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Interview with
**Dr Christian Rey
de Rudder**



Entretien,
Jean Fabre



Interview with His Excellency

Lansana Gberie

Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva

Opening of a
COVID-19 screening
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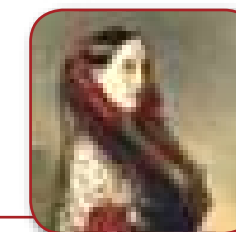
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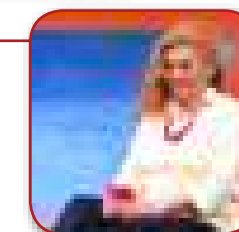
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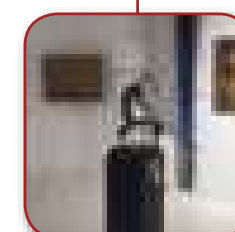


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The older you get...

“The older you get, the quicker the years pass by,” my colleague observed the other day. “Did you know that, according to some contemporary historians, the most important year in the twentieth century was 1979? I presume that was before 2020 and the Covid19 that knocked out the whole world for quite some time. Generations after us will definitely be curious to know what it was like to live under these conditions.

“Going back to 1979, I do remember that year well and it seems like yesterday,” he continued. “It was the year of the Iranian revolution; the overthrow of the Shah of Iran; the end of the Sino-Vietnamese War; the independence of Malta; Greenland granted limited autonomy from Denmark; and the opening up between the United States and China – just to mention some of the most important events on the international scene marking our time.”

1979 was also the year that Pope John Paul II arrived in his native country, Poland, on his first official visit. It was an event that is now considered “the nine days that changed the world” and that brought about the solidarity movement of the Polish people in their opposition to the regime that Stalin had bequeathed them. Who does not remember Lech Walesa and the Gdansk shipyard where it all started?

Forty-one years later, we have now seen the breakdown of the former communist states, the emergence of new independent states, a couple of financial crises, the disappearance of former Marxists and Communist ideologies replaced by neo-liberalism and extreme consumerism leading to global economic crises, social unrest, devastating wars and huge refugee problems. Geopolitics and economic interests now take precedence over everything else. We have seen the terrible disasters in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya... just to mention a few.

However, nothing we have seen up to date can beat the Covid19 pandemic I would say. Since March 2020 when the whole of our modern society was turned upside down, we have become more and more a digital society, where we are under constant surveillance owing to the Covid19 pandemic. It sounds terrible, but it's reality unfortunately.

However, we have also seen some positive trends such as the emerging of collective consciousness about the disastrous state of our planet. “Although some politicians say that there is no planetary warming, the people are starting to act like responsible citizens, and they are acting, make no mistake about it,” my colleague continued.

We see more and more examples of circular-economy-driven concepts in



television ads, making people aware that we do not have to possess everything; it's possible to rent. Every day we see on television, through their ads, that big companies are moving in this direction too.

People of all ages have now become climate activists, and were up to the emergence of COVID, fighting against plastic and all types of litter. They walk, they cycle, they recycle, and they try to reduce their consumption as much as possible. It has even become possible to recycle one's clothes and furniture. Therefore, we are definitely seeing the emergence of new orientations in society, with, we hope, more social justice and solidarity.

So, on these rather positive notes, despite confinement, social distancing and a tricky virus floating in the air, we wish you all a very pleasant day. Stay healthy and safe!

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The Blame Game

Many years ago, I worked for a major UK retailer in the Research and Development division of the company implementing new technology from loyalty cards, to logistics, automated checkouts and a variety of other innovative ideas. They had 5 stores throughout the UK, branded differently from the mother company and were open to the bemused public to shop in those stores as though they were normal stores. This division was set up as a separate legal entity and in addition to field testing innovative retail ideas, they attempted to make a profit, or at the very least, break even.

I worked there for about three years and largely enjoyed the experience and eventually moved on when I had a better and more interesting opportunity elsewhere. I gained a great deal of experience with the R&D division, not least of which was managing complex projects.

My first project was a resounding failure but, the company persevered with me and I felt duty-bound to try again and improve my project management skills to help deliver another piece of this gigantic jigsaw puzzle. One fundamental lesson I learnt was to deal with project risks / issues, regardless of who was to blame for the situation in hand. Analysis of what went wrong or right was left after the conclusion of the project where a post-mortem would be conducted with participation of most, if not all, stakeholders. It was the job of the project manager to ensure such a process took place at the end of the project and resist fracturing the unity / team spirit of the project by allowing finger pointing during the lifetime of the project.

I was committed to this concept and carried with me for the remainder of my career, aiming to deliver the project objectives within the stipulated parameters of time / budget / scope of work. I remain a firm believer in this principle and advocate it at every opportunity.

It is important to stress that continuous review of progress, risk exposure and resolution of unexpected issues were always kept in focus in order to ensure stumbles along the way are dealt with effectively, without dissipating too much energy and focus, by identifying the person(s) that may have caused the problem in the first place. The exception being if someone is so obviously and clearly not doing their job or are collectively believed to be a disruptive element, then action must be taken to out-place them from the project. However, this is an exception rather than the rule.

Most, if not all of us, have experienced the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. We all felt its destruction and disruptive effects on our societies, with varying degrees of intensity of damage. On the whole, most governments set out to deal with the pandemic in ways that best suited their circumstances and made judgments based on scientific and medical advice they received from their experts, taking into account the degree of acceptance by their own societies of restrictive measures they could apply to halt the spread of the virus.

A government would assemble a team of politicians, experts and implementers to review the situation on daily if not hourly basis and come up with appropriate measures as the situation continued to deteriorate or improve. Given the last pandemic was the Spanish Flu some 90 years ago, the World had little or no practical experience

to draw on. So, these teams made decisions on the best available evidence at the time. It comes as no surprise that some of the decisions were spot on while others were inadequate, untimely, or wrong.

Being lockdown for days and weeks with little or nothing to do, and with the help of many data sources, including social media, we resorted to accumulating superficial knowledge on the pandemic subject. We formed our individual views and validated these views with like-minded friends and relatives to fortify our opinions. We became armchair critics of the government and the team that was actually fighting the pandemic. We ignored all the decisions and actions taken and proved to be adequate and focused on those decisions and actions that seemed ‘inadequate, untimely, or plain wrong’ and pronounced those who took such decisions to be negligent, incompetent, or both. We could have told them it wouldn't work!

This wouldn't be so bad if it was confined to us, the masses or the silent majority, as we are often referred to. Deep down, we know those in authority mean well, the establishment does its best for all and as human beings, they are bound to make mistakes every now and again. Besides, if we have a collective view, we are not afraid to express our displeasure overtly and exercise our democratic vote at election time.

The problem is with those who are in semi-responsible positions like experts, commentators and media types who are not part of the team dealing with the pandemic. They form views and cannot wait to express them through their media or cloaked in their academic qualifications. They pronounce the work being done as not good enough, or timely enough, or goes far enough, or is too much, too soon, and so on.

They form a constant cloud over daylight, permanent din over the music, drip-drip of toxic liquid on the road to recovery and in the process, undermine our collective hopes and prayers for deliverance from our predicament. They wait for every opportunity to shout out: I TOLD YOU SO!

This is not a new phenomenon. As a project manager, I have had characters like this standing on the edge of the project whispering into their own hands where things are going wrong and who is to blame. Should the project prove to be a success, they melt away with words trailing behind them to the effect ‘they were lucky to get away with it’. If however, the project should fail, irrespective of the reasons, they are there with rooster-like puffed up chests, reminding anyone willing to listen, that they told us so!

So, if you are one of those ‘malcontents’, please stop it; you are subtracting value from the total sum of an organisation's strength. You don't even have to step up and volunteer to help but, it would be nice if you did.

If you are a person in a position of authority and it falls to you to guide and protect the project, watch out for those toxic characters and shoo them away; you will be doing your organisation a great favour.

MUFID SUKKAR



Entretien, Jean Fabre

Au cours de votre impressionnante carrière, vous vous êtes toujours engagé pour des causes nobles. D'où vient votre motivation ?

Peut-être d'avoir perçu très tôt l'injustice des inégalités de situation et l'importance de la solidarité en naissant dans une famille modeste de parents sourds. Dès l'enfance j'ai vécu ce qu'est l'exclusion liée à la condition de naissance ou au statut social, la possibilité de surmonter ce qui nous handicape, et la nécessité d'être présents les uns aux autres. J'ai toujours vu mes parents aider d'autres plus en difficulté qu'eux. Par ailleurs, j'avais 20 ans quand le drame du Biafra a explosé. La famine a tué plus que la guerre. Impossible de rester inactif. Cet engagement ne m'a plus quitté. Il s'est renforcé depuis, car je fais partie de la première génération dans l'histoire

qui, à côté de progrès extraordinaires, lègue à ses enfants une situation pire que celle héritée de ses parents avec le changement climatique et la perte de biodiversité. Il faut rectifier cela d'urgence. Par amour pour eux.

Que faudrait-il faire pour que chaque humain mange à sa faim ?

Ce qui manque n'est pas la nourriture, mais l'accès à la nourriture. Le problème, c'est la persistance de la pauvreté dans un monde d'abondance. La pauvreté n'est pas une fatalité liée au lieu de naissance, mais le résultat d'une conception cynique de l'économie mondialisée structurée pour faciliter la spéculation et l'accaparement des richesses et jouer sur les inégalités plutôt que pour prendre soin de chaque humain.

Si l'on répartissait équitablement la production mondiale, chaque individu (bébés compris) disposerait d'un pouvoir d'achat mensuel de 1600 dollars. Avec l'ONU, ses agences spécialisées, ses fonds et programmes, la Banque Mondiale, le FMI et d'autres, nous sommes équipés pour mutualiser les ressources et compétences nécessaires afin de surmonter les manques locaux de toutes natures. Mais on ne récolte que ce que l'on sème : en 2020 l'aide publique moyenne des pays nantis pour le développement des pays moins prospères reste loin des 0,7% du PIB qui devaient être fournis dès 1975, comme demandé en 1970 par l'Assemblée Générale de l'ONU. Et il n'y a pas d'accord à l'OMC pour rendre équitable le commerce international. Il faut aussi mettre fin aux conflits armés qui annihilent en peu de temps des décennies d'efforts. Que les États, les entreprises et les individus se mobilisent pour mettre en œuvre l'Agenda 2030, comme nous en avons les capacités, au lieu de se perdre dans des compétitions délétères, et les résultats seront là. Il n'y a pas de déficit d'idées ou de moyens, mais de fraternité.

La crise sanitaire mondiale que nous traversons va-t-elle changer les mentalités ?

Cela dépend de ce que chacun fera et de ce que chacun laissera faire ; et des leçons que chacun tirera de ce qui a été vécu. L'histoire nous enseigne que les chocs traumatiques suscitent trois types de réflexes. Le désir de solidarité pour pallier nos vulnérabilités, rectifier collectivement nos erreurs et prolonger le bonheur de faire du bien. À l'opposé le repli sur soi dicté par la peur qui exacerbe les nationalismes et racismes, divise les humains et impose des mesures liberticides au nom de la sécurité. Le troisième est de retrouver au plus vite le statu quo ou de faire des profits sur la situation, ce qui rigidifie les logiques ayant conduit au désastre. Les trois sont déjà à l'œuvre à des degrés divers.

Les faits diront où a penché la balance. Prenons un exemple. Face à une urgence sanitaire qui menace sans distinctions la famille humaine, il est abject que des entreprises soient en compétition pour breveter un traitement ou un vaccin dans une logique de profit. Le changement de mentalité consisterait à tout partager au niveau mondial, que l'on soit dans le secteur privé ou la recherche universitaire sur fonds publics : connaissances, découvertes, laboratoires, expériences, exonération de redevances sur les techniques et produits utilisés pour cette recherche, etc. pour aboutir à un brevet public commun universel et gratuit, et à organiser la mise à disposition des remèdes à quiconque dans le monde. On peut raisonner de même sur les priorités budgétaires pour équiper les hôpitaux, les mesures concernant la qualité de l'air et le dérèglement climatique, les solidarités sociales, etc.

Quel enseignement tirez-vous de cette crise

Comme tout le monde que partout les dirigeants peuvent prendre en un instant les mesures qu'ils pensaient impossibles. L'utopie n'est que la distance qui sépare ce que nous pouvons faire de ce que nous osons faire. Osons donc la fraternité. Osons mettre l'humain et la nature dont il fait partie au centre de toutes nos décisions.

Nous avons désormais un devoir de discernement. Notre génération vit les transformations les plus rapides, les plus intenses et les plus profondes qu'aucune autre génération. Non seulement les technologies et l'informatique ont tout bouleversé pour le meilleur et pour le pire, mais les économies se sont entremêlées, et la démographie nous a embarqués sur un même bateau. Je suis né dans un monde de 2,4 milliards d'habitants, et nous avons dépassé les 7,7 milliards ! Dans 15 ans seulement se sera ajouté un autre milliard d'humains. Nous dépendons des mêmes ressources naturelles en quantités limitées, et la température moyenne de la planète dépend de la somme de nos émissions individuelles. Sur le navire Terre, il y a qui voyage en première classe, qui en seconde, qui en troisième et qui à fond de cale, mais nous sommes tous membres de l'équipage : tout ce que nous faisons affecte peu ou prou la direction du bateau. Au 21e siècle, nous sommes entrés dans l'ère de la responsabilité individuelle et collective. Nous devons donc avoir un comportement citoyen - du local au global.

Comment, au niveau individuel, pouvons-nous contribuer à la construction d'un monde meilleur ?

Il n'y a rien d'autre dans la vie que la somme de décisions individuelles qui sont à un petit ou grand niveau selon l'heure de la journée, le lieu où nous nous trouvons, et ce que nous devons ou choisissons de faire. Gandhi disait «Quand tu t'apprêtes à faire quelque chose, pense à l'effet que cela aura sur le plus petit et le plus vulnérable d'entre nous. Si cet impact est négatif, cette action est illégitime». Appliquons cela dans toutes les circonstances, et nous verrons d'immenses changements. Il y a souvent un gouffre entre nos valeurs et nos actions, y compris parce que beaucoup de pratiques qui nous semblent normales constituent à bien y réfléchir des abus. Alors veillons aussi à nous relier avec ceux et celles qui s'interrogent de la même façon. L'histoire nous montre que de belles réalisations humanistes naissent de cette façon.

Nos contemporains semblent plus égoïstes, moins engagés. Que faudrait-il faire pour qu'ils retrouvent le goût de la politique ?

Donner l'exemple ! Savoir accueillir la parole d'où quelle vienne, pratiquer la bienveillance, entendre ce qu'il y a

derrière chaque revendication qu'il s'agisse de jeunes faisant la grève du vendredi, de paysans sans terre, de mouvements d'occupation de rues, de femmes appelant au respect, ou d'internautes inquiets des pratiques liées au big data... Il ne manque pas de volonté de s'impliquer pour faire bouger les lignes. Mais presque partout la confiance dans la classe politique, les institutions et les médias s'érode. Les élus doivent cesser les spectacles pitoyables d'invectives et dénigrement du «camp d'en face». Ceux et celles qui prétendent à des fonctions publiques doivent comprendre qu'au 21^e siècle la plupart des solutions ne peuvent pas venir d'en haut. Elles doivent être construites par les personnes concernées même si c'est plus compliqué et que cela prend plus de temps. Le responsable politique de notre époque doit davantage jouer le rôle d'une sage-femme qui aide à la conception et l'accouchement des projets de société qu'un Deus Ex-Machina qui prétend savoir pour les autres ce qui leur fait du bien et demande au mieux leur approbation.

Que faut-il faire pour que les gens deviennent plus solidaires ?

Arrêter de sommer les individus, les entreprises et la nation d'être compétitifs ! Cesser de faire de la concurrence un dogme intouchable. Permettre à la politique de retrouver une place dans l'économie. Remettre à l'honneur la valeur civique de la solidarité et de l'union au service des individus et du bien commun, non pas comme une vertu de la vie personnelle en contradiction schizophrénique avec ce qui relève des rapports marchands, mais comme vertu cardinale de société donc aussi pour la sphère économique. Cesser de dresser les uns contre les autres, les individus, les entreprises, les sociétés et les nations. Si la compétition est stimulante dans le sport et peut avoir sa place dans une économie plurielle, elle est destructrice de valeurs quand elle devient le moteur de la société. Dans un monde qui approche les 10 milliards d'habitants, la solidarité individuelle et collective n'est pas une simple option, c'est un impératif de bonne gestion. Elle doit même s'étendre au niveau international où il convient de faire de la coopération autour des objectifs de développement durable une priorité mesurable via le niveau des moyens investis.

Face à des mastodontes comme Monsanto ou la généralisation des OGM, quelles sont nos chances de gagner ?

Rien n'est impossible, mais rien n'est gagné d'avance. La sécurité humaine exige une vigilance plus grande des élus pour sortir nos sociétés de la mainmise de la chimie sur l'agriculture, le jardinage et la santé. Il ne suffit pas de plaider auprès des pouvoirs publics la cause d'approches plus respectueuses des équilibres écologiques et de la santé. Les individus qu'ils soient consommateurs ou producteurs doivent s'informer

sur les risques et les enjeux et prendre leurs responsabilités en appliquant à leur niveau le principe de précaution quand l'opacité des informations laisse un doute sur la nocivité de certains produits ou pratiques, voire multiplier les actions de groupe devant les tribunaux comme aux É.-U.. Ils doivent aussi notifier aux élus les lignes jaunes qu'ils tracent comme électeurs. Celles-ci doivent inclure toute protection de secrets industriels qui empêchent un contrôle citoyen, ainsi que les limites qu'imposent les accords commerciaux types CETA en matière de normes environnementales et sanitaires ou de règles relatives à la concurrence qui réduisent les marges de décision d'une communauté dans le champ économique, social ou sociétal.

Quel serait selon vous un système économique plus adéquat ?

