

## **Acceptance Speech – George Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy**

Mr. Diego Hidalgo

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Dear members of the Jury of the Raymond Georis Prize, members of EFC, representatives of the Mercator Fund, Mr. Georis, friends,

I want to thank you very much for this important prize. It is an honor that I did not expect. And it is both an honor for me and for the people that work with me. On their behalf I would like to express my deep appreciation for your generosity.

This prize has a special relevance because it symbolises the example of Mr. Raymond Georis, who understood and understands how to link private and public funds and how to establish a solid network of European Foundations. His work has had an important impact on the well-being of Europeans and has served as a symbol of a diverse continent united by common values.

In a country that I know well, the United States, philanthropy is part of the mainstream culture - it helps advance society, playing a role in politics, in social development, and in the promotion of innovative thinking.

Until a few decades ago in Europe, philanthropy had a much lower profile. In contrast with the US, on our continent the state played a different and fundamental role in social development and we still rely heavily on public funds for innovation, social change or to provide incentives for cultural life.

But things are changing: the European private foundation sector is establishing itself and gaining important ground, sometimes

working alone; in other cases working in mixed activities with public funding.

The relationship among European private and public sectors and civil society is a crucial new development for us, and the work of individuals such as Mr. Georis, and strong, influential networks like the European Foundation Centre, are making a real difference in very different fields of our lives and in the lives of others.

I would also like to mention that the European experience is now being developed with increasingly strong links to US donors, as we can see in this Assembly. This is a development that in part we owe to EFC, and it gives me huge satisfaction. We need to work much more closely, and also with foundations from other countries and continents in order to face up to today's crucial world challenges.

Let me tell you that since I started to work some decades ago in the promotion of a host of activities in the fields of democracy, peace, poverty, social issues and human rights, I never considered myself just a philanthropist. I always made myself an integral part of the projects that I funded: I celebrated the successes and was saddened by the failures.

I come from a country – Spain - that has a relatively new democracy and modern institutions. Since the 1970s I considered that my role was to use my resources and skills to promote initiatives that could help move forward a democratic political debate on some of the crucial issues that we are facing in the planet: poverty, violations of human rights, lack of democracy, lack of sustainable peace. I promoted a variety of organisations— from publishing houses to think tanks and platforms for dialogue. With my experience as a committed donor I tried to generate a synergy and a dynamic of cooperation and solidarity.

Neither I nor the institutions that I helped to create have the solution to the dramatic problems of the world. But as the representatives of hundred of foundations that are now in Istanbul, we are part of that community of values and ideas. We generate spaces for dialogue, we move forward debates, we help to imagine innovative ways to make things different.

I hope that this prize, which I don't deserve but which I accept with humility, will help to strengthen the links between us in Spain, the international donor community and the hundreds of thousand of grantees that you are supporting around the world. We all share the same view: to make the world more livable, more just and more democratic.

Thank you.