Towards a European Council of Research Libraries

1. The organizers of this advanced workshop wanted to create a direct link with the one which took place at Stanford University on October 1-3, 1984. Thus it is appreciated that quite a number of participants in the first meeting are attending the present one. Obviously more American colleagues attended the Stanford meeting, just as more Europeans are present here. Under these circumstances, it is appropriate that the program includes a report on the first meeting. It will be delivered by Richard McCoy, president of the Research Library Group and principal organizer of the Stanford meeting.

To start with, I would like to read the introductory remarks which I made at Stanford, not for lack of imagination, but to check them with our European colleagues, to see if they agree or disagree with my way of looking at the professional differences between the U.S. and Europe, as well as on institutional differences which bear on the professional ones.

Though national governments should still improve their support of research libraries, the scholarly community feels the need to pull resources together on the European level. Large libraries in the U.S. are larger and richer than their European counterparts and they already have accepted the idea that no one institution can meet the needs of its patrons. Economic pressures and new technology both favor cooperation.

The economic considerations which first prompted nuclear research on a supra-national level in Europe are now valid for most research fields. The needed infrastructure which libraries and information services provide are generally accepted to be of basic importance to any advanced project in the humanities as well as in science and technology. As to the new technology, it is obvious that it is the same in Europe as in the U.S. The applications are however much less advanced in Europe than in the U.S. The explanation of this situation is, it seems to me, the core of what I want to convey to you. It has several components and I shall come to it in a moment.
The growing integration of libraries into the whole field of scholarly communication, which goes from university management to electronic publishing, is being recognized in and outside the traditional library field. It is important that other patterns of collection building, of bibliographic access, of availability of publications and of transborder data flow receive priority from a European angle. Library management, preservation and human resources are other problems to which research libraries must address themselves.

A European consciousness is developing in different fields, on both governmental and non-governmental levels. Within the scholarly community it has been accepted that eminence can no longer be achieved within national boundaries. Consortia in the field of research libraries and information services are however much less developed in Europe than in the U.S.

Since the Council on Library Resources is the recognized leader in enhancing the services of research libraries, I have been exploring the possibility of setting up a European equivalent in order to improve the efficiency of European research libraries. I shall conclude this feasibility study by the end of the year, but I can already give you the general trend of these conclusions knowing however that the present conference will have, at least I hope, an impact on these conclusions. I said that already at Stanford and I am repeating it here.

All of us know that private foundations do not have the same significance in Europe as in the U.S. Notwithstanding I have been trying to look for a European "Library Committee" like the one with which CLR works and which is the principal means to channel foundation money to CLR. It would be an overstatement to say that I have been moderately successful. With two exceptions and I shall come back to them, foundations in Europe have national interests. National boundaries in Europe are still eminently strong and it is impossible to ignore their strength, though most national professional organizations have come to the conclusion that self-sufficiency is no longer a realistic aim. To the profession it is clear in Europe that the information revolution ignores national boundaries and efficient answers to the challenge of this revolution have to be dealt with at a transnational level, it being understood that national components will remain pre-eminent, at least in the near future. Private foundations, whether they are interested in libraries or not, have not yet completely realized this