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Federal Councillor PASCAL COUCHEPIN
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Subject: Eranos Foundation and Alwine von Keller, Ascona

Honourable Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin
Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs

Four years ago, I received permission from the then sole administrator, Mrs. Maria Danioth, to contact whoever I deemed necessary for the relaunch and salvation of the Eranos Foundation. I was then co-author of the public appeal in favour of Eranos, which quickly gathered hundreds of signatures from important people (e.g., a serving Italian government minister) as well as ordinary citizens. Before my exploratory mandate was withdrawn by the Foundation Board, I wrote a critical/propositive report on the state of the Eranos Foundation in 2003 (never published) and had numerous contacts with the Federal Supervisory Authority for Foundations, including a meeting in Bern with the person responsible for the file. Today I am part of an observation group that critically monitors the developments of the Eranos situation, while maintaining an absolutely neutral position.

I know well the administrative and cultural history of Eranos from 1988, when the then sole administrator Rudolf Ritzema revolutionized the Foundation's cultural action and began a period of de-responsibilization of administrators vis-à-vis the Foundation. All sorts of things happened at the financial and organizational level. This brought the Foundation to the brink of bankruptcy, loaded with 4.5 million francs in debt. This whole affair is described in my report on the state of the Foundation but above all in the collected documents.

Currently, the major problem has arisen of the sale to Mrs. Fok Laiping, member of the Eranos Foundation Board (CdF) and wife of CdF president John van Praag, of about one third of the Foundation's buildable land on the lakefront in Moscia, including a villa called "Shanti House", for 2 million francs. All this without seeking offers from third parties and with a sale price derived from an incomprehensible valuation of the 200 m² built (value between 10,000 and 25,000 francs per square metre) and about 950 m² of buildable lakefront land (max value 5,000 francs per square metre). In Bern, perhaps the Ascona real estate market is not known, but I can assure you that the value of the sold plot is much higher (already in 2000 an appraisal commissioned by the Foundation attributed a value of 2 million francs to the plot, calculating the villa at 450 francs per cubic metre and not per square metre, and the land at a miserable 1,700 francs per square metre, a price now ridiculous for lakefront land in Ascona. Unfindable land.)

As an observation group, we contacted the CdF members to understand the Foundation's intentions. Unfortunately, it was not possible to meet the mayor of Ascona, Mr. Aldo Rampazzi, CdF member, despite his availability for a meeting. The mayor of Ascona agreed with the sale and gave his approval without announcing his decision to the municipal authorities.

This sale violates the purpose of the Eranos and Alwine von Keller Foundation and is incomprehensible to public opinion. Common sense also tells us that if President van Praag has the financial means to buy this property, he also has the money for a long-term loan to the Foundation at zero interest. It is not understood why, despite having a solid majority on the Eranos CdF (through members of the East West Foundation, founded in 2004!!!), he needed this additional guarantee to continue his work within the Eranos CdF. It is a question of purity of intent.

What I take the liberty to ask you is that the Supervisory Authority for Foundations treat this sale application with extreme firmness and rigour. There is currently an alternative: a real project to have the Foundation's properties bought by local authorities with possible subsidies from the Canton of Ticino to create a Foundation owning the real estate constituted by local authorities and the Eranos Foundation. This Foundation would then manage the cultural activities, in the tradition of Eranos, to the Eranos Foundation.

I ask that the Federal Supervisory Authority for Foundations support this project with all means at its disposal, which would forever resolve the issue of public protection of that cathedral of the spirit that is Eranos. And for you to do the same politically.

The Cultural Heritage Office and the Cultural Heritage Commission of the Canton of Ticino have responded positively, in recent days, to the request to bind/protect the immovable properties of the Foundation in Moscia as well as the archives and library and intangible properties. The request was made by the head of the Culture Legacies and Foundations Department of Ascona, Mrs. Paola Cerutti, with the agreement of the majority of the Municipality (why in the Eranos CdF is the municipality represented by Mayor Aldo Rampazzi and not by the municipal culture officer already a CdF member?). This protection, which will be officialised shortly, further responsabilises the municipal, cantonal and federal authorities.

On the other hand, the most significant part of the archive and library heritage is now located at the headquarters of the East West Foundation (which controls the Eranos CdF with 3 out of 5 members), which has apparently also become the operational headquarters of the Eranos Foundation, at the Aion in Ascona (responsible Claudio Metzger CdF member) which is also the headquarters of the Centro Numismatico Ascona business, the Aion Private Art Service & Consulting SA etc. etc.

In the "Eranos" affair, the Supervisory Authority has not acted in the past with sufficient incisiveness and firmness, barricading itself behind the autonomy of decision of the CdF and the jurisprudence of the Federal Court.

In the meeting of 6 April 2004, I personally had to deliver to the Supervisory Authority representative sensitive documents that it had requested from the CdF without being able to receive them from the same.

As far back as 1992, in a meeting in Bern with the Foundation's lawyer (Avv. Claudio Lanini), the Supervisory Authority had already clearly warned the CdF "We would not want the Foundation to suddenly find itself stripped of its assets. ...:", warnings repeated in the following years. It did not help much since the Foundation found itself on the brink of bankruptcy and the Supervisory Authority proposed its liquidation as the only solution.

As a Swiss citizen, I seriously question the validity of the current Foundations Act and the real possibilities of control over the actions of Foundation CdFs, I hope to be proven wrong.

Awaiting your reply, please accept the assurances of my highest esteem.

Daniele Bonetti