Les théories du laisser-faire sont caduques sur une planète aux ressources limitées qui comptera bientôt dix milliards d'habitants. Le politique doit reprendre la main sur l'économie. Plusieurs approches peuvent cohabiter, mais à condition de faire une place suffisante aux initiatives orientées sur le bien-être social et la préservation de la nature. Les exemples abondent d'entreprises visant une performance économique durable tout en poursuivant des objectifs sociaux ou environnementaux et en favorisant la participation et la solidarité. Elles comprennent en particulier des coopératives, des mutuelles d'assurance et de santé, des associations, des fondations et diverses entreprises sociales. Les 300 plus grandes coopératives et mutuelles dans le monde représentent un chiffre d'affaires qui dépasse les 2000 milliards de dollars. Ce secteur dit de l'économie sociale et solidaire a fait preuve d'une grande résilience et même de croissance lors de la crise économique de 2008, et semble prometteur face aux défis de l'évolution du travail à l'ère des plateformes numériques et de l'intelligence artificielle. Le faire grandir aiderait à s'attaquer aux causes profondes de l'exclusion et à réaliser la vision transformatrice de l'Agenda 2030.

“Cesser de faire de la concurrence un dogme intouchable. Permettre à la politique de retrouver une place dans l'économie.”



Interview with Ambassador

Elchin Amirbayov

Assistant to the First Vice-President of Azerbaijan

You have a long outstanding career in diplomacy, and now you are the Assistant to the First Vice-President of Azerbaijan on foreign policy. What are the foreign policy priorities of your country?

As they say, foreign policy is the continuation of domestic politics by other means, and therefore it should be guided by national interests. And the first and foremost priority for Azerbaijan from this standpoint is the restoration of its territorial integrity and sovereignty over the whole territory within its internationally recognized borders. To achieve this goal we need to resolve the ongoing Nagorno Karabakh conflict through eliminating the consequences of armed aggression of the Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijan. In other words, legitimate control by Azerbaijan over its Nagorno Karabakh region and 7 adjacent districts must be restored. As you are well aware, almost twenty percent of the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan has been under illegal Armenian military occupation since 1993. As a result of this more than 1 million of Azerbaijanis are either refugees or internally displaced persons. Ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijani population was carried out by Armenia not only in Nagorno Karabakh and surrounding 7 regions of Azerbaijan but also

in Armenia itself, where more than 250 000 Azerbaijanis had been forcefully evicted from their homes. So, to address this major challenge is not only a foreign policy objective but also our number one national security priority as well as our sacred duty.

Realizing that this tragic conflict and illegal foreign occupation shall soon be over, Azerbaijan has invested lately a lot of efforts and energy into strengthening its statehood and developing its economy. Through robust international economic cooperation Azerbaijan has obtained best possible conditions for exploitation of its vast and versatile hydrocarbon resources thus putting itself on the global geopolitical map as an important stakeholder and a reliable strategic partner both for the West and for the East. As a result of farsighted, independent and balanced state policies, Azerbaijan's reputation as an important international player has surged, with its economy registering an unprecedented growth - our GDP tripled in the last 20 years. During these years of restored independence (*first, short-lived independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan lasted from 1918 to 1920*) we initiated and successfully implemented

huge multinational projects of global scale and strategic significance. Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan major export oil pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, Southern Gas Corridor, and development of the Eurasian transport corridor, of which Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad is a part, are the most vivid examples of our visionary approach that earned Azerbaijan an image of a crucial regional stakeholder that connects East with West, North with South and is accepted by all as a natural platform for all sorts of constructive engagement and effective interaction, including intercultural and inter-religious dialog. Talking about international connectivity in the conditions of growingly interdependent world, I would like to specifically mention the Southern Gas Corridor project that will very soon be inaugurated (*it's last segment, the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline-TAP is almost over and should be commissioned before the end of this year*). This project will not only strengthen our economy but will also serve as Azerbaijan's major and well appreciated contribution to European energy security with an ambition to diversify the sources of natural gas for Europe and lessen the over dependence of quite a few European nations from the single source of natural gas. Thus, further deepening of our strategic partnership with Europe and other regions of the world in the fields of energy and connectivity will continue to be one of our major foreign policy priorities. On the other hand, we will continue with our efforts to modernize and diversify our economy through attracting foreign direct investment in such important fields of our economy as agriculture, tourism, information technologies, green economy, etc.

Azerbaijan today is a stable, modern and democratic nation that is proud to have been able to strengthen its restored independence since 1991. Further consolidation of our democratic credentials and strengthening of human rights protection in Azerbaijan remain among top priorities of our government.

Being a secular nation with multiethnic and multi-faith population, Azerbaijan continues to be a well-recognized island of stability, mutual respect and religious tolerance where happy and harmonious coexistence of all of its citizens is not just a slogan but a sheer way of life. Proud of its historic mission to contribute on a global scale to promoting multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue, Azerbaijan regularly hosts political, religious and cultural leaders from around the world through such important platforms for dialog as the World Summit of Religious Leaders, Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, biannual Baku International Humanitarian Forum and regular World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue also known as the Baku Process that was brought to daylight by our country in close cooperation with such important international players as Council of Europe, UNESCO, UN Alliance of Civilizations, ISESCO back in 2006. Cherishing its sovereignty and independence, Azerbaijan is not aspiring to join any military-political block or security alliance and will try to continue to perform its fine balancing act in a geopolitically uneasy neighborhood.

It is in recognition of its growing international role and reputation as a reliable, independent and impartial partner that Azerbaijan was overwhelmingly elected to serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council back in 2011 and was unanimously chosen in 2018 to preside over the Non-Alignment Movement, the second biggest international organization after United Nations.

Looking back on history, Azerbaijan first got its independence just after the Russian Revolution, and had a short period of independence. It seems to me that in those days there was no conflict with neighboring Armenia. So why did the conflict start after the Soviet Union broke down? Does it have its roots in the days before your independence?

To respond to this question we need to dwell upon the territorial claims of neighboring Armenia to Azerbaijan as the root cause of this tragic conflict. Present-day Armenia is a small country in the South Caucasus with a population of less than 2 million. Armenians, referring themselves to a very remote history, have always nurtured an illusionary dream of creating a mythic "Greater Armenia", from Black to Caspian Sea. And in order to attain this grotesque goal they would resort in the course of relatively recent history to anything from terror to crimes against humanity to setting unfounded territorial claims to its neighbors. But it should be underlined that the present-day Armenia, which makes the smallest part of the South Caucasus, has been created on the historical Azerbaijani lands (*one fact: capital of Armenia Yerevan's population in early 20-th century was 70 percent Azerbaijani*) and has nothing to do with ancient Armenian state that existed far away from our region. Nevertheless, in order to mobilize Armenian nation to achieve the goal, they deliberately developed among themselves the image of an enemy with regard to Turks and Azerbaijanis, and this was done throughout generations and covered the whole 20th century.

Blood count started from mass massacres of Turks and Azerbaijanis since the end of 19th century. The grim example of this were brutal massacres against Azerbaijanis in March 1918 even before the establishment of the first Azerbaijani Republic in May 1918. 20,000 innocent Azerbaijani civilians were killed in those days and these massacres were inspired by the nationalistic Dashnaksutiun Party (established in 1890) which utilized terror as a necessary means of struggle against perceived enemies and a way to consolidate the Armenian ethnicity into a mono-ethnic nation with statehood.

Soon after the Russian revolution of 1917 both Azerbaijan and Armenia became part of the Soviet Union, with Nagorno Karabakh, naturally, retained as an integral part of Azerbaijan like it had been the case throughout the centuries. In spite of a constant broad campaign of disinformation and illusionary wishful thinking, carried out by Armenia and Armenian lobby throughout the world, Karabakh being a historical Azerbaijani province and part of Azerbaijani statehood has never been associated with Armenia and has always been part of Azerbaijani collective national identity. Even the mere name of Karabakh (Qarabağ, in Azerbaijani transliteration)

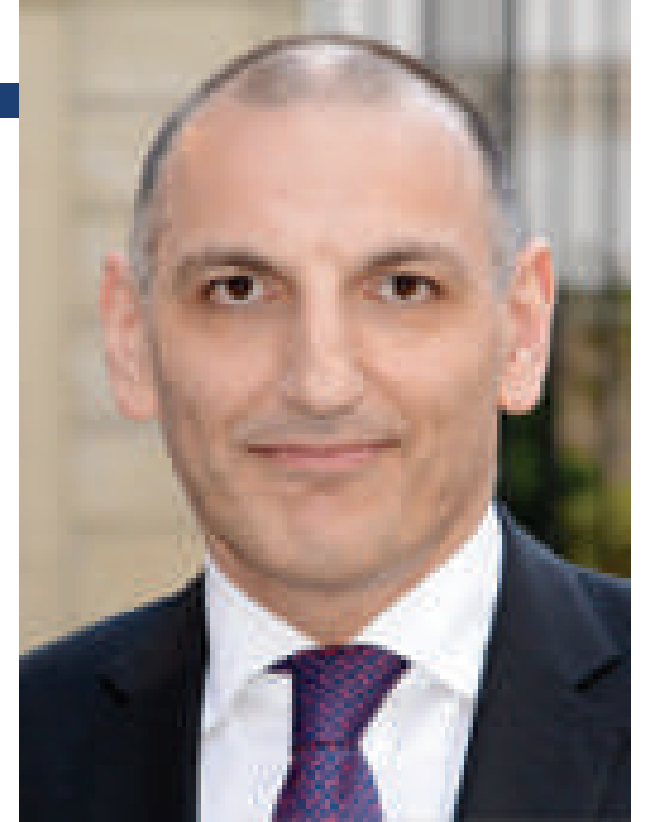
is translated from Azerbaijani language as a "black garden". In the meantime, Azerbaijanis who had been indigenous, autochthonous population in the territory of present-day Republic of Armenia had been ethnically cleansed from their homeland throughout the twentieth century, namely during pogroms and eviction campaigns in 1905-06, 1918-1920, 1948-1953 and in late 1980s.

During a rather short and disastrous rule of the "father of perestroika" Mikhail Gorbachev in late 1980s, Armenians, both in the country and the diaspora, started to prepare ground for secession of Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) from Azerbaijan. They staged the first rallies in Nagorno Karabakh in 1988 and it was at that time that the first Azerbaijanis were brutally killed therein in the town of Agdam with the criminal appeasement by Soviet leadership of the aggressor. The process of disintegration of the Soviet Empire led to weakened state structures and loss of control from Moscow over the peripheries and all this had further exacerbated the situation. Armed groups and terrorists appeared in Nagorno-Karabakh. Mostly sent from Armenia and financed also by radical representatives of the Armenian diaspora in Europe, Russia and the United States, these groups were engaged in illegal and criminal activities against Azerbaijan. By late 1989 the whole Azerbaijani population was driven out of Armenia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan regained its independence with Nagorno Karabakh as an inseparable part of its internationally recognized territory. Armenia continued to openly lay territorial claims to Azerbaijan over NK and eventually started the undeclared war against Azerbaijan. Consequently, the conflict entered a new "hot phase" in which local Armenian authorities in Nagorno Karabakh, supported militarily and financially by Armenia, spearheaded the brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijani population of the territory that made up at that time 25 percent of its entire population. In February 1992 Armenia committed the most terrible and heinous crime against the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno Karabakh. On the night from 26 to 27 February an act of genocide of Azerbaijanis was carried out by Armenian armed forces when during just one night 613 innocent people including women, elderly and children were slaughtered only because they were Azerbaijanis. Two Armenian field commanders who later on became presidents of Armenia, Robert Kocharian and Serge Sargsyan, were in charge of this inhumane extermination, and one of them had subsequently proudly admitted having committed this nefarious war crime. I am confident that these two war criminals will be sooner than later brought to justice and held responsible for this outrageous crime against humanity.

During and after the conflict with Armenia in the 1990s, you were faced with a huge number of internally displaced persons. Can you describe what happened to those persons, and did they ever get any compensation from the occupying power?

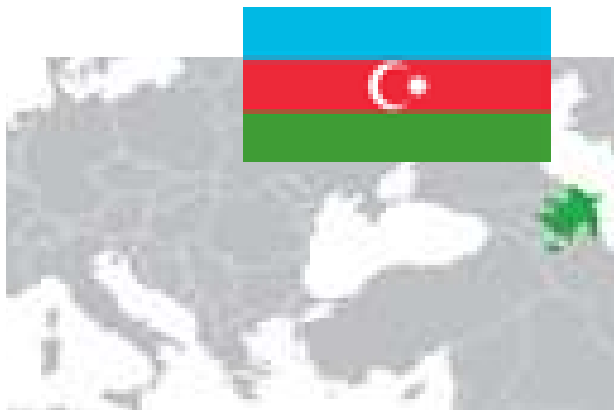
Well, the only «compensation» that they received from the



occupying power was the fact that they escaped the tragic fate of their compatriots from Khojaly and were not mercilessly annihilated.. Unfortunately, the issue of Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced persons has been underreported in international media. We think this happened because Azerbaijan was faced with a notorious double standard approach. As I mentioned earlier, as a result of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, more than 250,000 Azerbaijani refugees were driven out from Armenia in late 1980s and some 800,000 Azerbaijan were internally displaced from the occupied territories within Azerbaijan. In early-mid 1990s the existence of more than a million refugees and IDPs was a heavy burden for a nascent Azerbaijani statehood and created a real humanitarian crisis that UNHCR and other relevant UN agencies and international donor organizations had tried hard to address. Later on, Azerbaijani state had to take over from them due to the fact that as a result of successful implementation of its energy strategy Azerbaijan recorded unprecedented growth rates, allowing it to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to improve the conditions in which the refugees and IDPs in Azerbaijan lived. In 2008 Azerbaijan abolished the last temporary refugee camp and today the absolute majority of those forcefully displaced people have moved into newly-built residential areas in various parts of the country. But their strongest desire and hope is to be able to go back to their own homes as soon as possible because no palace can replace them the place where they were born and where their parents and grandparents are buried. Significant part of this displaced population will be soon able to realize their dream to return to their homes, as a result of liberation by glorious Azerbaijani army of certain parts of the occupied territories from illegal foreign occupation.

For many years, there has been a kind of status quo in the region, and it seems like you were having negotiations with a view to settling the dispute. Why did those break down?

The status quo that was in place till 27 September 2020, has been holding for more than quarter of a century, eversince the



Russia-brokered ceasefire agreement was reached by Armenia and Azerbaijan on 12 May of 1994. This has been a status-quo formed as a result of illegal foreign occupation, ethnic cleansing and numerous violations of international humanitarian law, like for example, illegal settlement policies carried by the occupying power Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Therefore, this status-quo was illegal, illegitimate and therefore very fragile and unsustainable. The Minsk Group of the OSCE co-chaired by US, Russia and France, was tasked back in 1992 with mediation mandate to change this status-quo and help parties to reach an agreement that would eliminate all the consequences of Armenia's armed aggression against Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, due to Armenia's destructive attitude, throughout all these years the mediators have failed to bring about any tangible results of their activities and eventually the *mediation* has been downgraded to *mitigation* and the *conflict resolution* has been replaced by *conflict management*. In other words, preservation of the ceasefire regime has become the priority, if not the only concern of the international mediation and this somehow coincided with the strategic goal of Armenia - to consolidate even more existing status-quo and to move off as far as possible the prospect of meaningful, result-oriented negotiations under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group. It was clear to all that Armenia intended to keep control over our territories forever. All this happened against the background of repeatedly stated position by US, Russia and France presidents on the inadmissibility of the continuation of the status-quo.

However, Azerbaijan has always stood and continues to remain fully committed to a peaceful solution of this tragic conflict, on the basis of respect for norms and principles of international law, and in strict compliance with the letter and spirit of Resolutions 822,853,874 and 884 of the United Nations Security Council adopted in 1993, all of which demand immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from the Azerbaijani territories and recognize the region of Nagorno Karabakh as part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, because of Armenia's destructive position, these fundamental documents that gave birth to the OSCE mediation and its Minsk Group, still remain unimplemented.

Main reason why this conflict lasted so long was total impunity that Armenia enjoyed while ignoring international law and challenging the peace process, due to the lack of adequate reaction on the part of mediators and broader international

community. Impunity, as they say, is the largest inducement to continue to do wrong and it developed Armenia's sense of permissiveness and confidence that it can easily get away with illegal foreign occupation and ethnic cleansing committed against Azerbaijanis.

When current Armenian Prime minister Nikol Pashinyan came to power as a result of street revolt in 2018, we in Azerbaijan hoped that things might change for better in the peace process and trusted his promises to facilitate the peaceful resolution. Unfortunately, he failed to keep his promise and the opposite happened. Things became much more tense and dangerous during his tenure because for the last year and a half Pashinian torpedoed every overture to resume substantial negotiations, rejected out of hand all previous proposals and ideas of the mediators and instead initiated a long list of provocations that were meant to destabilize Azerbaijan and to provoke it to retaliate and spark off another flare-up that would make any prospect for negotiated settlement even more remote.

These provocations, both in rhetoric and actions, demonstrated the real intention of the Armenian leadership – to continue illegal occupation of Azerbaijani lands and even try to conquer new territories with no genuine will to hold substantive talks to end the conflict.

There might be additional factors which conditioned the timing of the escalation, for example, efforts to tarnish Azerbaijan's economic successes and damage its international energy and transportation projects and prevent further foreign investments in the country. One of the reasons why Armenia chose the Tovuz segment of Armenian-Azerbaijani border for its military aggression back in July was to target critical energy and transport infrastructure of Azerbaijan transporting oil, gas and other goods from Baku to Europe, passing through this north-western region of Azerbaijan.

From what I have understood, your country has tried many times to relaunch the peace process, and you even organized meetings between the two presidents here in Geneva. What do you see as the main obstacle for bringing Armenia back to the negotiating table?

