

Toast Barcelona, 9 July 2008 (Dirk van de Kaa)

Madam President, Members of the Council, Members of the European Association for Population Studies, Distinguished Guests

In March of this year it was 25 year ago exactly, that Charlotte Höhn and Guillaume Wunsch traveled to The Hague to join me in a brief walk to a public notary to sign the documents establishing a professional European association of demographers, now called IEPS by some and A-aps by others.

The famous French author Gustav Flaubert once noted that 'in the corner of every notary's heart lie the moldy remains of a poet'. In the case of the EAPS these poetical remains had not exerted any influence at all. The documents were in Dutch, met certain legal requirements and used very plain language. But Guillaume and Charlotte were well aware of their lofty goal: to create an association that would bring together researchers from all over Europe. At the time that seemed more visionary than feasible. Much to our pleasure two friends, Andras Klinger and Zdenek Pavlik had already agreed to join us in forming the first Council. That made us hopeful. We were, moreover, acting on behalf of numerous other colleagues. Together these represented a wide range of European experience and tradition in the study of population. They had accepted, always without hesitation, I might add, to support our endeavour, in particular by raising national interest in it. They really provided our plans with a solid foundation and we were, and still are, most grateful to them.

Unfortunately, some of those early supporters are no longer with us. It is with a mixture of gratitude, nostalgia and sadness that here I recall the names of those who passed away: Jerzy Holzer, Hans-Joachim Hoffman-Nowotny, our second president Gérard Calot, and the two quite senior advisors of the First Council: William Brass, who represented the IUSSP and Jean Bourgeois-Pichat, who represented CICRED.

In taking this step we knew we could also count on the goodwill of the senior members of a previous European population association that had been initiated by the famous Alfred Sauvy in the 1950s. The careers of these colourful figures matched the turbulent times through which they had lived. Let me just mention Gunther Beyer, Hilde Wander, Erland Hofsten, Vladimir Trebici, Luigi Di Comite, Edward Rosset, and Milos Macura. They were planning to join us en-bloc.

The successive Councils worked diligently. In their efforts they were aided greatly by the members who volunteered to organize our international conferences and workshops. We identified some who were courageous enough to accept the heavy responsibility of the editing of the new European Journal of Population. Other colleagues in a responsible position joined our Advisory Board or accepted the task of leading that important body. Others again provided the necessary dynamism and intellectual leadership to our official Working Groups and very many contributed their papers.

I hesitate to single out particular persons or organizations in this regard. So many of us did whatever they could that it might seem arbitrary. But exceptions must be made. First for the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute: its board and successive directors offered EAPS hospitality. More importantly still, the institute provided the association with a succession of capable Executive Secretaries and the secretarial support these needed.

Once I mention their names you will also understand my reasons for singling out two particularly meritorious individuals: Guillaume Wunsch and Nico van Nimwegen. During the past 25

years they, between them, have held every conceivable post in the Council at least once. Many a glass of beer may have passed their lips, but with good cheer and tenacity they actively served the association longer than anyone else and very well indeed.

In the quarter of a century of its existence the European Organization for Population Studies has developed beyond the wildest dreams of its founders. No doubt, this owes a lot to the diligent work of members just mentioned. But more significant still, I would like to suggest, were developments on which individual demographers exerted no influence at all. If you had interviewed us when we started, we might have felt like the newly elected Prime Minister of a large country that shall not now be named. When, at the end of his first, carefully prepared interview, with all questions submitted in advance, he was asked what he thought of the future of his country, he looked baffled, shuffled through his papers and said: "I don't seem to have been briefed on that".

We had not been briefed either. In any case, in 1983 we did not foresee some major developments and certainly not in their full consequence. I cannot possibly analyze them on this festive occasion. Let me simply remind you of four of them. The first is, of course, the lifting of the Iron Curtain that had divided Europe since World War II. In tandem with this, a much greater degree of cooperation between European countries could be achieved. Let me remind youngsters that it was real progress to be able to go through border controls without having to show one's face, tired of a long wait, both en-face and in profile, to surly officials in a small cubicle. No doubt political developments in Europe provided successive councils with a very favourable tailwind. In 1983 we might have dreamt of such changes, but it would have been absolutely ludicrous to assume that they would happen within decades.

I would, secondly, like to suggest that the remarkable changes in demographic behaviour in Europe have also worked in our favour. Europe is a trend setting continent. Europe provides a quite unique research environment. Our results are of increasing relevance to friends from abroad; their quality is rising steadily.

If one looks around at this gathering, the third major development also is evident. It is the great expansion of tertiary education in Europe and the increased participation of women therein. Whatever one says about the gender issue, it nearly always is wrong. So let me not say that EAPS is becoming increasingly beautiful, but simply observe that, in all respects, the greater involvement of women in society has been especially beneficial to us as a demographic association.

To round off, I want to mention as a fourth point the emergence of something resembling a truly 'Free European Sky'. If there had been no low-cost airlines it is doubtful that so many of us would have found their way to this conference in Barcelona or to the previous one in Liverpool.

Let me now offer you a toast: May EAPS continue to benefit from favourable societal tailwinds, and may it flourish in the 25 years to come! Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you the EAPS!