fiscal environment in which foundations can operate. In this regard, the EFC has been working actively towards the realisation of an optional, pan-European legal form for foundations. Since 2005 the Centre adopted its recommendations for a European Foundation Statute. In the past year, we had some very encouraging signs that all this work may finally be paying off. This spring, in its Communication on the Single Market Act, the Commission confirmed that it will present a Regulation on a European Foundation Statute. The European Economic and

Social Committee, the European Parliament, Commissioner Barnier and President Barroso have all expressed their backing for the Statute.

These are indeed exciting times, as this Statute promises to take European philanthropy into a new era. However, we must not celebrate too soon. Now is the time to step up our efforts at national level to ensure approval of this new legal form by the Member States, which will review the Commission's proposal next year.

2. I had the privilege to oversee the first-ever EFC Foundation Week, which brought a new and engaging way of presenting foundations to the EU and to the public. The Week was a success on many fronts, from its interactive fair to over 60 sessions and meetings on the many facets of philanthropy in Europe. The EU institutions and the public got the chance to see foundations in a different light and the event also gave foundations the opportunity to talk to and learn from EU representatives and members of the public in ways that they never had before.

3. The strengthening of relations *within* the European philanthropic sector was a priority. The EFC's relationship with the national-level associations of foundations and donors is growing ever-stronger. The Centre's newly strategic plan, if approved by our General Assembly, defines a new, more formal relationship through the creation of a new architecture for the foundations movement. The Foundation Council of Europe will bring together Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe (DAFNE) and the EFC in a new governance arrangement that will represent more than 5000 major European foundations. With this new synergy comes a sense of common purpose which I am confident will prove indispensable and powerful in our advocacy efforts.

4. Looking for new forms of engagement with organizations outside Europe was a major priority during my term. One of the fastest changing – and most challenging – contexts that we work in is the global one. Looking outside the borders of Europe, there is a growing sense that so many of the issues that European philanthropy addresses have global implications and causes. To tackle these

issues, we must look out beyond our borders – for ideas, for partners, for knowledge and for solutions. The Global Philanthropy Leadership Initiative – a joint effort of the EFC, the Council on Foundations of the USA and WINGS – is really picking up steam. This initiative brings together philanthropy leaders from across the world. We will examine the critical challenges global philanthropy faces today, we will discuss issues and opportunities at the horizon and we will identify potential areas for collective action that can increase and strengthen the impact of foundations' responses.

I would like to express our solidarity to our Japanese colleagues who unfortunately, for well known reasons, were not able to attend our meeting. I had the opportunity to convey a personal message to Mr. Hiroshi Tanaka, Executive Director of the Japan Foundation Center, who sent us a message which you can find in your folders.

Next Saturday I will hand the chairmanship to Marco Parlangeli and I am truly convinced that the Centre is prepared to fulfill its mission, thanks to the active

participation of all its members and its extraordinary staff under the direction of Gerry Salole. I hope that these days in Cascais prove to be an occasion for valuable and forward-thinking discussions about the future of philanthropy in Europe. I am sure they will be.

Thank you.

Emílio Rui Vilar