As I said, Armenia's main intention had been to preserve the status-quo of illegal occupation of Azerbaijani lands. They have always avoided substantive negotiations because they knew that sooner or later they would be forced to agree to evacuate the occupied Azerbaijani territories from their military presence, as was envisaged by the proposals of the mediators. Current Armenian leaders rejected all the proposals of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, including the so-called "basic principles". That rejection has completely derailed the peace process. And when Azerbaijan was again attacked by Armenian armed forces on 27 September, the decision was taken by Baku to launch a counter-offensive that would dissuade Armenia from pursuing further the military option and would force it to peace. This peace-enforcement operation by Azerbaijan has shattered many myths, including the one on invincibility of Armenian army. Glorious and highly-motivated Azerbaijani army has been already

successful in liberating a significant part of our sovereign territory that had been under foreign occupation for almost thirty years. We do hope that Armenia would finally realize that the only sustainable solution to the conflict may be achieved through constructive negotiations, on the basis of strict compliance with norms and principles of international law, first of all, on the basis of respect for territorial integrity of states and inviolability of their internationally recognized borders. Unfortunately, the gross violation by Armenia of both agreements on humanitarian truce brokered by Russian and later by France, on 11 and 17 October shows that their behavior is still guided by illusions, which under the circumstances could be a very dangerous thing.

Psychologists often say that finding a common enemy can serve to unite a people/nation. Do you think that the strategy of the Armenian government was to start this war just to make their people forget their own problems?

I would tend to agree with you that one of the reasons for the latest attack of Armenia was, as they say, "to rally the nation round the flag" and invite the people to concentrate on the "common enemy" in order to divert the attention of the Armenian public from the deplorable internal situation in the country, both from political and socio-economic point of view. Dire economic situation in Armenia, which due to its irrational policies has two out four of its borders closed, has been even further aggravated by the dreadful management of the covid-19 pandemic. Economic crisis was hardened by a demographic one, since many Armenians leave the country seeing no future for them therein. Political opposition has been silenced by "democrat" Pashinian when one of his predecessors Robert Kocharyan was thrown in prison and the other one, Serge Sargsyan, was placed under house arrest, unable to leave the country until his investigation is over. So, in this situation of internal collapse, Pashinyan opted for another military adventure against Azerbaijan hoping that this will give certain boost to his swiftly dwindling popularity.

Some people would say that this is a religious war, and the main issue is religion – Christians versus Muslims. What do you reply to this claim?

This is indeed a good question. On the one hand, as I explained before, the root cause for this conflict has always been territorial claims of Armenia to a part of Azerbaijan's sovereign territory recognized as such by the whole world.

On the other hand, Armenia realizes that a conventional way of addressing this problem with the involvement of broad international community would put it in a weak spot because in accordance with international law Nagorno Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan. And four abovementioned resolutions of the UN Security Council reconfirm that premise.

So, in order to gain some sympathy to its cause, especially in the Western world, Armenia has been deliberately using lately the "religious card" to present its conflict with Azerbaijan from a completely different, civilizational perspective. But all those who have a slightest idea about the nature of the

Armenian-Azerbaijani stand-off and know something about the regional geopolitics and history, would agree with me that this stunt by Armenia is erroneous, irrelevant, misleading and even dangerous. Unfortunately, this primitive and easy-to-sell qualification of the conflict is one of the most favorite yet false clichés used by Western media to define the nature of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

One has to realize that while the absolute majority of Azerbaijan's population are Muslims, it is probably one of the most secular nations not only in the Muslim world but well beyond it. Just one example to support this statement. In 2016, during his official visit to Azerbaijan, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, His Holiness Pope Francis to Azerbaijan, voiced the Vatican's appreciation of the high level of religious tolerance in Azerbaijan and called it an excellent example for others. He was really impressed and praised Azerbaijan for the excellent harmony and mutual respect that so happily exist between Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox and Jewish communities in the country. Moreover, despite the ongoing conflict, around 30 000 ethnic Armenians continue to live in Baku, Ganja and other places of our country as proud citizens of Azerbaijan. They fully enjoy all rights prescribed by our Constitution and the same awaits after de-occupation all the other Azerbaijani citizens of Armenian ethnic origin who are presently living in the occupied Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. We strongly believe that peaceful and harmonious coexistence of Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Nagorno Karabakh will be possible and we are ready to do our best to achieve that goal.

During the summer, there were many acts of provocation, from what I have read. Each time you stayed calm and chose not to take any action. Could you describe some of these events and what was behind them, from both your own side and from the Armenian side?

Well, there has been quite a long list of those, I am afraid. But I believe it is important to go through some of them in order to understand that the treacherous attack by Armenia against Azerbaijan on 27 September was a well thought out pre-planned act aimed at entirely undermining the already almost non-existent peace process. Exactly one year ago, Armenian Prime Minister at a rally in the occupied areas of Azerbaijan made a statement that "Karabakh is Armenia full stop". That statement actually was the first serious blow to the negotiation process. One may ask a question: if one party to the conflict already decided everything what kind of peace process can we talk about?

Among other provocations registered earlier this year I would mention the adoption of a new and more aggressive national security policy by Armenia just a couple days before the July attack against Azerbaijan, that introduced the notion of preventive strikes against the enemy and identified Armenia as a guarantor of security of Nagorno Karabakh; statements of Armenian Defense Minister on the need for his country to wage "new war for new territories" in order not to be forced to evacuate the 7 regions around NK; holding of "inauguration ceremony" of the "newly elected president" of the self-styled republic of Nagorno Karabakh in the ancient

Azerbaijani town of Shusha, populated before occupation in May 1992 almost entirely by Azerbaijanis. This town, because of its special place in Azerbaijan's history, is extremely dear to every Azerbaijani and is part of our national identity. So, Armenian leadership announced plans to transfer the so-called parliament in Nagorno Karabakh from Khankendi (Stenaparket), to Shusha.

Next in my list comes intensification lately of the illegal settlement of ethnic Armenians from the Middle East and other regions of the world in the occupied territories, in gross violation of International humanitarian law (IHL), namely of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949.

In addition, they carried out three armed attacks on our territories in July, August and September this year.

As I mentioned above, on 12 July 2020 Azerbaijani border district of Tovuz, located 200 km away from the Karabakh, came under fire from the territory of Armenia. This was done to provoke Azerbaijan to retaliate and hit the territory of Armenia so that Yerevan could immediately appeal for intervention of Russia and other allies of Armenia within the framework of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) on the side of Armenia. Azerbaijan rebuffed the attack with due proportion and chose not to advance inside the Armenian territory since we have never had any military targets or objectives in the territory of Armenia. All these provocations were enriched by increased transfers of weapons and other military equipment to Armenia from third countries right after the July border incident and throughout August 2020.

Military build-up, among other actions by Armenia, signaled about their preparation for another provocation, another large scale attack. We were ready for this and when it happened on 27 September we immediately launched a counter offensive.

Since September 27, there has been a full-fledged war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. What exactly happened that day?

On 27 September, the Armenian armed forces attacked Azerbaijan frontline districts adjacent to NK from three directions – south, south-east and the north. This was the third biggest attack this year. As I said, we anticipated such an offensive given Armenia's embittered war rhetoric and provocations in the last few months. Azerbaijan, in its turn, launched a counter offensive in the course of which an important part of the occupied territory has been liberated by our army. Unfortunately, Armenia, losing on the battlefield, in violation of international humanitarian law, started targeting civilian population and infrastructure on the frontline districts in order to create panic among our population and render the maximum possible loss of human life. Even our big cities like Ganja (second biggest city of the country) and Mingachevir situated far away from the zone of conflict came under numerous cowardly night-time ballistic missile attacks from the territory of Armenia. As a result of these heinous war crimes of Armenian political and military leadership 63 Azerbaijani civilians were killed (including 10 children), 292 were wounded, some 1950 houses were fully destroyed. By commanding this war crime Prime minister Pashinian has,



unfortunately, joined the list of Kocharian and Sargsyan, his predecessors who committed the Khojaly genocide in 1992 and all of them shall one day be held responsible for their crimes against humanity.

We hear that Turkey is sending you military personnel, and mercenaries. Is this true?

Let me tell you that this is purely fake news and part of the vast disinformation campaign impudently launched by Armenia in order to cover up its deployment of thousands of terrorists, mercenaries and foreign fighters from the Middle East, Europe and other regions to the occupied territories. Unfortunately, no one from those who voiced these baseless allegations against Azerbaijan took the labor of presenting us at least one single evidence. On the other hand, we have intelligence reports from several sources that PKK terrorists and Armenian nationals of some European and Middle East countries are engaged on the battlefield on the side of Armenia.

What about United Nations peacekeepers -- do you think that might be a solution?

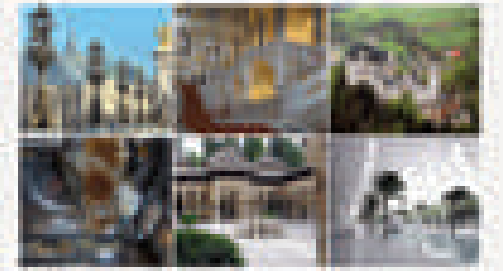
I believe it is a bit too early to talk about the deployment of peacekeepers because active combat activities are still going on. Armenia rejected two attempted humanitarian cease-fires and Prime minister Pashinian openly stated that there could not be any diplomatic solution to the conflict. So, the issue of peacekeepers may be considered at a much later stage when all the other necessary elements of the peace settlement are in place.

Finally, your Excellency, the United Nations and many other actors have called for cease-fire and resumption of the talks. Do you think this will happen soon?

This may happen even tomorrow, at least Azerbaijan is ready to resume talks as soon as possible. But, as they say, it takes two to tango and, unfortunately, most recent statement by Armenian Prime minister excluding any possibility of a diplomatic resolution of the conflict is a bad sign. For talks to resume, Armenia has to stop its illegal military activities in our occupied territories and commit itself publicly that it will withdraw its armed forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, as it is demanded by four resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, by international law and by the common sense.

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Of Leadership and Anniversaries

by David Chikvaidze

A great man turned ninety recently. I consider myself privileged and lucky to have had a chance to work with him and for him.

I first encountered James A. Baker, III and his team right after the 1988 US Presidential Election. Assistant to the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, DC, I got the call from the transition team of the Secretary of State-designate, nominated the day before. The following day, I met with Mr. Baker's scheduling assistant. She confessed a quarter century later to being terrified at meeting a Soviet diplomat in the State Department lobby. But she had little choice, since Mr. Baker had "asked" her to stop shaking and get down there! He wanted to get things moving.

The friendships that emerged with his core team from our work together in those early days continued throughout the Bush Administration, first in Washington and later when I moved to Kremlin protocol. All that time, watching this extraordinary man in action, I could not help thinking - without disloyalty toward my side -- how I would love to work for this guy.

It happened in 1997, I was a UN staffer. Named UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, Mr. Baker told the UN top brass briefing him: "You have a guy here by the name of David Chikvaidze who is good at organizing things. I want him to work with me on this."

A dream came true and what an endorsement! Being part of James Baker's team was an unparalleled experience -- a source of professional exhilaration, personal pleasure and just a whole lot of fun! It was also a singular honor.

Three years later, on a long flight in a small government-loaner jet, heading back to Western Sahara from New York, I finally decided to pose a question that had long been on my mind: "Mr. Baker, not being an American, I am not insisting, merely asking, why are you doing your country the disservice of not running for President?"

He looked at me for a moment with surprise and contemplation - a look that anyone who knows him can readily visualize - then smiled and asked: "How long have you known me, David?" "Over ten years, now," I replied. "Well," he said, "do you see me hat-in-hand going around asking for money and support and then having to return favors to all these special interests?" "No, sir," I replied. "Well, there's your answer!"

What makes a leader great? Is it positions held, fame achieved, integrity, character, faith, basic human decency, love of country and family? The gist of why I consider James A. Baker to be a great leader is comprised of all of the above and is perfectly reflected in his succinct reply to me on that memorable flight.

27 years out of government, James A. Baker is still the 'gold standard' for Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, and White House Chief of Staff. His stature as a public civil servant is surpassed only by his qualities as a human being: integrity, honor, loyalty to those around him and a gift for humor. An authentic giant among men, in political, diplomatic and human terms.

Never afraid to call a spade a spade, he told me on more than one occasion, "Honesty is the best diplomacy." Beware of sitting across a negotiation table from James A. Baker, however. He will best you ten times out of ten. But you will come away saying to yourself, *What an extraordinary guy*. No trickery, subterfuge, or bluster -- often mistaken for diplomacy. He just knows his brief and how to navigate international relations to the benefit of his country.

Secretary Baker's professionalism and meticulous approach to diplomacy, coupled with his 'straight shooter' nature, was most evident in the run-up to Desert Storm. Though the United States was dealing by then with a very 'pliable' Soviet Union, Mr. Baker did not take for granted that the UN Security Council would adopt a resolution authorizing the ejection of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait by force. He held intensive talks, diplomatic horse-trading, including with the ten non-permanent members of the Security Council, putting in 37-hour workdays on three continents. As a result, he obtained an overwhelming majority vote for the

resolution. This was diplomacy at its best and the use of the United Nations machinery at its best.

Hypothetical analysis, with hindsight to boot, is seldom welcome, but I often wonder how the post-Cold-war world would have developed, had the American electorate given George H.W. Bush a second term and had James Baker continued as Secretary of State?

Is he infallible, did he never make mistakes? He probably did, and I would love to hear him recount those instances, maybe in the context of his birthday celebrations, or better still, on another long flight. What I associate with his name, however, is top-notch master classes in diplomacy, every time I had the good fortune to be around him. Whether as a junior Soviet diplomat working with his team in Jackson Hole, Wyoming in 1989, or ushering him through the Great Kremlin Palace in 1991, or assisting him on confidential diplomatic missions to Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, it was always unique schooling in diplomacy, democracy and statecraft.

I often wonder, as I contemplate today's deeply unsettled world, what would Jim Baker do, if he were in office today? Inevitably I come to the same conclusion: if Jim Baker were in office today, the world would likely not be so unsettled.

The author is an international civil servant. The opinions expressed are his personal views.

Interview with Mr.

Rabih El-Haddad

the Director of the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

Unforeseen and unprecedented challenges such as natural disasters, terrorism, cyber warfare, and pandemics are shaping the 21st century. The transnational nature of such challenges requires cross-sectoral, multifaceted, and complex responses. Therefore, every sector, from the public to the private, is affected and required to yield tangible solutions. On April 24, the world celebrated the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace. The event epitomises an essential opportunity to commend the significance and the need for a robust multilateral approach to tackle and overcome the current crisis. Moreover, as recently stated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), “with the right actions, the COVID-19 pandemic can mark the beginning of a new type of global and societal cooperation”. Nonetheless, many questions arise on how diplomacy and the UN system will practically adapt to the paradigm shift. Mr. Rabih El-Haddad, the Director of the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research

(UNITAR), addresses the questions by sharing effective insights and UNITAR's own experience.

Given the traditional face-to-face nature of diplomatic practices, is COVID-19 jeopardising the essence of diplomacy at large?

The current pandemic is surely affecting the art of diplomacy at its core. In other words, there is no diplomatic immunity to the crisis. However, it is not jeopardising its purpose. We are currently seeing a reshape of diplomatic practices on a global level. Priorities are changing week in week out. Foreign Ministries in some of the most affected countries, such as Italy and Spain, are managing the supplying of medical equipment which requires considerable cooperation among countries. Most recently the United Kingdom has announced a £75 million plan to bring back the British citizens currently overseas. Again, that entails a high degree

of global collaboration. On top of that, the International Monetary Fund is warning us about an imminent global recession. As a matter of fact, according to the International Labour Organization five to 25 million jobs will be eradicated en masse, and the world could lose up to more than three trillion dollars in labour income. Furthermore, the World Trade Organization is expecting the world trade to plunge between 13 per cent and 32 per cent this year. Overall, we need to bear in mind that the challenge is multidimensional, and that diplomacy is surely changing the tools through which it operates whilst still thriving, let alone being jeopardised.

What path should diplomacy follow to tackle the existing and forthcoming challenges?

Diplomacy is alive and it is shifting its paradigm. The bilateral work of diplomats has radically changed. They naturally moved their attention onto the national level, safeguarding

The 21st Century Renaissance of Diplomacy **UNITAR's bright experience in the face of a gloomy crisis**

the national interests. In turn, diplomacy has become a crisis management practice, mostly beneficial on the short term. However, given the multi-layered trait of the challenges, we will need a more concerted effort to confront them on the long term. Therefore, diplomacy should follow the essence of multilateralism, which combines efforts by all States to tackle a common challenge that transcends borders. Undoubtedly, support to international organisations is the key for effective multilateralism. Accordingly, member states of the European Union are reinforcing their commitment in supporting the work of the World Health Organization, a pivotal machinery in fighting the pandemic. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has pledged USD 500 million to health organisations and programmes. In addition, the present and forthcoming challenges are going to have tremendous spillover effects that go beyond one single realm. Global economy, peace, and security will be dramatically impacted by both the pandemic and future

transnational challenges. Hence, I do not envisage any better path to follow than that of multilateralism, harmony, and solidarity.

How is the current crisis affecting the work and overall mission of the UN and how is the UN system reacting?

Like every other diplomatic actor, the UN is far from being immune to the crisis. The UN is being severely affected in the way it conducts diplomacy. Almost all negotiations occur face-to-face and they require the use of non-verbal communication to build rapport and trust among delegates. Therefore, finding a solution that would replace the physical presence at the negotiation table is an arduous mission. Having said that, the UN is managing to proactively conduct distance diplomacy. The intergovernmental machinery of the UN is currently exploring and implementing virtual means for conducting business as usual. A plethora of

online platforms and measures have been tested by the UN governing bodies to conduct their work. In turn, the critical work of the UN is still being conducted by virtual means within the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. In fact, the General Assembly has successfully held its fifth Committee, making relevant decisions regarding the budget, by technological means. Moreover, the Council (Security Council, Ed.) has been able to discuss, inter alia, the issues vis-à-vis Libya, the DRC (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ed.), and COVID-19; and the Economic and Social Council has been delivering its work in promoting sustainable development.

