

## **Eddy Van Avermaet's speech during the farewell party GM at Granada 5-8 July 2017**

### **The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EASP**

A good evening to you all, un bonsoir à tous et à toutes, goede avond iedereen, einen guten Abend für Sie alle, .... y buenas Noches para todos y todas,

#### **Introduction**

Last fall two lovely ladies, our (now former) president, Manuela Barreto, assisted by our executive officer, Sibylle Classen, asked me to contribute to the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Association by writing down its history. I did as asked. You could each pick up a free copy at the conference registration desk. Those who did not will find a pdf version of the contents on our website. I am taking this opportunity to express my warmest thanks to Tina Keil, a postgraduate member at the University of Exeter, who took care of the lay out of the booklet. If it would not have been for her, the booklet would be no more than just another dull and dry history booklet. So, thank you Tina!

The two lovely ladies also asked me to deliver a 'brief' speech on the occasion of this farewell dinner/party. They emphasized the word 'brief', partly because they know I am a man of many words, but mostly because people are not interested in long speeches after 4 intensive days of hard work, for some supplemented by 4 evenings (and nights) of less hard work.

So, I accepted the invitation to write and to speak. I felt flattered, yes, but at the same time I suddenly felt very old when they added: "Eddy, you were there already in the early years, you lived at Leuven where a number of the early meetings leading to the foundation of the Association took place, you were a student of Jef Nuttin, one of the founders of our Association". And so they went on, making me feel older and older by the minute.

Oh well, what is old? Consider our Association. Are we now 50 years old or 50 years young? It all depends on one's frame of reference. I turned 70 last December. Well, compared to me, our Association is very young. On the other hand, many of you present here are distinctly less than 50 years old (a great many of you were not even born when the Association came into being). Hence, compared to you, youngsters, our Association is old.

Still, looked at in perspective, old and young go very well together: old in wisdom, young in spirit! As the motto of my beloved home town Leuven has it: 'Leuven, eeuwenoud en springlevend!' [*"Leuven, centuries-old but still alive and kicking"*].

Paraphrasing: "EASP, 50 years old, but more than ever: alive and kicking!"

#### **Our history: a fairy tale**

You all know how fairy tales begin: "Once upon a time ..."

Well, once upon a time – in the early sixties - there was a wise man, an American, (mind you, not all Americans are wise these days), a social psychologist called John Lanzetta, who travelled through a number of European kingdoms and republics. While travelling he did not, as in many fairy tales, run into wicked witches or voracious dragons. Instead he had the

great fortune to run into friendly social psychologists. Much to his amazement many of them had never heard of, let alone met each other.

And so, he decided to bring them together, first in Sorrento (near Naples) in December of 1963, and again a year later (in 1964) in Frascati (also in Italy) and then again in 1966, this time in the Abbaye de Royaumont (near Paris).

*[I should point out that at the Royaumont meeting Lanzetta was present as a guest of honor only, the preparatory work having been done by a European Planning Committee. Moreover, whereas the Sorrento and Frascati meetings had been paid for with American money, the Royaumont Meeting was fully paid for with European money.]*

And it is here at Royaumont that this group of social psychologists formally decided to create a new organization. They first considered calling it 'the European Union', but fearing already back then that eventually the British would leave the Union, they opted for a different name: 'The European Association of Experimental Social Psychology' or the EAESP. They elected a government, called it the Executive Committee – with Serge Moscovici as its first president – and they wrote a set of official bylaws. These bylaws were formally accepted by the members during the first official General Meeting of the Association, held at Leuven in 1969. A year later, in 1970, the then Dutch queen Juliana proclaimed – through a royal decree – that henceforth EAESP was now an officially recognized legal entity.

And so it all began .... How about that for a fairy tale!!!!

#### **What did the Dutch have to do with it?**

By the way, for those among you who wonder why the Dutch queen Juliana was involved, rather than e.g. the Belgian king or the British queen, let me explain. Mauk Mulder and Jaap Rabbie, at the time respectively secretary and member of the EC and responsible for the 'officialization' of EAESP, were from Utrecht University in The Netherlands. That is also why the official seat of our Association is still in Utrecht.

Hence, whether you like it or not .... in a way we are therefore all Dutch!

#### **Why celebrate our 50th in 2017?**

Assuming that you paid attention to the dates I mentioned and assuming that you were still sober enough to add 50 to those dates, the outcome will never have been 2017.

