



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT - NR 9

Lund, 14th December 2018.

Dear Colleagues,

Dear Friends,

One year passes by quickly and now it is Christmas again. Our Christmas tradition differs but still it is something that unites us. Even in the modern secularized world the Christian religion and what it represents must not be forgotten. It is such an important part of what we believe and our traditions and culture. It is an indispensable part of our life.

For us in the north Christmas Eve is the big day when presents are given to the children by a Father Christmas or "jultomte" as we say. In old folklore he was a small gray figure living in the barn. The bright colors were given to him as late as in the eighteen hundreds most probably by Jenny Nyström who painted story books and Christmas cards. The big, fat man that we now see is an American invention. Modern Father Christmas as you probably know is supposed to live in Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland. I have met him there a few times. So, you better believe in him!

Christmas Day is the Church day here and we used to start the day by going to the church early in the morning. When I grew up we did that in a sledge driven by horses. Ten kilometers in a cold sledge is something I very well remember. But, it was very often beautiful with the snow and the bleak colors and all the candle lights in the farms in the snowy forest. Nowadays, people tend to go to church later in the day and the biggest church going day of the year has become the first Sunday of Advent.

My dear predecessor Lino de Bono wrote a long letter at the end of his successful two years. I will try to follow that tradition by writing a short Christmas letter to you all and to make some comments of what has happened during my first year. If Lino de Bono comes from the south of Europe I may say I come from the north and many years as most of you know I have devoted my time to the Arctic Issues and especially University of the Arctic. Maybe, it has influenced my way of acting. But, I am living in the south of Sweden. The north is far away from here, almost two thousand kilometers.



I must say, it is wonderful to be together with friends from countries in Europe exchanging thoughts and ideas. That was obvious to me when we had the meeting in Brussels in the end of May. The morning seminar with the title "Europe, Quo Vadis" was something I would like to see more often. We come from different parts of Europe and we have different views and backgrounds and we need to learn more about each other to avoid future misunderstandings or something worse as conflicts.

Two excellent speakers at the seminar enlightened our views and knowledge of Europe. Mr. Herman van Rompuy, former Prime Minister of Belgium and Chairman of European Council was matched by Mr Pierre Defraigne, professor at the Europa College in Bruges and Paris School of International Affairs. The moderator was Mr Franklin Dehousse, Professor at different universities and Former Judge at the General Court of the European Union. Together they gave us a deep understanding of the complexity and richness of European

politics and what the future might bring. Mrs. Mayence-Goossens contacts were essential for arranging this seminar as well as the excursion program on Saturday and we thank her for that.



Almost two years ago we decided to have a new colloquy and this time with the title "The Future of Europe" and the final meeting of the colloquy took place in the middle of October in the most European city of all, Strasbourg. There one can find many European institutions as the Council of Europe, European Parliament, and the European Court of Human Rights and much more besides a big and well-known university. Our friend Walter Schwimmer, former Secretary General at the Council of Europe, had been chosen to be the rapporteur of the colloquy and he did an excellent work. He managed in spite of many different views and opinions to unite us around a final and very good result. He deserves praise for his superb rapport.

I am happy that there are now three active members from northern Europe, Finland will be full member next year and hopefully also Norway. Sweden has been a full member for some years. We in the Nordic countries have a tradition that we send one representative from each association to our neighbors' annual meetings. That way we learn more about each other and we can get new ideas like the new Finnish initiative to go to the schools and inform the students about the history of the country. Finland has just celebrated its 101 anniversary on December 6, the Day of Independence. This year the Finnish association had an interesting seminar about the year 1918, when modern Finland was formed. It was a great pleasure to be the Swedish representative there.



Good meetings do not come without effort. Without the great work of our secretariat with Roland Roblain, Lisette Hermans and Krist Decanniere very little would have been achieved. They deserve a great thank you from all of us. Thank you, very much!! You are indispensable.

I also would like to extend my thanks to the Restricted Bureau with Jean-Pierre Fourré, Jan-Kees Wiebenga, Brigitte Langenhagen and Dario Rivolta for the very good collaboration we have had during the year!

Dear Friends,

When we were just about to send this letter out, a terrible terrorist attack against innocent people happened in Strasbourg, the place we all visited not long ago.

It is terrible that we live in a world when these actions take place anywhere anytime. Naturally, our thoughts go first of all to the innocent victims and their families but also to the local authorities we met during our colloquy and the people of Strasbourg.

But, I hope in spite of what has happened we all will have a peaceful Christmas Season.



Let me end by wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2019!

Rune Rydén

President

Photo 1 & 3 : © Krist Decanniere

Photo 2 : © Kevin Oeyen (Belgian Senate)