I would also like to take the opportunity to commend the work of both the World Health Organization and the World Bank. Both entities, in accordance with the recent recommendations of the Secretary-General, are constantly cooperating to help the least developed countries and the most vulnerable societies in facing the challenge. Reaching out to the furthest first and leaving no one behind remain high on the agenda of international organisations.

COVID-19 is severely impacting learning institutions and the world of knowledge at large. Specifically, what are the impacts on UNITAR's work and vision?

We have seen major public and private learning institutions globally, including world famous universities, moving onto

UNITAR is the training arm of the United Nations. UNITAR's mission is to develop the individual, institutional, and organisational capacities of member states and other UN stakeholders. To reach the goal, UNITAR offers high-quality learning solutions and related knowledge products and services to enhance decision-making and to support country-level action for overcoming global challenges.

“We have time to rethink ourselves as individuals and as part of a larger community called humanity and how we operate within our planet.”

distance learning solutions. Similarly, UNITAR is adapting, innovating, and redirecting its whole work to the online sphere. We are rethinking learning methodologies and learning sharing tools. We are a learning institution which has been delivering face-to-face knowledge products and services since its establishment in 1963. However, throughout the years, we have been developing and operating on a virtual level too, offering an array of products and services from distance. As a result, UNITAR's work, vision, and mission

have been altered to some extent but not hindered. Overall, I can proudly say that we have been able to build a high degree of resilience thanks to our extensive work and experience.

What are the strategies and solutions being implemented by UNITAR?

As previously mentioned, we shifted all our work online at the moment. That implies the reshaping as well as the actual

replacement of all our face-to-face activities. Specifically, at the Division for Multilateral Diplomacy at UNITAR we have managed to develop and implement new knowledge products and services. We have recently launched five brand-new **e-workshops**, entailing innovative training approaches, on a plethora of topics including **leadership in crisis, women's leadership, and conducting diplomacy digitally**. Moreover, we offer two **online diplomas on Multilateral Diplomacy and International Law** as well as a **master's programme and a certificate on International Development and Diplomacy** in collaboration with the University for Peace. We have also recently launched the **Executive Diploma in Business Leadership and International Affairs** with the INCAE Business School. In addition, we provide a wide range of our well-established **e-Learning courses**, with more to come, on numerous topics including a focused one on **informed decision-making during the global pandemic**. In the upcoming weeks, we will also launch a **podcast series**, in collaboration with prominent practitioners of diplomacy, free and open for everyone. Lastly, we are also developing other products and services to be gradually released in the upcoming months.

Given your experience, it is fair to claim that the crisis is providing you with an unprecedented opportunity to enhance your work and overall mission. How do you see the future work of UNITAR?

The current crisis has given us the unique opportunity to boost our creativity, to explore new avenues, and to expand our horizons beyond conventional frameworks. We are looking beyond mere adaption, we are aiming for innovation. Not only are we strengthening our resilience levels and leadership role in providing innovative learning solutions, but we are also able to deliver online products worldwide rethinking our capabilities and overcoming limits. Further



distance learning solutions will surely be developed in the near future, in cooperation with our partners, to reach out and support all beneficiaries, despite of their capabilities and location. In turn, we will be able to cut costs, provide high-quality affordable products, and have a tangible impact on climate change by offering more accessible products without the need to physically move. Hence, we will have further opportunities to provide ad hoc services to the most vulnerable and to reshape learning methodologies as well as learning sharing tools.

Is there anything else you would like to say to the reader?

Overall, I believe that there is a bright side even in this gloomy crisis. We have time to rethink ourselves as individuals and as part of a larger community called humanity and how we operate within our planet. We have time to nurture our inner souls, fostering tolerance, compassion, and empathy. We have time to forge fundamental tools for strategic and enlightened decision-making, preparing for other crucial challenges such as climate change, food security, access to education, and many more.

I would like to borrow the words of the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, that today more than ever powerfully resonate, to give a glimpse of hope to everyone. He once said that “knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in

every family” and “more than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that, my friends, is why we have the United Nations.”

I would also like to use this opportunity to express sincere and profound gratitude to everyone who is relentlessly providing help during this strenuous emergency. We will come through this together and stronger.

Mr. Rabih El-Haddad leads the Multilateral Diplomacy Division that encompasses the Multilateral Diplomacy and International Law Programmes and the Institute's New York Office. He plays a key role in supporting the UN intergovernmental machinery towards achieving an enlightened and efficient multilateral decision-making. In doing so, Mr. El-Haddad works hand in hand with Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the UN Governing Bodies Secretariats, ministries in charge of complex and international negotiations as well as academia, think-tanks, and the private sector. During his extensive career he has supported major negotiations led by the G77, the LDC Group, the African Group, SIDS, and the GCC.



Interview with His Excellency

Lansana Gberie

Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations Office at Geneva

He is a gracious and friendly man, the ambassador of Sierra Leone in Geneva. The current lock-down and Covid19 measures have left many with the impression that life is quiet, but this is far from the case for His Excellency and his colleagues. They have all been busy working as usual, through the new communication channels that we have all discovered. As His Excellency is no exception, in between Video conferences he had time to receive us and to talk about his country, which has made impressive progress for its people since the civil war ended. Let us briefly mention that they now have free primary education and are aiming at universal health care. Let us leave the floor to His Excellency.

In August this year, the Ambassador was elected by his colleagues as President of the Seventh Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (CSP7). The ATT is an international treaty that regulates the international trade in conventional arms and seeks to prevent and eradicate illicit trade and diversion of conventional arms by establishing international standards governing arms transfers. The ATT has a total of 110 States Parties and 31 States that have signed but not yet ratified the Treaty. The Ambassador feels at home at the ATT. He was in December 2012 appointed by the United Nations Secretary General as a member, later Coordinator, of the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts monitoring the arms embargo then in place on Liberia. Dr. Gberie served in that capacity for three years.

Q: Mr Ambassador, you have a long and impressive career. Could you tell us a little about yourself?

I'm from Sierra Leone. I began my career really as a journalist, for which I did not study in a professional sense. I studied history and later in college I decided to be a journalist. That was a time when there was a civil war in Sierra Leone. I was working for media like IPS, wrote for BBC West Africa, and the reason why I wanted to be a journalist was that I wanted to understand the civil war, report on it and make people inside and outside of the country aware of what was going on. This was my key motivation, trying to comprehend what was going on in my country, and also in neighboring Liberia. So, I did that in the 90s before I decided to go to graduate school and do my master's degree. I even wrote my thesis on the civil war. So, that was my key motivation in becoming a journalist.

Much of what was going on then was covered by foreign correspondents, but they did not necessarily know the context

"The reason why I wanted to be a journalist was that I wanted to understand the civil war, report on it and make people inside and outside of the country aware of what was going on."

of what was going on. Western reporters who came in wrote sensational news about child soldiers and all kinds of atrocities. My aim was to go beyond what was visible, what was being reported by Western media and to look at the political, economic and social contexts of the war, and that is what drew me to become a journalist.

Q: Do you often feel that we here in the West do not get the right picture?

Well, there are extremely good Western journalists who do write about the right picture, but some did not have the time nor the patience to study the context. There were good journalists who took the time to study all the different

aspects. The majority of the reporters, however, did not take the time to go in depth.

Q: If I recall correctly, it took a long time to settle this conflict.

Yes, it took a long time to understand the war, even for me who comes from that context. It took me some time to understand why this war was happening, why there was a rebellion, and why atrocities were happening. I am not condemning other people – only stating the fact – and this is the reason I decided to be a reporter myself.

Q: Before coming to Geneva you were a Political Economy and Security Sector Reform Expert at the United Nations Development Programme project on Liberia Public Expenditure Review of the Justice and Security Sector. Could you tell us about it?

I started my United Nations career when I got appointed by the Secretary General to be a member of a panel of experts on Liberia. I later became the coordinator. The thing was to monitor the arms embargo then on Liberia, who may be behind the illicit arms trafficking in West Africa, and report to the UN Security Council on our findings, three times a year. I went out there and spent quite a lot of time in Liberia over the next years. And then I ended up working for the United Nations mission in Liberia. There was a project to try and review the security sector, and I was an expert working on security sector reform at the later stages just before I left the United Nations.

Q: You have a long and impressive career working for the United Nations. Today you are on the other, side representing your country being the Ambassador and the

Permanent representative to the United Nations. How is it to be on the other side?

It makes the transition less dramatic for me. I have worked for the United Nations, so I understand how the United Nations works. I knew people in Geneva before I came, but it is different when you represent your government. Your sense of responsibility is greater, and you feel a lot more empowered. It is a satisfaction that comes from representing your own country, your own people. It's a lot of responsibility because you are aware that you are here as a spokesperson for the government representing over 7 million people. You always have to express the views of your government. There is nothing about personal ambition, whereas in the United Nations this is a primary motivation. Here the ambition is to be a good representative for your country, working in the country's interest and be somebody that can be looked upon as a good face of Sierra Leone. It is extremely important, and it is a very prestigious mandate that you have, and I'm extremely grateful to His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio for appointing me to this exalted position.

Q: A lot of diplomats say that they are very busy when they are stationed in Geneva. And you?

It is a very busy station. Geneva is the busiest diplomatic station that we have. For example, I'm here as Ambassador to the government of Switzerland, Ambassador to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as well as permanent representative to the United Nations and all the international organizations, and we are talking about really major ones. Apart from the United Nations per se, you have the WHO, the WTO, the Human Rights Council, UNAIDS, the Global Fund. All these are massively important for a country like mine, and you have to make sure that you represent your country in these organizations effectively, which is obviously not easy. They are all very important.

Q: Do you have a special organization that is particularly close to your heart?

Everyone of them are important, but as we speak the closest one to my heart I'll have to say is the World Health Organisation.

Q: Why?

Because it is of primary interest to us. You know we have gone through Ebola and now this Corona virus pandemic, and our government places great emphasis on primary universal health care for everyone. It's difficult, and we do not

"The primary concern was to fully entrench press freedom. That was very important. Now we have succeeded, we have a new government."

my previous life, I was an activist where human rights were concerned.

Q: So what were you fighting for in Sierra Leone?

The primary concern was to fully entrench press freedom. That was very important. Now we have succeeded, we have a new government. Under a law dating back to 1965, journalists could be jailed if they were writing something that did not please the government. It was removed from the books only last week. A lot of our colleagues went to jail because of that law.

It was also issues related to women, gender, child raising, and inheritance – all these kinds of issues are rapidly improving now. When I was growing up, these issues were really very prominent as disabling factors, particularly for women. There have been enormous improvements in all these areas since the war ended. Still, there are gaps, such as in the representation of women in the government. We have not achieved even the minimal aspirational 30 % representation of women in parliament, in government. There is a group of women called Fifty-Fifty who are fighting for that, and I hope we will succeed in doing that.

Q: Most people do not know much about your country, and when you hear about Sierra Leone, the film Blood Diamonds comes to your mind. How is it to live with that cliché?

It is a terrible thing. We are trying to show a different face to the world. The war ended officially in 2002. We have conducted several presidential elections, had changes of government. There is peace, and the country is stable. There are fewer incidents of violent crime in Sierra Leone than in almost any Western society. It is a very peaceful place. We are open for business, we have a democratic society where there is the rule of law, investment is protected, and it's a very welcoming and friendly society.

There are still diamonds, but we were among the first to implement the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme. It

have the resources to make it a full reality. We are trying very hard, but we must remember that this is an aspiration overall. So, the global health institutions are vitally important to me. Of course, the WTO, certainly the ATT, and the Human Rights Council are also very important, and that's my background. I worked on transnational justice in Liberia, when I was head of the International Centre for Transnational Justice, which had an office in Liberia. Throughout my career, I have been engaged very profoundly with human rights issues. So, human rights are very important... In

has gone on now for 20 years. So, there are absolutely no blood diamonds, and there have not been any for 20 years. We still have problems with smuggling, but that is minimal in comparison to previously. The diamond business is fairly organized. The diamonds are officially certified and shipped out. The diamonds of Sierra Leone are very precious because they are of extremely high quality – much more than those of any other country. The value per carat is very high. We started to produce diamonds in the 1930s when the country was under British rule.

There is a novel by the British author Ian Flemming *Diamonds are forever* that is set in Sierra Leone. In those days, there was a lot of smuggling, and the British brought in the former head of their secret services to come and control the smuggling. That's how Ian Flemming wrote his book. Read it and you will recognize part of Sierra Leone in it.

Q: Your country has gone through many challenges, politically and also with the Ebola crisis. How is the situation today?

The situation now is stable. A new president was elected in April 2018, and he replaced another president. He won by the ballot box, and it was a peaceful handover. There have been a good level of economic growth and social stability but all this has been challenged by the Covid19 virus. But the virus situation is largely under control now. The number of cases has not really gone up. There is a problem with community transmission, but the death rate has been very low, lower than average, and partly because contact tracing, restrictions and testing have been fairly efficient. You know that we have a big youth population who are more likely to survive but also because of the active steps by the government to make sure that people are quickly isolated.

We had closed the airport, but now it's reopened, so, there are flights coming in and out. So, I guess like any other nation, we cannot shut down the system because of the Covid19 virus.

Q: Do you think that having had the Ebola outbreak to some extent "helped you" in this currently Covid19 situation?

Yes. I would definitely say so. It definitely has helped with the messaging. The people understood that this is a serious problem, because we had Ebola some years ago. Some of the protocol of the Ebola such as washing your hands, tidiness...

"We offer quite a lot. We have a youthful population, strong and healthy. We have a good environment, rule of law, investments are protected. We have peace and stability, lots of land, minerals"

that foreign investors coming in can get good educated labor, a healthy population, good infrastructure.

This is our primary goal: economic development. We would like long-term partners who make partnerships with our country, with our people.

Q: What do you offer?

We offer quite a lot. We have a youthful population, strong and healthy. We have a good environment, rule of law, investments are protected. We have peace and stability, lots of land, minerals...

Q: Finally, Mr Ambassador, you have been posted in Geneva for almost two years. From your previous experiences, what are the pros and cons here?

The pros first. It's very rewarding working for your country. Geneva is one of the international centres of the world, and to be able to speak in these international fora is a great honor and extremely gratifying. It is the most satisfactory thing in my life to do this on behalf of my country.

Any cons? We are a small mission, we cannot do what bigger missions do and equally cover all these important organizations. We are trying to rectify that.

this is something that people responded to immediately based upon our recent experience with Ebola.

I think this is the primary reason why we have the situation largely under control, and then of course the efforts by the government to make sure that this message gets out constantly.

Q: What are the priorities in the foreign policy of your country?

When the current president came to power he emphasized economic diplomacy. We need to attract good foreign investment. Our problems are many, and we have to deal with all of them at the same time. This is the reason why we want to educate our people – so that we can have an educated work force, so



L'immobilier de proximité et sur-mesure

Depuis plus de 50 ans, Rentimo développe ses activités à Genève et à l'étranger. Le groupe participe à des opérations immobilières d'envergure et s'est aussi spécialisé, au fil du temps, dans la location d'appartements meublés. En parallèle, il propose des hôtels résidence via sa filiale Rey Hôtels & Résidences : Drake Longchamp sur la rive droite et Sagitta sur la rive gauche. Rencontre avec le Docteur Christian Rey de Rudder qui dirige Rey Group.

Rentimo a été fondé par votre père, Othmar Rey. Quelle est l'histoire de la société ?

Dr Christian Rey de Rudder, président de Rentimo SA et Rey Hôtels et Résidences :

Le groupe immobilier a, en effet, été créé par mon père dans les années 1960. Rapidement, il a diversifié ses activités avec le développement de la résidence hôtelière. Pour ma part, je suis arrivé aux affaires dans les années 1980. Alors Docteur en sciences économiques, j'ai apporté ma connaissance de la branche de l'accueil que j'ai étudié à la Business School of Harvard (« Hospitality & Services Opération »), ainsi que mon réseau international. Les activités de Rentimo en Suisse comme à l'étranger m'ont mené à voyager. J'ai alors été élu président des Hôteliers genevois, puis président d'Hôtellerie Suisse – l'association faitière représentant l'ensemble des hôtels suisses – ainsi que Genève Tourisme. Ces différentes

responsabilités m'ont permis de visiter des marchés émergents comme par exemple la Chine et l'Inde et ainsi participer activement à la promotion du tourisme en Suisse. En 2006, à la fin de ces mandats et suite à l'arrivée de mon fils Xavier dans la société, je me suis concentré sur les affaires familiales. Je peux aussi désormais compter sur la présence de ma fille Eléonore de Poortere qui a pris la responsabilité du département Développement au sein de la Direction.

Dans quelle direction les activités de Rey Group ont-elles évolué ?

Depuis plusieurs années, une attention importante est portée au développement durable dans chacun de nos projets, qu'il s'agisse de constructions neuves ou de rénovations. Une dimension qui s'exprime dans le choix des matériaux, avec une priorité donnée au bois ou encore à l'application de peintures aux composants naturels. Notre implication en faveur du développement durable se traduit également dans l'aspect sociétal de nos projets. Aujourd'hui, nous ne voulons pas seulement des lieux d'habitation, nous souhaitons aussi des lieux de vie avec des jardins, des commerces et des activités proches de nos logements. Une intégration villageoise, en somme. Pour ce faire, nous travaillons en étroite collaboration, entre autres, avec l'Ecole polytechnique de Lausanne autour de réflexions sur le « vivre ensemble » et comment vivre demain, voire après-demain.

Comment fonctionne Rentimo SA ? Quelle est la philosophie de l'entreprise ?

Notre réseau est bien implanté et nous misons sur le meilleur rapport qualité-prix. Nous nous consacrons à des projets méticuleusement sélectionnés et auxquels nous croyons. Nous fonctionnons avec le bouche-à-oreille et effectuons des recherches spécifiques en fonction des demandes qui nous sont adressées. Alors, nous établissons une sélection dans tous nos réseaux en fonction des critères souhaités. L'éthique familiale est véritablement au cœur de nos relations avec les clients et nos collaborateurs.