The Association was internally founded in 1966 at Royaumont.  $1966 + 50 = 2016$  (last year).

The Articles and Standing Orders were approved at the General Meeting in 1969.  $1969 + 50 = 2019$  (two years from now). The Association became an externally recognized legal entity in 1970.  $1970 + 50 = 2020$  (three years from now).

Hence ... why celebrate the 50 years in 2017? Why now?

Hypothesis 1: the EC members cannot count ... a hypothesis that I reject.

Hypothesis 2: the members of the present EC like to celebrate. As we are now fifty-ish, sort of in the neighbourhood of our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, they felt that this General Meeting in 2017 was the perfect occasion for the celebration.

Should the members of the newly elected EC prefer 'official' dates I suggest that they re-celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020 at the next General Meeting. As a meeting place I recommend that they have it at the most perfect of locations, namely the Dutch Royal Palace at The Hague. After all, The Netherlands is our official home.

## **Reading the booklet and the Archives**

For those of you interested in the details of our history, I suggest you read our booklet, or even better yet, pay a visit to Leuven, go to our university library and dive into the 14 or so boxes that contain the Archives of our Association, if only to read the early handwritten letters of the members of the first Executive Committee: Henri Tajfel, Serge Moscovici, Mauk Mulder, Gustav Jahoda, Jef Nuttin, Ragnar Rommetveit and Martin Irlé. They corresponded in any of a number of languages: English, French, Dutch or German. Besides, for those of you interested in money, the archives even contain their hotel and restaurant bills.

## **A true story about 'reading'**

So, for the full history, 'read' the Archives or 'read' our booklet. Speaking of 'reading' I cannot resist telling you a story from the early years (also described in our written history account). A story, yes, but a true story. It is known to some of you, but definitely not to the younger generation.

Back in 1969- 1970, when Henri Tajfel was the Association's president and Jef Nuttin its secretary, the two of them experienced a sense of frustration over the fact that many members of the Association never replied to appeals of various sorts, made in the Association's Newsletters. Before jumping to the conclusion that members did not even bother to 'read' the Newsletter, let alone react to calls for action, Jef Nuttin, as secretary responsible for the Newsletter, decided to test the 'they don't bother to read'- hypothesis. And so, in the Newsletter of February 1970, members could read the following announcement:

*"Taking into account the relatively high lodging and travel costs involved in various forms of small meetings, it was decided at the last Committee Meeting to invest a relatively high percentage of the Association's funds in the acquisition of a boat, a middle-sized yacht which would fly the French colors, and with the president and the secretary as experienced yachtsmen. The yacht will be used as a mobile meeting place for any small meeting planned by the Committee or its members."*

The announcement ended with:

*"The above decision will however not be carried out if 3 or more members of the Association object in writing to the Secretary within one month of the date of this Newsletter".*

After the month had passed Jef Nuttin got to counting the number of objections. it was an easy count: only one member objected (Peter Schönbach ... he shall be praised forever!!) Point proven .... in 1970!

Being a bit naughty (a trait I inherited from my mentor and friend, the late Jef Nuttin), I for one would be curious about the outcome if the new Executive Committee would decide to try and replicate the experiment now.

## **The Association: a success story**

Seriously again and moving to the end of what I wanted to say, overlooking the entire history of our Association it has been a tremendous success. As proof, there are the many small and medium sized meetings, the Summer Schools, the General Meetings, our joint

activities with other societies, our publications, the grants awarded, the growth in membership ...and so forth and so on .... the list is endless.

But above all, there is you, past and present members of the Association! If it were not for you and through you, the Association would not be what it is today. And of course, there were and there are the 17 presidents and the 17 Executive Committees that have steered our boat (no, not a yacht) through the seas and waves of all the challenges for European Social Psychology. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude! And then of course, there is also the person who in many ways embodies our Past, our Present and our Future: our executive officer Sibylle Classen, who in this very year is celebrating her 30<sup>th</sup> year of service to the Association.

### **In concluding**

In concluding, two wishes!

My first wish:

The Association has always been family. Please, let it remain family!

My second wish:

You all know how fairy tales end. Such is also my wish for the Association: "that it may live long and happily here after and ever after!"

Thank you and enjoy the rest of your evening.