

MAECENATA FOUNDATION

PRESSINFORMATION

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Maecenata Enters a New Phase

From 6th May, 2024, after nearly 35 years, Maecenata will have a new CEO. Founder Rupert Graf Strachwitz, who is 76, has decided to step down. Ansgar Gessner (46), well known in philanthropy and civil society circles as a senior executive of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, has been appointed as his successor.

Maecenata began in 1989 as a consultancy specialized in philanthropy and NPOs. One of its first major tasks was to collect data on German foundations, which had not been done since before WW I. This first brought Maecenata in touch with what was then the European Foundation Centre and with the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. A strong orientation towards research and a number of publications ensued. In 1997, the Maecenata Institute was formed as a separate not for profit centre for research and policy studies. Generous funding from Atlantic Philanthropies, the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Bosch Foundation and others enabled this side of Maecenata to flourish. Later, the Volkswagen Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and Porticus became major funders. Rupert became a member of the German Federal Parliamentary Commission on Civic Engagement in 1999, and has been active in providing independent policy advice at national and transnational level ever since.

In 2001, Maecenata created the German partner for the Transnational Giving Europe Network. In 2011, when the consultancy was sold, Rupert established the Maecenata Foundation as a charitable entity and the legal body for all Maecenata's remaining activities. Today, these include the Maecenata Institute, the Transnational Giving Programme, the Tocqueville Forum (since 2014) and a MENA Study Centre (since 2019). Approx. 20 volunteer, full time, part time, and student staff serve on the foundation's board and work in its programmes.

To date, Maecenata has released well over 300 publications in three online series and in printed form, and staff and associates have contributed to a wide range of journals and edited volumes internationally. Major research projects included 'Reforming Charity and Foundation Law in Germany', 'The Paradox of Foundations', 'Philanthropy Insight',

‘Urban Planning and Civil Society’, ‘Religious Communities and Civil Society in Europe’, and lately, ‘Contested Civic Spaces in Europe’. Maecenata staff teach at three universities in Germany and lecture in academic and other contexts world-wide. Also, since joining the Transnational Giving Europe Network as its German partner, Maecenata has accepted approx. 190 Million Euro in earmarked donations and forwarded them to beneficiaries world-wide, including i.a. the UN World Food Programme, UK and US universities and grass roots NGOs in the southern hemisphere.

While Maecenata has always maintained a strong European and international outlook, Rupert has also devoted special attention to intercultural and interreligious dialogue, particularly with the MENA region. Muslim philanthropy and giving have played a major role in Maecenata’s endeavours, resulting in a number of projects and publications. Since the MENA Study Centre was opened, this has become an even more important focus. Furthermore, Rupert, who holds a Ph.D. from Muenster University, has always taken a keen interest in European and international civil society studies, and has been an active member of the International Society for Third Sector Research since this world-wide academic society was formed. He is an associate of the Centre for the Study of Philanthropy and the Public Good of the University of St. Andrews, and has served on a number of boards of foundations and charities, including the Fondazione Cariplo, Milan (1999-2006), and currently, the International Rescue Committee Germany.

Rupert, who has over 700 publications to his own name, does not intend to retire totally, but does feel the time has come to hand over the responsibility for what is now a well-respected think tank to a new generation. Dr. Siri Hummel (she) became the director of the Maecenata Institute in 2023, and Rupert will now complete the hand-over by welcoming Ansgar Gessner as Maecenata’s new CEO. He will remain on board as non-executive director and senior strategic advisor, and will continue to take a keen interest in civil society and philanthropy affairs, to write and teach, and to offer his experience and know-how to whomever might be interested.“

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