Le groupe a très tôt été sensible à l'équilibre vie professionnelle/vie privée correspondant au plus près des besoins de chacune et chacun. Pour ceci, le temps partiel a été introduit depuis plusieurs années.

D'ailleurs, pour vous donner un exemple concret, la majorité de notre direction, qui est féminine, a opté avec notre soutien pour le temps partiel.

Le contact direct, la proximité et la confiance sur le long terme qualifient nos rapports. Nous appliquons des processus similaires à ceux de notre éducation militaire d'officiers suisses : la déontologie, la solidarité, la transparence et la rigueur sont des valeurs essentielles qui nous guident au quotidien.

Votre activité n'est pas uniquement centrée sur la promotion immobilière, mais s'étend également à l'hôtellerie et à la location d'appartements meublés.

C'est exact. Nous offrons une large gamme de prestations dans l'immobilier et dans l'hôtellerie. La location d'appartements meublés est ce qui constitue le lien entre ces deux domaines d'activité. Nous nous adaptons au marché et à ses nouvelles orientations internationales. Pour répondre à une demande spécifique à Genève, la location meublée et la résidence hôtelière sont les meilleures alternatives. Sur ce point, nous travaillons en partenariat avec des organisations internationales et des structures d'accueil des expatriés.

Sur quels grands projets immobiliers travaillez-vous ?

Un certain nombre de nos projets viennent d'être réalisés ou sont en cours. Nous sommes actuellement impliqués dans le développement de l'écoquartier de Meyrin, les Vergers, qui prévoit la construction de 1200 logements en location. Acteur privé le plus important du projet, nous sommes chargés de la construction de quatre bâtiments, totalisant environ 350 appartements. Innovation de taille : une des tours, la Tour C2 des Vergers a la façade en grande partie constituée de lucido, façade solaire agissant comme un isolant naturel. Répondant aux standards Minergie A, ce bâtiment est une véritable prouesse en matière de développement durable puisque pour diminuer la consommation électrique nécessaire au fonctionnement de l'immeuble, les installations techniques sont placées à mi-hauteur de la tour et non pas en sous-sol comme cela se fait habituellement. Une innovation qui, de l'extérieur, prendra la forme d'un étage entièrement végétalisé, procurant ainsi un environnement agréable pour les locataires. Cet immeuble est terminé et un prix nous a été décerné.



Autre projet que nous développons actuellement : les Portes de Bossy, à Collex-Bossy. Il s'agit de « Townhouses » regroupant des appartements en propriété par étage. Nous avons débuté, également, l'été dernier, un projet de 26 appartements à la frontière des cantons de Vaud et de Fribourg. Parfaitement en accord avec l'aspect champêtre du village, ces logements répondent tous au label Minergie, et ce dans un rapport qualité-prix particulièrement avantageux. Enfin, nous avons d'autres projets en gestion, en particulier à l'international.

Si nous sommes très fiers de nos projets développés en Suisse, nous sommes également heureux d'exporter et de représenter notre savoir helvétique dans des contrées parfois lointaines. Le dernier exemple en date, est le développement d'un village à la consonnance suisse sur plus de 233 hectares au Kazakhstan. Ce village, créé et pensé par nos soins et dont la coordination de la construction se fait sous notre houlette, est situé au bord d'un lac à l'eau cristalline, en face de montagne et de forêt de sapin... Toute ressemblance avec des paysages que nous connaissons tous en Suisse n'est peut-être pas totalement fortuite.

Ce village au nom d'Aqbura comprend notamment des hôtels avec des chambres et services 4 étoiles ainsi que des yourtes modernes et revisitées, un centre-villageois de plus de 20'000 m2 avec des restaurants, des cafés et des commerces, un centre MICE, un port et sa marina, des complexes résidentiels avec des chalets de 1, 2 et 3 chambres et des activités à foison en été (jusqu'à +40C) comme en hiver (jusqu'à -40C) parsemées dans un paysage enchanteur rehaussé par nos soins.

La qualité du projet et de notre travail a été reconnue et soulignée. Comme symbole d'un développement helvético-kazakh réussi, il nous a été alors proposé d'accompagner notre président de la confédération, Uli Maurer, lors de sa visite présidentielle au Kazakhstan, en novembre 2019. D'ailleurs, ce voyage aura été l'occasion d'apposer et finaliser la signature de plusieurs projets de notre part visant à accroître nos activités au Kazakhstan en partageant notamment notre savoir-faire en matière touristique et hôtelière. La Suisse forte de ses 41'000 km² fait rêver ce géant Kazakh de 2'725'000 km².

Rey Group
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In Conversation with Mufid Sukkar

Author of the column
“Businessman’s Blues”



Mufid, welcome to Diva International. We have known each other for many years but this is the first time I interview you.

Your name in a word documents recognised by our readers, having for years contributed to the column “Businessman’s Blues”, where you talked about the challenges of conducting business with your unique perspective on a number of business topics. However, we still don’t know much about the person as an individual. Could you tell us a little more about you?

Well Marit, I have always sought to be involved in whatever is going on around me. I was born in Jerusalem and spent my formative years in that region but by the age of 16, I wanted to expand my horizons and begged my parents to let me travel to the USA or the UK to finish my higher education. They finally relented and I came to England and gained a degree in Aeronautical Engineering, which was the wrong choice of degree, to be honest. But that was one of my best mistakes as it spurred me on to find an alternative and more suitable career. I joined a computer systems development consultancy in London, which gave me the platform to develop my career. Over the coming years, I was on a mission to keep pushing myself from my comfort zone to the next level above, just to see if I had it in me to climb up the career ladder. You may call it arrogance, over-confidence, or even naivety but, I was always sure I could contribute more to any organisation I worked for. I prefer to think of it as self-belief. Don't get me wrong, I was not always right, I made spectacular mistakes and fell flat on my face a few times on the way. But, I have always felt that was part of the journey anyway.

Over the years I set out to take on tasks that amounted to more than just providing what was needed as defined by someone else. I wanted to be part of the process of identifying what was needed and how to get it; hence I ended up in strategic and business planning as a transformative undertaking to help organisations move to the next level of growth and maturity. I worked for and with companies throughout the UK, Europe, USA and the Middle East, to be involved in articulating their purpose / vision in the marketplace and putting together the necessary strategies to implement this purpose / vision.

As I grew older and became aware of the subtleties and complexities of organisations, I was convinced that the most effective and impactful influence on an organisation is through the Boardroom. So, I set out to master the knowledge of corporate governance and even go through the tough process of attending classes, sitting exams and finally interviewing selection by the Institute of Directors where I became a ‘Chartered Director’, which qualifies me to sit on company boards and contribute to the controlling and steering a company through its challenges and competition in its marketplace.

Outside of work, I am married to a most wonderful woman called Claire and we have three grown up daughters with two grandchildren. There is nothing Claire and I like more than to get the whole extended family together and spend a weekend of absolute pleasure.

I love music from opera to jazz to rock music all the way to rap. One of my biggest disappointments in life is my inability

to sing. I know this is to be true because every time I try to sing, at least one member of the family begs me to shut up!

In my spare time, I love cooking and trying out new recipes and sharing the results with family and friends. Like work, once I master a dish or a type of bread, I look for new challenges to see how far I can go. Six years ago, I started my own blog and as the author, editor and proprietor of my blog, I decided to cover many topics from the serious business issues to the ridiculous and funny experiences I had while travelling on business.

But you suddenly went under the radar for a while, can you tell us why?

In late July 2018 and completely out of the blue, I was suspected of having an advanced liver cancer which could only be cured, if at all, by an operation

to excise the tumour and the loss of part of the liver. After a battery of scans, biopsies, blood tests and so on, the final confirmation came on a Monday and the operation took place on the Friday of the same week. The surgeon took out 66% of my liver and I began my biggest life challenge to date. Although I came close to death on a number of occasions due to various complications, I am still around almost two years later. But life goes on and more than ever, I am determined to continue my journey of being involved in the market.

Unfortunately, as 2020 began so badly for all humanity with the Coronavirus, like everyone else, any plans I had for returning to work had to be put on hold. As I find I have more time on my hands than I ever did since I was at junior school, I am thinking seriously about taking an on-line course in creative writing. I am tempted to write fact-based fiction based on my experiences.

So, you seem to continually challenge yourself, without fear of operating outside your comfort zone. From your post-graduate days to the current time, including your serious illness, you continue to have an appetite to push your boundaries. Where do you get the motivation to keep going?

Well, my motivation comes from a combination of greed and fear. Greed in this context is the desire to know more and be the best version of me I can accomplish, in the hope that my life will amount to more than just an average one and leave a legacy of some sort. Fear is the absolute dread of passing through life not earning the right to own this precious thing called ‘life’ and therefore, be thought of as a person who was dependent on others. For me that would be the worst epitaph about my life.

“Sooner or later, a MENA company will appoint mediocre or even incompetent personalities just because they are members of the business owning family’. In contrast, a Western company will always strive to hire the best for the job, irrespective of their background, family name or connections.”

Without being pious or religious about things, I truly believe we are put on this earth to do the best we can to contribute positively until the very end. For me, retirement just does not make sense, unless it is an enforced retirement due to ill health.

You said you spent a good part of your professional career in Europe and then lately in the MENA Region. As a business specialist in strategic planning, corporate governance and transformational change, what are, in your opinion, the keys differences in conducting business between these two contrasting regions?

That’s a very good question! I will cover the key differences in a minute however, I am amazed by the similarities between them as well. When you think about it, business is business, wherever it is conducted. As such, many fundamental rules

apply in both regions, and the rest of the world, for that matter. A business is a proposition to bring out a product / service, identify a customer base that requires or desires your product / service. If you are able to maintain that requirement and desire by your customers because what you offer is uniquely and constantly demanded or, you continue to re-invent and enhance your products and services, then you have a viable and sustainable business. Easier said than done? Yes, it is but these are the fundamental constants of any business anywhere.

The differences however are mainly cultural. Most big businesses in Europe are public listed ones with multiple shareholders and accountability to various stakeholders. In the MENA Region however, most businesses are family owned and run, typically headed by a patriarch who may have been the original founder. As private businesses, they have an aversion to being regulated and prefer to make decisions either by the powerful patriarch or a small council of senior family members. Accountability, therefore, is vague and unclear. Another difference is the tendency for MENA companies to run out of steam at some stage while their counterparts in the West are able to renew themselves on regular basis. I am sure many people can quote many examples of how this last statement is not always true and I agree, there are exceptions to any rule. A privately-owned business in the MENA Region works on the assumption of inheritance not only of the wealth of the business but also, the assumption of senior positions by the owners’ descendants. Sooner or later, a MENA company will appoint mediocre or even incompetent personalities just because they are members of the ‘business owning family’. In contrast, a Western company will always strive to hire the best for the job, irrespective of their background, family name or connections.

So, are things changing in the MENA Region or they will always be the same?

Yes, they are changing but, very slowly, and often in an untimely manner, when it is too late to rescue the business from its destructive owners. Having said that, change is moving at a much faster pace in certain business sectors such as insurance, banking, and investment as these are heavily regulated internationally and wherever your business is based, you have to follow the same rules and regulations as all other insurers, bankers and investors throughout the world. In many cases, they don't like it but, they have no choice other than follow the international rules. Those who don't, sooner or later find themselves in big trouble.

In your recent article "The Blame Game" published in the latest issue of Diva International, you discuss and contrast the nature of project management with, let us say 'departmental management'. Why do you think this is such an important issue to bring out and draw attention to?

If you go back to basics, a business is mostly run according to a specific set of rules / procedures / standards. Managers are charged with part of the business such as marketing, sales, finance, I.T, and so on to conduct business successfully, lawfully and cost-effectively. Managers have at their disposal budgets, skilled and competent resources which they are supposed to utilise to the best of their abilities. When things go wrong either because rules / procedures / standards have not been followed or, political conflict occurred within the one department or across more than one department. It's the managers' responsibility to identify the source of the problem and act accordingly, from making changes to the standards, resolving the politics, up-training members of staff at the heart of the problem, to the drastic out-placement of certain people, hoping the measures would bring the business ship back on the right course.

However, projects are entirely different creatures. They are meant to be for a finite period of time to bring about a business change / improvement. So, investment is dedicated to such a project to accomplish the overall objectives, within the agreed timescales, and allocated budget. Suitably qualified individuals are temporarily recruited from various department or as external contractors and they are charged with delivering the project according to the three criteria above. For whatever reason, this is an extremely difficult task to accomplish and before long, problems arise, and corrective measures must be put in place to rescue the situation.

"One thing for certain, is that the project manager cannot, as a matter of routine, look for culprits to blame instead of looking for solutions to fix. Once the project is concluded, it is an excellent practice to conduct a project post-mortem in order to identify lessons learnt and where necessary apportion praise or blame to individuals."

Notice here, the project manager does not have the luxury of referring to pre-defined standard procedures and he or she can only rely on the collective experience of the project team to identify the nature of the problems and how to resolve them. One thing for certain, is that the project manager cannot, as a matter of routine, look for culprits to blame instead of looking for solutions to fix. Once the project is concluded, it is an excellent practice to conduct a project post-mortem in order to identify lessons learnt and where necessary apportion praise or blame to individuals.

I have been involved in too many projects where these rules were not observed because someone high up wanted blood and demanded guilty parties. The end result is that the project loses its team spirit, politics becomes prevalent and the whole thing becomes a survival game, at the expense of the project and ultimately the project is doomed to failure.

Projects are very expensive if they do not deliver the benefits hoped for and to ignore this aspect is, to my way of thinking is extremely dangerous to any organisation.

Are you saying that in a project situation you would avoid blaming individuals, leaving to the end, even if by the end they might have made things worse? Think of what is happening in certain countries in the way they dealt with the Coronavirus, when experts give politicians wrong or badly timed advice, people lose their lives.

That's a very good point, in the way you put it and indeed you should act immediately if the source of information is a bad one. However, things are hardly ever that simple and inn the chaos that prevails during a pandemic, everyone is learning as they go along, and action taken is not always an exact science. What I am observing is a number of people who feel the best way to contribute is to stay on the side lines and wait for those busy trying to deal with the pandemic so they can blame them for making wrong decisions. Very often the decision is not so critical that it may have disastrous consequences.

Setting Coronavirus epidemic aside, you recently planned on returning to London to provide business consultancy in London. Can you tell us what services you had in mind to focus on providing?

In a way, I gave many clues in my previous answers. Put simply, when the pandemic has been concurred, I am offering a service to company boards of directors (BoD) to help them improve their ability to lead the organisation.

Admittedly, there are many companies with very effective BoD but, you would be surprised how many more could do with an objective external perspective.

The service provided can be around strategic planning but, the duties of a modern BoD are considerably more diverse and complex. The composition of the Bod of executives, shareholders and independent is one dimension but, the diversity along the lines of age, gender, ethnicity and intellectual perspectives are also important elements. Articulation of the organisation's value system is fast becoming an important criterion for judging the effectiveness of a company's strategies and business plans. Installation of corporate governance best practices are also key. Lastly, effective communication with all stakeholders (shareholders, employees, clients, suppliers, legislative or regulatory bodies, as well as the communities the business operates within, is the responsibility of the BoD.

As you can see, the BoD being at the apex of a company pyramid demands that such a body to provide active and effective leadership. The consultancy I set up is called 'Ducibus Consultancy Services'. In case you are wondering, Ducibus is Latin for leadership and guidance so, it is quite fitting. There is a website which covers in more details all of the above: www.ducibus.co.uk

The international community and the specialised agencies are often a little disconnected from the business world. What can be done to improve this relationship?

That is often true, I am sad to admit. If you think of these specialised agencies as businesses, once they achieve success, they grow lazy; just like any commercial business from restaurants to airline manufacturers. This is suicide really. Every organisation, even not-for-profit ones must always seek to improve what it has to offer. It must keep in touch with the outside world and establish whether or not what it provides is still relevant. You can do market research, assemble focus groups, introduce pilot services, gather data, analyse the data to death and so on. However, the simplest and most effective way is talking to your client base; better still, listen to your client base and have the humility to accept harsh and painful feedback.

Sorry, but I want to go back to the Coronavirus, if you don't mind. Do you think the business world will look markedly different after the pandemic from what it was like say, on 1st January 2020? If so, which are the business sectors, countries and regions most likely to suffer badly, and which are those most likely to come out intact?

Of course, as we are still in the middle of the pandemic, we

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don't yet know the extent of the damage this viral war will exact on our world. However, there are enough clues to suggest that this is unquestionably a major 'game changer', if not the biggest game change in living memory; much bigger than the Millennium Bug or the financial crash of 2008. Look at the Nine-Eleven of 2001 incident and how much of an impact it had on our all of our lives from social, business, international relations and state control standpoints. Some of the changes were for the good because we no longer take safety and security of travel for granted. Other changes were not so positive like bunching many countries together as terror state, making them legitimate target for sanctions and invasion, causing millions of ordinary people to suffer.

As far as the Coronavirus pandemic impact on the business world, this will bring in some retrograde changes but mostly, I am optimistic the changes will be for the better. Many companies already practice remote working, thus saving on unnecessary travel of staff, use of expensive real estate in prime urban locations. If this new practice is applied on permanent basis, there will be significant cost-cutting in business running and a bonus reduction on the environment. Already, we are seeing and experiencing cleaner air, less light and noise pollution, recovery of wildlife and so on. Of course, some of these benefits are temporary until the world business machine is kickstarted again but, I am convinced that many people will not return to the 'bad old days' of disregard and disrespect of our precious planet.

And what about the philosophical argument going on between the American centralisation versus the European and Far Eastern globalisation model?

I am not a fan of the Trump doctrine which advocates 'America First' and the rest of the world can take a jump in the ocean. If a supplying nation is unwilling to give the USA the best commercial terms, then they will either take it elsewhere or even repatriate the production to the USA.

However, I think there will be an amalgam of the two models. The idea of business globalisation will have to be fundamentally re-defined. In my younger days, I lived through globalisation as it was applied and misapplied across various business sectors with mixed results. For example, just in Time 'JIT' principle in the supply chain was and remains successful. However, devolving low skill-based services (e.g. customer help centres) or manufacturing of component elements, proved to be less successful. When the pandemic arrived, it favoured countries which were self-sufficient or specialised in the production of certain types of equipment (medical like ventilators, and testing kits), food and other

essential goods. In conclusion, companies will think very hard about protecting their future supply chain to make sure that the business is exposed to minimum risk by having complex and multi-border supply chain.

Where do you see the changes taking place at individual company level?

Perhaps the two most fundamental changes will happen in the boardrooms of companies, where the thinking about the long-term viability and integrity of the business is the responsibility of this relatively small group of people.

First change in the boardroom will be a more sophisticated and effective risk management consideration and discussion. Currently, most companies pay lip service to risk management, but the responsibility is devolved to people outside the boardroom who tend to be technocrats with experience of modelling and calculating theoretical risks and produce eye-catching graphs and heatmaps to include inn reports, business plans or presentations to peer groups. Post-Corona boards of directors will go to school on this topic and assume responsibility for the consideration and assessment of the company's short, medium and long-term risks, together with more appropriate language to articulate the risk analysis accessible to a wider audience of all stakeholders. The financial consequences of such a change is significant because the company may have to set aside potential investment in R&D, equipment renewal, or business expansion, to mitigate against potential risks likely to damage the business. Take the passenger airline industry. The bulk of their investment is in new aircraft and now we find that stock worth \$trillions is parked all over airports and aircraft hangars yielding no income but demanding further expenditure to keep it airworthy when the time is right to fly again. In the meantime, the very same airlines are laying off staff and seeking help from their governments to remain solvent during the crisis. Some will make it but many will not. The airline industry will have to rethink its approach to conducting business in the future.

The second change in the boardroom will be in the collective intellect of the board members. By and large, currently the boardroom consists of monochromic type of like-minded, like-experienced people who have a tendency to suffer from group-think and quickly agree, rubberstamp even, proposals put by the executives to steer the company in one direction or another in order to maximise income and short-term profitability, at the expense of long-term sustainability of their business. Post-Corona boardroom composition must take a wider perspective of its collective responsibility by eschewing homogenous composition and create diverse boards with

“However, within each sector, there will be winners who are lucky to get (fairly or unfairly) full governmental support, have huge amounts of cash reserves, or they had the foresight to mitigate against corona-like disasters in their business model.”

the foresight to mitigate against corona-like disasters in their business model. The losers will be those who fail to secure government funding, relied on short-term cash liquidity, or assumed things can never get so bad as the Coronavirus 2020 proved to be.

As for nation-states, I am much less optimistic. I am sorry to say that the big beasts will weather the storm and the poor countries will bear the heaviest cost; it has always been thus. However, a shift of economic balance will inevitably take place and the order of the G20, or even G8, in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) may change somewhat.

Will the USA come out of this stronger at the expense of China's faltering growth, or will China somehow leapfrog the USA to the number 1 spot of being the world's biggest economy?

Wow, I was hoping you wouldn't ask me this specific question! I can sit on the fence and say: it can go either way; which is obvious. But I know you will not let me get away with such an answer. So, I am going to stick my neck out and say this: China will eventually leapfrog the USA because too much infrastructure has been lost in the West and ceded to the Chinese to build within their borders. However, the actual change of order was always going to happen; it was a matter of time. What Coronavirus has done was to poke a stick in the side of the USA, which will now be alerted to what is likely to happen and the USA may put up a more concerted effort to resist the loss of world economic leadership.

In any event, I am not likely to be around to see the day when my prediction proves to be true or a total nonsense so, I am showing false courage here.

differing, sometimes opposing, perspectives to examine the business and set out a new blueprint of how they should conduct business in the future. Issues such as risk management, social responsibility, climate sensitivity, business architecture, strategic planning and value systems must be re-examined and articulated with honesty and serious endeavour to act upon them beyond just lip service.

So, who will be the winners and losers in say, 3 years from now?

That is a much harder one to predict as to who might be winners and losers because it will not be by business sectors. We will still have banks, airlines, insurance companies, retailers, manufacturers, and professional services. However, within each sector, there will be winners who are lucky to get (fairly or unfairly) full governmental support, have huge amounts of cash reserves, or they had

Since you are based in London, could you give us an idea of what that great financial centre is likely to look like both post-Coronavirus and post-Brexit?

The UK is a strange business paradox and likely to continue to be so in the future. Two World Wars stripped it of its powerbase and wealth. Many people don't realise that the UK spent more on winning WW2 than Germany did on losing it. The UK paid the USA for all the arms, ships, planes, and supplies it was given by the Americans under a sort of a long-term lease agreement. The last instalment of this agreement was paid by the Labour government around 2007 when the Finance Minister (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Alistair Darling issued the final cheque to the US government. Having lost most of its colonies at the urging of the USA, the UK lost cheap access to a great deal of natural resources which helped build its manufacturing industry. Inevitably, the income from a variety of industries dwindled, leaving the know-how and reputation to build a modern economy on.

The UK did not join the EU from inception and had to stand in line to be admitted in the early Seventies. They never really bought into the dream project of a United Europe and felt they needed to be on the inside to make sure things did not take a sinister turn that echo the first half of the 20th Century. Independently, they built London's reputation for insurance and banking through flexible, yet controlled methodologies that encouraged many other countries to use the UK as their base to conduct financial services. This sector, unlike most other sectors, always met its tax obligation fairly so much so, the famous Square Mile contributes the lion-share of income to the government revenue. The second area of expertise which was traditionally nurtured and continued to be encouraged is scientific application research. The UK may no longer build ships, make airplanes, manufacture cars, produce super computers, or own gigantic pharmaceutical companies however, it has the knowledge, expertise, and research infrastructure to sell to manufacturers of such valuable goods.

So, I believe the UK could survive Brexit because the real British Establishment has been trying to leave the EU since the day the country joined on 1st January 1973, hoping to return to their earlier glory days of being an 'Island Nation'.

Then you add the Coronavirus factor to this mix, coming at a time when the UK is actually in the middle of negotiating a comprehensive and extensive trade deals with the rest of the world, including the EU countries. All bets are off and when

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the government was busy brushing up on their best trade negotiation skills, along comes the pandemic and throws a hand grenade in the middle of proceedings.

You did not mention Tourism which must also contribute to the UK GDP

That's because tourism will affect every country in terms of loss of GDP but with a counter compensation of domestic tourism experiencing growth as people are likely to discover their own countries and avoid travel for a couple of years or so. In addition, if you look at the UK, France, Italy and Spain, you discover that apart from Italy, the other 3 countries have on average 10% of their GDP

from tourism. Italy is somewhat ahead with around 13%.

So, what is your prediction for the UK in simple terms?

In short, it will be a brave person who attempts to predict in what shape the UK will emerge out of the impact of both Brexit and the Coronavirus, even after a period of adjustment thereafter. What I can say is this, on 1st January 2023, 50 years after joining the EU, business will continue to be successfully conducted in the UK but the country will be busy reinventing itself into something else more suited to the 21st Century. I have faith in the British resilience and adaptability.

Well, thank you so much for the conversation and we look forward to receiving more articles from you in the future.

Thank you, Marit. I really enjoyed the session, even with some of your tough questions. For sure I will continue to submit articles to you, hoping you can find a suitable spot in your excellent publication, which I think keeps on getting better and better.



Voyage sur les traces de

George Orwell en Birmanie

Texte et photos : Jean-Michel Wissmer

Qui ne connaît pas le prémonitoire 1984 ou *La Ferme des Animaux* (*Animal Farm*) dont la lucidité étonne encore aujourd'hui ? Ce que l'on ne sait pas toujours, c'est que Orwell, de son vrai nom Eric Blair, a été policier avant d'être écrivain, policier de l'Empire britannique en Birmanie, aujourd'hui le Myanmar.

Pour aller sur ses traces, il faudra faire preuve d'un peu de patience et d'endurance, car *Une histoire birmane* (*Burmese Days*), son premier roman, qui met en scène une petite colonie britannique, se déroule dans un lieu très isolé aux confins de la Haute-Birmanie. Il y a peu, beaucoup de régions n'étaient pas ouvertes aux étrangers en dehors de sites emblématiques comme Bagan, Mandalay ou le Lac Inle. Mais les choses ont changé, progressivement, on parle de transition.

Afin de se rendre sur les lieux décrits dans *Une histoire birmane*, il faudra aller à Mandalay, capitale religieuse du pays, prendre un avion pour Bhamo et de là, après deux jours de navigation (ou plus, car les bateaux s'embourbent régulièrement) sur le grand fleuve Irrawaddy, artère vitale du pays, rejoindre Katha. Katha ressemble à bien des bourgades birmanes avec son marché, ses maisons de teck et ses pagodes, mais c'est le souvenir de Orwell qui fait la différence. Les responsables locaux, conscients de l'importance littéraire de leur petite ville et d'un patrimoine très rare, ont plutôt bien

fait les choses. Le *Cultural Heritage* propose un circuit qui mène le visiteur vers une dizaine de lieux liés au roman, lieux devant lesquels un panneau en birman et en anglais propose explications et extraits du texte. Si le narrateur du roman affirme : « La ville n'offrait aucune curiosité touristique », ce n'est plus le cas aujourd'hui !

Orwell en Birmanie

Eric Blair est né à Motihari dans le nord de l'Inde et appartient à une lignée de famille de colons au service de l'Empire. Entré dans la police à 19 ans, il a vécu cinq ans en Birmanie entre 1922 et 1927 (mais le roman se situe en 1920). Délaissant à son retour en Angleterre sa carrière d'officier, ce qui fut un véritable choc pour sa famille, Orwell est apparu transformé ; ces années birmanes et tous les excès du colonialisme l'avaient profondément marqué : c'est le début d'une véritable

conscience sociale qui va l'amener à se préoccuper du sort des plus démunis et à écrire *Dans la dèche à Paris et à Londres* (*Down and Out in Paris and London*, 1933). Grâce à la Birmanie, Eric Blair est devenu George Orwell. Alors, revenons à Katha, et découvrons ce gros village au milieu de nulle part, le livre de notre auteur entre les mains.

L'éditeur anglais du roman, pour éviter les susceptibilités, avait exigé de l'auteur qu'il change les noms des lieux et des personnages, et Katha est devenu Kyauktada. Le héros

“Si le narrateur du roman affirme : « La ville n'offrait aucune curiosité touristique », ce n'est plus le cas aujourd'hui !”



principal, John Flory, un marchand de bois, s'il n'est pas le narrateur, partage les mêmes convictions qu'Orwell. A peine sorti du débarcadère, je découvre le premier lieu, et le plus sinistre, la prison, toujours en activité. Construite par les Anglais en 1890 (comme bon nombre de bâtiments coloniaux de cette préfecture), elle pouvait accueillir une soixantaine de prisonniers qu'on occupait à différentes tâches pour la communauté britannique. L'un des personnages du roman, le commissaire adjoint M. Macgregor (la plupart des membres de cette colonie travaillent soit pour la police soit dans le commerce du bois), regrette le temps où l'on pouvait envoyer un employé à la prison avec un mot disant : « Veuillez donner quinze coups de fouet au porteur », triste illustration de l'esprit de l'époque. On apprend aussi qu'un paon est la mascotte de la prison et déambule au milieu des détenus au visage terreux.

“Le Club européen, ce temple lointain, mystérieux, ce saint des saints dont l'accès est bien plus jalousement gardé que celui du nirvana !”

Assez vite on parvient au marché dont le roman signale à plusieurs reprises les fortes odeurs de poisson séché. Rien n'a changé. La bonne surprise m'attend un peu plus loin : la maison d'Orwell. Le responsable du *Cultural Heritage* m'ouvre les portes. Elle est construite sur pilotis comme la plupart des maisons birmanes afin d'échapper aux inondations mais aussi pour stocker des aliments. Si la maison semble à l'abandon, malgré une chaise en plastique posée sur la terrasse couverte et du linge qui pend, l'ambiance est toujours évocatrice. A l'étage, des portraits d'Orwell, photos et tableaux, sont accrochés sur les murs à la peinture défraîchie.

Une impressionnante statue équestre du général Aung San occupe un carrefour. Elle en dit long sur la volonté de défier l'ancien occupant. Aung San est le héros national de l'indépendance birmane qui sera effective en 1948. Assassiné

en 1947, Aung San ne vivra pas ce moment de libération. C'est aussi le père de Aung San Suu Kyi dont on connaît les combats.

Plus loin se dresse la petite église anglicane, surnommée dans le roman la « pagode anglaise », et qui accueillait la communauté britannique et quelques Eurasiens. Avec ses éléments de brique et de bois elle a été restaurée avec goût. L'intérieur indique qu'elle est parfaitement en activité et dégage une atmosphère de sérénité. Encore quelques pas et je me retrouve devant le joli portail sculpté du court de tennis qui semble attendre l'arrivée d'un joueur, membre de la bonne société anglaise. Datant de 1910, c'est un témoin muet, comme figé dans le passé. On dirait qu'un arbitre va bientôt escalader la haute chaise blanche qui ne surveille plus personne.

Et enfin, voici un lieu central de la vie coloniale britannique et donc un « personnage » majeur du roman : le Club. Difficile d'imaginer que ce banal bâtiment d'un seul étage et tout en longueur abritait toute la vie sociale de la colonie. Transformé en coopérative d'État, il abrite aujourd'hui quelques bureaux poussiéreux où s'activent de rares employés. On travaille au ralenti par ces chaleurs, une chaleur suffocante qui est aussi un personnage du livre. Le roman consacre de très nombreuses pages au Club et, en les relisant, tout prend vie : la table de billard ; la bibliothèque où les livres et les vieux magazines moisissent à cause de l'humidité ; le bar, essentiel pour noyer l'ennui malgré les gin tonics toujours tièdes, car il n'y a jamais assez de glace. « Le Club européen, ce temple lointain, mystérieux, ce saint des saints dont l'accès est bien plus jalousement gardé que celui du nirvana ! ». Et Justement, c'est aussi le lieu de tous les débats, essentiellement autour d'un



thème : comment faire pour n'accepter *aucun non-Anglais* au Club. La trame du roman se déroule en grande partie autour de cette question. Seul Flory paraît prêt à accepter l'entrée du docteur indien Veraswami pour qui « un membre du Club est quelqu'un de sacro-saint ». Mais le docteur indien a la peau bien trop foncée pour les colons, et cet appui de Flory (traité de « bolchevique » ; on ne fait pas dans la nuance...) suscite un haut-le-cœur de la part de la communauté dont les commentaires racistes parfaitement assumés font bondir aujourd'hui. Le docteur est en compétition avec U Po Kyin, un magistrat birman arriviste et comploteur qui n'hésite pas à fomenter de fausses révoltes et à écrire des lettres anonymes pour dénigrer le docteur indien qui, par ailleurs, malgré le rejet dont il fait l'objet, défend la *pax britannica*. L'accès des Birmans (au moins un...) à des institutions britanniques, comme le parlement et précisément les clubs, avait fait l'objet d'une autorisation en 1923. Ce n'était pas du goût de notre colonie de Katha-Kyauktada qui tire tout son orgueil de ne la respecter *sous aucun prétexte*.

Un amoureux de la culture birmane

Une bonne moitié du roman va tourner autour du personnage de Elizabeth Lackersteen. Seule jeune femme anglaise, fraîchement arrivée dans la colonie, elle suscite les passions, celles de son oncle libidineux, et surtout celles de Flory et ce malgré la relation de ce dernier avec une Birmane (qui se vengera à la fin, ce qui ruinera la réputation de Flory et le poussera au suicide). Elizabeth n'est pas différente des autres membres de la communauté et partage les mêmes préjugés. Tout la dégoûte. Flory essaie toutefois de l'initier – sans aucun succès – à la culture birmane. Cela donne lieu aux

plus belles pages du livre quand Orwell décrit une danseuse : « Ses mains aux doigts réunis virevoltaient comme des têtes de serpents : la souplesse de leurs poignets était telle qu'elles allaient presque jusqu'à toucher les avant-bras ». Flory la compare à une marionnette, et il ne croit pas si bien dire. Encore aujourd'hui, des spectacles de marionnettes font se confronter une (vraie) marionnette et une (vraie) danseuse qui imite ses gestes, actionnée par d'invisibles fils tenus par un véritable marionnettiste. Citons encore les paroles de Flory qui devraient toucher au cœur chaque Birman et chaque amoureux de la Birmanie :

... toute la vie, toute l'âme de la Birmanie se résume dans la façon qu'a cette fille de se tordre les bras. En la voyant, vous voyez les rizières, les villages sous les tecks, les pagodes, les prêtres avec leurs robes jaunes, les buffles nageant au petit matin dans les rivières...

Y a-t-il plus belle déclaration d'amour à ce pays ? Et il faut le redire, Eric Blair ne serait jamais devenu George Orwell sans son séjour birman. Quand le narrateur décrit le malaise de Flory, tiraillé entre sa position de colon et une certaine clairvoyance, on peut lire ces mots : « L'Empire des Indes est un despotisme », et « Vivre dans un monde pareil a quelque chose d'étouffant, d'anéantissant. C'est un monde dans lequel chaque mot, chaque pensée est soumis à censure ». Comment alors ne pas penser au monde surveillé et suffocant de 1984 ?



Jean Claude Pallas

The Guardian of the Palais des Nations

« Défenseur du Palais des Nations » – this is how Jean Claude Pallas is known at the UNOG and internationally. His contribution to the preservation of the Palais des Nations is remarkable, in this sense he is The Guardian of the Palais. His book « Histoire et architecture du Palais des Nations (1924-2001). L'Art Déco au service des relations internationales » can be seen on the shelves of home libraries of Ambassadors, diplomats, researchers, architects, and of all those who love the Palais des Nations. It would be the rarest occasion to meet Jean Claude at the Palais as he left Geneva after his retirement. Being privileged to keep close contacts with him, I asked Jean Claude to grant us an interview on the occasion of the forthcoming anniversary of the United Nations.

Pouvez-vous nous raconter votre parcours à l'Organisation des Nations Unies à Genève (ONUG), au Palais des Nations ? J'en parlerai au passé puisque j'ai quitté ls Nations

Unies il y a une vingtaine d'années. De fin 1972 à début 2001 j'ai fait toute ma carrière dans la Section des bâtiments (parcs et jardins) et des services techniques (SBST) dont j'ai assumé la direction à partir de 1995. J'étais donc responsable de tout ce qui concerne l'exploitation, la maintenance, la modernisation, le remplacement de l'ensemble des installations techniques et des nouvelles constructions de cet immense bâtiment, le Palais des Nations (853.000 m³), de ses dépendances ainsi que du parc de plus de 46 ha. Mon activité était également très liée aux conférences puisque nous devons, en coordination avec les services concernés, mettre à disposition tous les moyens nécessaires au bon déroulement des conférences (en particuliers les « sound engineers »).

Comment avez-vous décidé d'écrire un livre sur le Palais des Nations ?

En 1995 j'ai commencé, à titre bénévole, la rédaction de

cet ouvrage sur le Palais des Nations. C'était pour moi une sorte de « Défense et illustration du Palais des Nations » car j'avais toujours été choqué par l'indifférence, et même pour certains le mépris dédaigneux, des architectes à l'encontre de ce bâtiment. Ma motivation était donc de réhabiliter le Palais en le faisant découvrir et mieux connaître à la fois aux fonctionnaires qui y travaillent, aux délégués qui participent aux conférences, aux membres des Missions permanentes ainsi qu'aux Genevois (et aux architectes sceptiques). C'est donc « l'amour du Palais » qui m'a guidé.

Dites-nous comment vous avez effectué vos recherches. Est-ce que quelqu'un vous a aidé dans vos recherches ? Pour la préparation du livre sur le Palais j'ai été particulièrement aidé par le personnel de la Bibliothèque, à commencer par le Bibliothécaire en chef, Pierre Pelou qui m'a toujours encouragé et soutenu. Le caractère pondéré et le sourire permanent de cet agrégé de philosophie, grand amateur de littérature et de jazz des années 1950, était un réconfort permanent. Je mentionnerai également Irina Gerassimova, chef du Groupe de la référence spécialisée et devenue par la suite une amie. Elle m'avait aidée lors de mes recherches sur le Palais, mais j'ai surtout apprécié sa collaboration pour mes investigations sur les visites de Léon Tolstoï à la ville Le Bocage en 1857. Du fait de sa formation et de ses connaissances elle a pu consulter, et me traduire, de nombreux documents et ouvrages originaux trouvés dans les bibliothèques et archives de Moscou, de Saint-Petersbourg et de Iasnaïa Poliana. J'ai donc associé son nom au mien dans mes articles sur « Léon Tolstoï au Bocage » qui ont été publiés en 2010 sur le site de la Bibliothèque de l'ONUG, dans la revue des fonctionnaires internationaux « UN Special » et dans la revue de la Société des écrivains des Nations Unies à Genève, « Ex Tempore » de décembre 2010 (traduction en russe par Irina). Je citerai également Christina Giordano, administrateur chargée du Groupe de la médiathèque et des collections et les fonctionnaires du Groupe des archives de la SDN et des collections historiques, qui a pu me procurer de nombreux ouvrages grâce aux prêts inter bibliothèques. Enfin dans mon ancienne unité, la Section de bâtiments et des services techniques (SBST), Catherine Mabilon, architecte, qui assura la mise au net des 26 plans spécifiques à l'ouvrage et Jean-Jacques Ferret qui réalisa les 8 petits plans de situation des différents corps de bâtiment.

La sortie de votre livre en 2001 – qu'avez-vous ressenti ? Je sais que l'ancien Secrétaire général des Nations Unies Monsieur Kofi Annan a été particulièrement intéressé par votre livre, et aussi Monsieur Vladimir Petrovsky, l'ancien



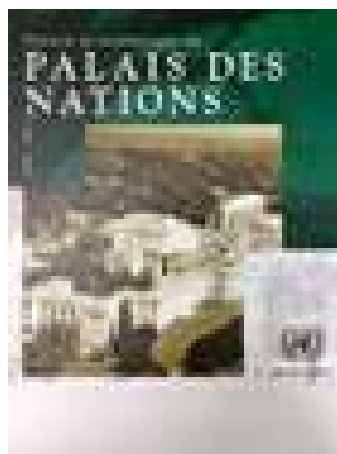
Directeur général de l'ONUG. Racontez-nous.

J'ai remis officiellement un exemplaire de mon ouvrage le jeudi 6 juin 2001 au Directeur général de l'ONUG, Vladimir Petrovsky, que je connaissais bien et il n'y avait donc pas d'émotion particulière. Par contre il n'en fut pas de même un mois plus tard, le mardi 17 juillet lorsque, toujours dans le grandiose bureau du premier étage qui a gardé sa décoration et son ameublement d'origine, je fus présenté par Vladimir Petrovsky au Secrétaire général des Nations Unies Kofi Annan, en présence du Bibliothécaire en chef Pierre Pelou. Ce jour-là l'émotion fut grande lorsqu'il m'a serré la main et félicité. Quelques heures plus tard l'émotion fut encore beaucoup plus forte lorsque le photographe officiel du Palais m'avoua humblement que toutes ses photos étaient ratées ! Il inaugurait son premier appareil numérique (nous étions en 2001) et il n'avait pas encore bien assimilé tous les réglages. Je pensais donc ne pas pouvoir conserver de trace de cette consécration. Fort heureusement le SG ne se déplace jamais sans un photographe du Siège qui travaillait encore en argentique. C'est son cliché qui m'a été transmis et qui est reproduit ici, et qui se trouve encadré dans mon bureau, en face de moi, en Charente.

Pouvez-vous partager avec les lecteurs votre découverte fascinante à la Villa Le Bocage ?

Après la publication de mon ouvrage sur le Palais des Nations, en 2001, je me suis retiré en Charente, pays de mes ancêtres paternels dont j'ai remonté la généalogie jusqu'à la fin du XVI^e siècle et l'histoire de ma nouvelle résidence jusqu'au XIII^e siècle (en 1274 : « molendinum de Ayzeto », moulin d'Aizet, Marcillac-Lanville), Toujours ce goût pour l'histoire des gens et des propriétés ! Dès notre installation dans ce nouveau domicile j'ai repris les recherches sur les dépendances du Palais en vue de terminer l'écriture d'un nouveau livre consacré au parc de l'Ariana et aux dépendances du Palais. En 2011 j'ai rédigé une détaillée sur les passages de l'écrivain Léon Tolstoï à la villa Le Bocage « Léon Tolstoï (1828-1910) à la villa Le Bocage (avril, mai, juin et juillet 1857) », j'avais terminé celle-ci en faisant la proposition suivante : « Pour en conserver le

souvenir une plaque commémorative pourrait être apposée soit dans le hall d'entrée de la villa soit à l'extérieur de celle-ci ». Cette initiative été retenue par la direction de l'ONUG qui a repris contact avec moi, en Charente et j'ai rédigé le texte de cette inscription et préparé un discours pour la cérémonie d'inauguration. Celle-ci s'est déroulée le 21 février 2011, devant le Directeur Général Sergei Ordzhonikidze et Son Excellence Monsieur Valery Loshchinin, Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Représentant permanent de la Fédération de Russie auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies et des autres organisations internationales à Genève. Ne pouvant me rendre à Genève pour participer à la cérémonie de dévoilement de cette plaque, Irina Gerassimova, mon amie de la Bibliothèque, avait volontiers acceptée de me remplacer et de lire le discours que j'avais préparé pour cette occasion. Quelques jours après le dévoilement, la plaque commémorative a été fixée sur la façade de la villa Le Bocage (les extraits du discours sont publiés séparément).



« Palais qui est
un peu
(beaucoup)
le vôtre.. »
Jean-Claude
Pallas

Je sais que vous travaillez sur un nouvel ouvrage... Quel est le titre ?

Lors de mon départ du Palais, le 31 mars 2001, mon nouvel ouvrage était déjà bien avancé et le Bibliothécaire en chef, Pierre Pelou, m'avait d'ailleurs proposé de le faire publier s'il avait été terminé. Il restait encore beaucoup à faire et j'ai quitté les environs de Genève pour m'installer dans la région d'origine ne de ma famille, la Charente, berceau de l'Art roman et du cognac (nous en produisions autrefois, j'ai encore sur les étagères de mon bureau une petite bouteille – une « mignonnette » - avec une étiquette « A. PALLAS & C°, COGNAC », provenant de mon grand-oncle Achille) et mon arrière grand-père, Jean, en exportait au Royaume-Uni). Le travail n'était effectué qu'à environ qu'à 70 % environ. Pris par de nouvelles activités comme l'entretien de la propriété et la rédaction d'une vingtaine d'articles pour des revues d'histoire locales, je n'ai repris que tardivement l'écriture de ce nouveau livre.

Quand pensez-vous que ce nouvel ouvrage sera publié ? Quel en sera le titre ? Y-a-t-il eu de nouvelles découvertes au Palais des Nations ? Dans l'affirmatif, est-ce qu'elles seront détaillées dans votre nouveau livre ? Le titre de cet ouvrage sera : **« Histoire du parc de l'Ariana et des dépendances du Palais des Nations (1920-2020). L'architecture du XIXe siècle au service des relations internationales »**. Il s'agira d'un nouveau livre, qui sera une suite logique de celui paru en 2001 et qui était consacré uniquement au Palais des Nations. J'ai privilégié la continuation des recherches (je ne peux m'en empêcher !) en particulier dans la presse genevoise des XIX^e et

XX^e siècles. Parmi mes dernières découvertes la visite de George Sand et Frantz Liszt à La Fenêtre en septembre 1836 et en 1857 la grande-duchesse Maria Nikolaïevna (1819-1876), fille du tsar Nicolas I^{er}, loua la villa où elle séjourna longuement et y fit faire son portrait, vers la mi-juillet, par le célèbre peintre Winterhalter (ce tableau se trouve au Musée de l'Hermitage). J'ai maintenant plus de 600 pages que je dois considérablement réduire et remanier pour laisser de la place aux très nombreuses illustrations. La date de publication n'est pas encore fixée, elle sera probablement reportée à l'année prochaine en raison de la pandémie et de la longue réduction d'activités au Palais.

Depuis que vous avez quitté Genève et le Palais des Nations, comment vivez-vous sans le Palais, « votre » Palais ? Je connais en effet le Palais 3^e sous-sol du Conseil au 10^e étage du bâtiment E, et les villas des caves aux greniers. J'ai circulé sur toutes les toitures et visité pratiquement tous les locaux, j'ai même voyagé sur le toit de la cabine d'un ascenseur lors de la réception des travaux de remplacement... Je me sentais donc comme chez-moi au Palais. Comme me

l'avait écrit M. Maryan Baquerot, Directeur de la Division de l'Administration, à l'occasion de mon départ : *« J'espère bien sûr que vous viendrez nous voir de temps en temps pour nous faire découvrir d'autres aspects de ce Palais qui est un peu (beaucoup) le vôtre.. »*. Bien sûr un peu de nostalgie maintenant, j'y pends encore souvent, mais j'ai tellement d'autres activités... Je terminerai en citant Guillaume Fatio, auteur d'excellentes monographies de communes genevoises (Pregny, Genthod, Bellevue, Hermance), et d'autres ouvrages : **« Ces vénérables demeures du Pays Genevois, encadrées d'ombrages séculaires, ont une âme faite de tout ce qu'elles ont vu, de tous les souvenirs qu'elles abritent. Il nous a plu d'évoquer, de réveiller des voix éteintes depuis longtemps... »**. Je rajouterai, avec regret, que malheureusement *« les ombrages séculaires »* se réduisent comme peau de chagrin en raison de l'emprise des nouvelles constructions...

Nous vous remercions pour cet entretien,

EVELINA RIOUKHINA



« Bocage est un délice »
Lev Tolstoï, vendredi 10 avril 1857

Extraits du discours de Jean-Claude PALLAS rédigé pour la cérémonie du dévoilement de la plaque commémorative des visites de Léon Tolstoï au Bocage¹

Dans le courant de l'hiver 1856-1857 la grande-duchesse Maria Nikolaïevna, fille aînée de l'empereur Nicolas I^{er} et sœur du tsar Alexandre II, est venue s'installer comme locataire dans la villa Le Bocage. Elle était accompagnée de sa famille, de son personnel et des deux comtesses Tolstaïa, Alexandra Andreïevna et sa sœur Elizaveta Andreïevna. Après avoir perdu son premier époux en 1852, le prince Maximilien de Beauharnais-Leuchtenberg, elle s'était remariée en 1854, sans autorisation impériale, avec le comte Grigoriï Alexandrovitch Stroganoff (1823-1879) pour lequel elle éprouvait une passion inaltérable depuis plusieurs années. Le mariage civil fut célébré en cachette, durant l'été, dans le petit village de

Gostilitsy dans les environs de Saint-Pétersbourg. Le mariage religieux, en novembre de la même année, fut encore plus rocambolesque. En 1856 le nouvel empereur Alexandre II, reconnaît, enfin, ce mariage, mais à la condition que son altesse impériale s'éloigne de St.-Pétersbourg à chaque fois qu'elle se trouvera enceinte. C'est pourquoi le couple quitta la Russie et alla se réfugier dans la campagne genevoise alors que Maria Nikolaïevna attendait un enfant qui naîtra dans ces murs au mois de mai 1857.

Il y a donc un peu plus d'un siècle et demi Lev Nikolaïevitch Tolstoï se trouvait ici, dans cette villa Le Bocage. Dès sa



première visite, le 10 avril 1857, il fut séduit par l'atmosphère qui se dégageait de l'ensemble de cette propriété et il note dans son « Journal intime » : « *Bocage est un délice* ». Il faut cependant préciser qu'au charme romantique et champêtre de l'endroit s'ajoutait celui, encore plus fort, de sa cousine, la comtesse Alexandra Andreïevna Tolstaïa.

Pour se mettre dans l'ambiance de 1857 il faut s'imaginer la villa et ses abords à cette époque. Construite en 1824, soit quatre ans après sa voisine La Fenêtre, résidence des Directeurs généraux de l'ONUG depuis 1979, Le Bocage avait à l'origine des dimensions beaucoup plus modestes et plus familiales. En particulier il n'y avait pas de deuxième étage côté Genève et l'aile coté Lausanne n'existait pas. Le cloisonnement intérieur était bien sûr différent et l'on trouvait essentiellement au rez-de-chaussée trois grandes pièces principales d'une superficie moyenne de 60 à 70 m² : le salon ovale, une vaste salle à manger (actuels bureaux 17, 18 et couloir) et une généreuse bibliothèque-fumoir (bureaux 8 et 15). On trouvait également quatre salons. Le tout était décoré et meublé dans le plus pur style Empire.

En dessous du Bocage, en direction du lac, la villa La Pelouse venait d'être construite en 1853 par David Jacob Duval (1814-1891) dont les ancêtres firent fortune à Saint-Petersbourg, où ils étaient installés depuis le milieu du XVIII^e siècle comme joailliers de la Cour. Ils rentrèrent à Genève dans les toutes premières années du siècle suivant.

Tolstoï n'a, malheureusement, pas eu l'occasion de rencontrer ce voisin du Bocage. Lorsqu'il rendait visite à Alexandra il pouvait, probablement, apercevoir « *Le Temple de la Paix et de l'Amitié* »² construit par le comte de Sellon en 1838 à coté de la villa La Fenêtre. Il ne le mentionne pourtant pas dans ses écrits. Ironie du sort ? Funeste présage ? Cet édifice emblématique fut entièrement détruit par la chute d'un arbre lors d'un violent orage le 15 janvier 1946, soit moins d'un mois avant le choix de Genève comme siège européen des Nations Unies (le 12 février 1946) et 3 mois avant la dissolution de la SDN (le 18 avril 1946). Aucun des nombreux projets de reconstruction n'aboutira.

C'est lors de la deuxième étape de son périple dans l'ouest de l'Europe, d'une durée totale d'environ six mois, que Tolstoï s'est rendu à Genève. Après avoir quitté Moscou le 29 janvier 1857 (calendrier russe) il se dirige vers la capitale française où il séjournera environ sept semaines. Désirant rencontrer ses parentes, les deux sœurs Alexandra et Elizaveta (en fait il ne s'intéressait qu'à la plus jeune, Alexandra), il arrive sur les bords du Léman le 9 avril et s'installe dans le très confortable Hôtel des Bergues. Il y avait une génération d'écart entre Léon et les deux comtesses, mais seulement onze ans de différence avec Alexandra. Léon avait 28 ans et Alexandrine 39. Le Bocage abritait déjà les amours de la grande-duchesse et du comte Stroganoff et une autre idylle aurait pu s'y nouer entre Alexandra et Léon, si ce dernier avait été plus entreprenant et moins indécis. Ses relations avec les femmes

furent toujours très compliquées. Cependant, il se noua entre eux une sincère et très profonde amitié et ils continuèrent à échanger une abondante correspondance pendant près d'un demi-siècle, jusqu'à la mort de la comtesse en 1903. Dans le courant de cette année 2011 ma collaboratrice pour ces recherches³ ira consulter à Moscou les archives d'Alexandra Andreïevna Tolstaïa, ce qui nous permettra peut-être d'en savoir un peu plus sur son séjour au Bocage et sur les visites de Tolstoï. Ce dernier restera au bord du lac une quinzaine de jours, du 9 au 21 avril, durant lesquels il se rendra trois fois à la villa. Par la suite, lors de son séjour à Clarens et sur la Riviera vaudoise (entre le 21 avril et le 30 juin), il y retournera six fois et une dixième et dernière fois le 1^{er} juillet à l'occasion d'un nouveau passage à Genève. Ils eurent également l'occasion

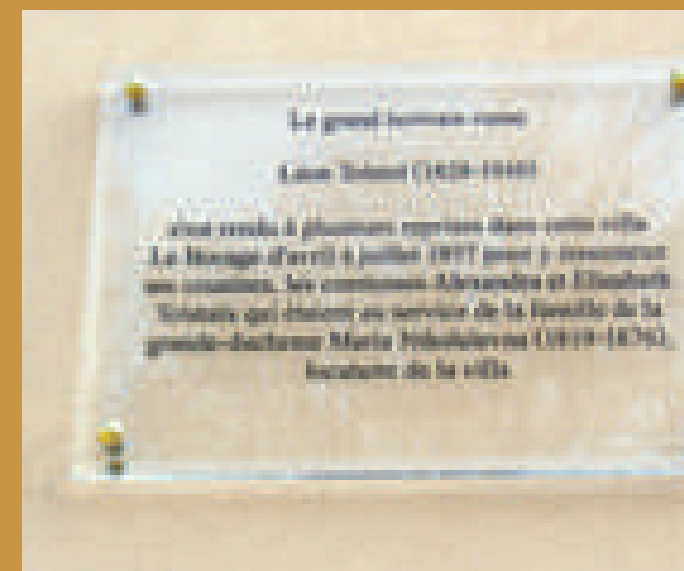


de gravir ensemble le Salève et de visiter Clarens ainsi que de se revoir plusieurs fois sur la route de retour vers la Russie.

...Cette plaque commémorative rappellera les passages successifs d'un des génies de la littérature mondiale et permettra d'avoir un autre regard sur cette villa [Le Bocage].

...Rappelons qu'un autre voisin immédiat du Bocage, le comte de Sellon (1782-1839), ayant fondé en 1830 la Société de la Paix, avait lancé un concours ouvert au monde entier « pour rechercher les meilleurs moyens de procurer une paix générale et permanente ». Voilà un programme qui aurait plu à l'auteur de « *Guerre et Paix* » et qui est une des aspirations fondamentales de l'ONU.

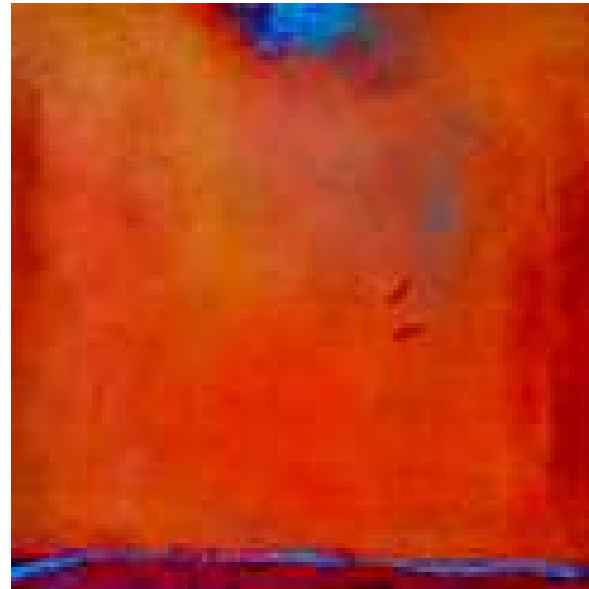
JEAN CLAUDE PALLAS



1 Monsieur Jean-Claude Pallas n'a pas pu assister à la respectueuse cérémonie organisée sous les auspices du Directeur Général de l'Office des Nations Unies à Genève, le 21 février 2011. Il a confié la lecture de son discours à Mlle Irina Gerassimova, ancienne chef du Groupe de la référence spécialisée de la Bibliothèque de l'ONU et amie très proche de Jean-Claude Pallas.

2 La série d'articles sur le Temple de la Paix et de l'Amitié a été publiée dans Diva International Diplomat, No. 1, 2020, pages 25-39, par Evelina Rioukhina, Ryan Kennedy et Oleksandr Svirchevsky, avec la contribution de Jean-Claude Pallas.

3 Mlle Irina Gerassimova a été la collaboratrice de Jean-Claude Pallas dans ses recherches. Leur article « *Léon Tolstoï à la villa Le Bocage* » est disponible sur le site de l'ONUG, rubrique Palais des Nations ([https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600581D0E/\(httpPages\)/6FC10502DAE464DAC12577F3005284EB](https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600581D0E/(httpPages)/6FC10502DAE464DAC12577F3005284EB)) et dans UN Special No. 702/Janvier 2011 (<https://www.unspecial.org/archives/UNS702/t54.html>).



Interview with **Peggy Hinaekian** artist and author

You are an internationally known artist. Could you tell us about how it all started?

My artistic career started very early in life, in Egypt where I was born and grew up. Having demonstrated above-the-norm abilities in drawing, I was encouraged by my father, who bought me the necessary tools to go ahead in my endeavors. I became an avid doodler and drew on any paper I could find – even in my text books. I took some art courses in my teens, but they were very unsatisfactory. The professor wanted to change my creations and interfered in my imaginary renderings. From then on, I was self-taught.

I immigrated to Montreal and started painting seriously and professionally. I had so much nostalgia for the relentless Egyptian sun that I would look at the snow falling outside the window and would paint sunny imaginary landscapes inhabited by people.

I gave my first solo exhibition in a gallery in Montreal. I also got an honorable mention for an abstract painting in a group show in Montreal. It was my first painting—vibrant colors. Abstract art was not known in Montreal in the late 1950s. I was surprised the organizers even accepted my submission. I had submitted a nude before, but it had been rejected because, I was told, it was not appropriate for child visitors. Yet, in Europe, nude statues are all over the public squares – different upbringing and cultural mentalities.

After a couple of group shows in New York, I settled down in Switzerland, where my artistic career took off in leaps and bounds. My first European solo exhibition was in Paris. I had excellent reviews in the newspapers. The Paris exhibition opened doors for me and encouraged me to apply to other

galleries in Europe, mostly in Switzerland.

I took a course in etchings in Geneva and produced quite a collection of them, their theme being intertwined human figures. I contacted print edition galleries in London, Paris and Rome, and my etchings then got distributed to other galleries all over the world. They can still be found online, being sold at auction.

Through a lot of moving around, working at a United Nations organization in Geneva, and raising two children, I never stopped painting and exhibiting. Painting was my passion. I finally opened my own gallery in Geneva which I had to close when I moved to the U.S.—again. I have done about 100 solo shows worldwide, numerous international art fairs, and my paintings are in private and public collections.

Do you think one is born an artist, or does one become one? If the latter, what did this mean for you?

I think one is born an artist. I really don't know how one becomes an artist if one does not have the talent. Maybe the talent is hidden and comes out later on in life. But, one can tell from children's drawings who has talent. Perseverance and a love for art can also contribute to becoming an artist, but only technically. I don't think imagination can be taught. To be a real artist, one needs imagination and going beyond the borders.

You have a long and impressive career. Looking back, what has been the most rewarding thing you have done?

The most rewarding thing I have done is take printmaking classes in Geneva. It opened international doors for me. Also,

participating in numerous international art fairs around the world made it possible to have international contacts.

Inspiration is key for an artist. Where does yours come from?

My inspiration comes from my life travels. Living in Egypt surrounded by desert, then living in Florida, surrounded by the oceans, have contributed to my inspirations. Actually, one journalist dubbed my work “Blue Reveries and Red Desertscapes”. I was also inspired by the colors of the New Mexican landscape. I can look at the ocean and an image comes to my mind. The same goes for looking at a desert landscape or the sky or the pavement. Inspiration is all around me. The colors in nature are fodder to my paintings. But I don't COPY nature, I distort it and invent it. The people in my paintings are also all from my imagination.

You live now in the US. Is there a difference in being an artist there in comparison with living in Switzerland?

Yes, there is a difference in being an artist in Switzerland and being one in the U.S. The difference is in the public. The public in Switzerland is more art-minded and receptive to art. This also refers to the whole of Europe. In the U.S. they still go for representational art. I am talking generally and not about the highly ranked galleries where people buy big names for investment. People in the U.S. want to understand what they are looking at. They are not curious to discover art they don't understand. They feel more confident in hanging

something that makes sense to them. Again, I am talking in generalities. There are the art aficionados in the U.S., but one has to look for them. I have met a few. I love it when a viewer can see something in my paintings that I do not see.

What are the key messages of your art?

I have one key message: help the public to see the world in new and innovative ways. Conceptually, I try to immerse the viewer in the perceptual experience of space, color and light. Therefore, my paintings actualize perception by carefully balancing these elements. I have a fascination with creative imagery that is an area of space occupied by floating forms that may join or float independently. Finally, by using color and texture, I try to breathe movement into my “abstract landscapes” to guide the viewer into the paintings and making the person wander into a different reality.

Finally, if one would like to buy your works, how should one go about this?

Anybody interested in buying my art should go to my website and either buy it through the site or contact me. I also do commissions. People have often asked me to do a similar painting in a larger size or do a giclée painting of an existing one. A giclée painting is, of course, much less expensive than the original one.

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Une collection révélée!

L'art des Nations Unies s'expose en Ville de Geneve

Cristina Giordano, Bibliothèque & Archives des Nations Unies Genève

Rapprocher l'ONU de la ville de Genève et de ses habitants "mission impossible" pensez-vous ? Et pourtant...

Michael Moller, Directeur général de l'ONU Genève de 2013 à 2019, a certes réalisé d'importants progrès dans ce sens. Pourtant, l'institution continue à être perçue comme une forteresse par le public. Les impératifs de sécurité, la pandémie de COVID-19 et les grands travaux de rénovation du Palais des Nations y sont pour beaucoup.

"Tout un monde – l'art du Palais des Nations s'invite en ville" expose, pour la première fois, des œuvres provenant du Palais des Nations à l'extérieur de l'enceinte de l'ONU. Madame Victoria Dzodziev, en est l'initiatrice.

Victoria Dzodziev et Francesco Pisano, Directeur de la Bibliothèque des Nations Unies

Arrivée à Genève comme étudiante, elle est aujourd'hui une femme d'affaires accomplie. Elle a même rejoint le monde, très discret et très fermé, du «tout Genève». Elle collectionne l'art moderne depuis vingt ans et a ouvert, il y a six ans, la galerie D10 Art Space pour aider un jeune artiste de talent. Genevoise d'adoption et de cœur, elle croit en sa cité internationale composée de quelques 140 nationalités. Un père russe, une mère ukrainienne, la déchirure entre ces deux pays la touche profondément. L'ONU l'interpelle avec ses institutions qui œuvrent pour un monde de paix. Pourquoi ne pas rapprocher les diplomates et les fonctionnaires onusiens des autorités genevoises et des milieux artistiques et financiers locaux autour de l'art, langage universel ?

L'ONU Genève recèle une collection de chefs-d'œuvre unique. Depuis un siècle, les dons des Etats à la Société des Nations ont enrichi la collection. Les œuvres sont exposées dans les couloirs du Palais des Nations, sans même être remarquées par les fonctionnaires. Pourtant, la Bibliothèque de l'ONU Genève a valorisé la collection en dressant un inventaire complet des œuvres. Les plus importantes apparaissent dans : <http://libraryresources.unog.ch/artworks>, une section spéciale du catalogue en ligne. En novembre 2017, la collection a reçu le prix des « Art Patrons of the XXIst Century », organisé par de prestigieuses institutions italiennes.

Si, jusqu'alors, il était impossible d'imaginer que les œuvres puissent quitter le Palais, c'était sans compter sur la volonté

et l'enthousiasme de Victoria Dzodziev, forte du soutien de la Directrice générale de l'ONUG, Madame Tatiana Valovaya, de celui de Francesco Pisano, Directeur de la Bibliothèque, et de ses collègues Blandine Blukacz-Louisfert, Cheffe de la Section de la Mémoire institutionnelle, Clara Gouy et Thomas Kryger.

Victoria lance le projet en pleine pandémie. Elle parcourt des kilomètres, dans un Palais des Nations désert, pour repérer les œuvres, comme une abeille butineuse à la recherche du plus fin des nectars. Sous son œil de collectionneuse avisée, l'exposition prend forme et est inaugurée le 24 juin 2020. Masques, gel et distanciation sociale s'invitent au vernissage.

Dans les espaces blancs de la galerie, les lithographies de l'artiste brésilien Otávio Roth illustrent les 30 articles de la Déclaration Universelle des Droits de l'Homme, en version simplifiée pour les enfants. «La Déclaration universelle, c'est facile», dit Victoria Dzodziev «Même les enfants peuvent la comprendre».

Un drapeau de l'ONU se tient près de «Pax», une œuvre de l'artiste italien Mimmo Rotella. Victoria l'appelle un «déchollage». Une colombe de la paix des plus classiques plane sur un monde fait de morceaux de posters arrachés, où les mots et les messages sont devenus illisibles. Une vision du chaos qui hante les relations internationales à l'heure actuelle?





La réflexion continue avec «Tribute 21», une série d'estampes de l'artiste américain Robert Rauschenberg qui, en 1994 déjà, abordait l'environnement, la technologie et la santé. Chaque tableau, composé de collages d'éléments hétérogènes, est dédié à une personnalité connue pour son engagement : Bill Gates, par exemple, pour l'estampe «Technologie». Dans le monde de Rauschenberg, il y a de la place aussi pour les arts: la littérature (estampe dédiée à Toni Morrison, qui venait de recevoir le prix Nobel en 1993), l'architecture et la musique. Et, bien sûr, le but ultime vers lequel toute activité internationale devrait tendre: «Happiness», le bonheur, l'espoir d'un monde meilleur.

Dans celle que Victoria appelle « sa chambre de force », les immenses planches de Günther Uecker sont constituées de quatre panneaux de bois, couverts de centaines de clous auxquels l'artiste a donné un mouvement circulaire. Le titre «De l'ombre à la lumière» (en original: «Von der Dunkelheit zum Licht») est un message positif et peut-être un clin d'œil à la devise de Genève, «Post tenebras lux». Une énergie singulière se dégage du bois et du fer employés par l'artiste allemand.

Dans «la chambre des pays», chaque œuvre offerte par un Etat Membre représente une culture différente. Les couleurs se répondent, en créant une sensation d'harmonie. Ce n'est pourtant pas la représentation d'un monde idéal: un travailleur prend sa tête entre ses mains dans «Malos tiempos» d'Eduardo Klingman, don de l'Equateur, «The Unknown Political Prisoner», don de l'Islande, se débat dans une cage mi-toile d'araignée, mi-Cube de Rubik. Les œuvres rappellent que les problèmes économiques ou les violations des droits de l'homme bien réels. Mais il y a aussi de l'espoir. «Les mains qui nourrissent» (titre original: «Hands that Feed»), don du Sri Lanka, sont des mains de femmes. Le Cercle féminin des Nations Unies évoque dans une peinture symbolique son action en faveur des idéaux de l'ONU. Une autre artiste équatorienne, Carolina Alfonso De la Paz, offre

une cascade de lumière colorée dans le tableau «Para seguir, para continuar»[Pour poursuivre, pour continuer]. Une colombe en pierre rouge du Monténégro vient se poser, avec grâce et féminité, sur une jolie table style XVIIIe siècle.

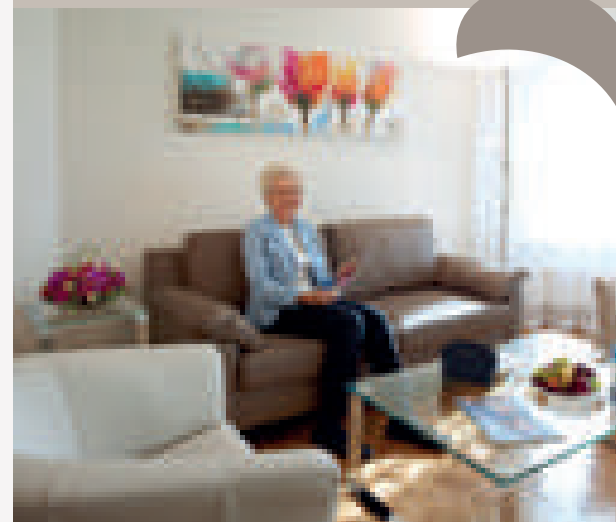
L'exposition s'achève avec quelques portraits: d'un maharajah indien, représentant de son pays à la Société des Nations, un selfie avant l'heure et de Fridtjof Nansen, l'éclectique premier Haut Commissaire aux réfugiés de la SDN. Explorateur, scientifique, diplomate, prix Nobel de la paix, son «passeport Nansen » donna pour la première fois un statut juridique aux réfugiés. On revient ainsi aux droits de l'homme, source de tout ordre international juste et équitable, et au travail des institutions multilatérales. La boucle est bouclée.

Nansen

Le dernier portrait est celui du «Cordonnier» de Zurab Tsereteli. Victoria Dzodziev connaît cet artiste, géorgien et russe, président de l'Académie russe des arts et fondateur du Musée d'art moderne de Moscou. Elle garde une reproduction de sa sculpture «Saint Georges et le dragon, ou le bien défait le mal» dans sa galerie. L'original a été offert à l'ONU à New York par l'URSS. Les sculptures de Tsereteli, gigantesques et grandiloquentes, ne font pas l'unanimité. «Le cordonnier» est aussi un tableau de grandes dimensions, coloré, qui fait penser à Chagall, mais son sujet est simple: le cordonnier façonne ses propres chaussures, il prend plaisir à un travail bien fait. Les diplomates, les onusiens, tous ceux qui portent la responsabilité de notre monde pourraient s'en inspirer. Victoria Dzodziev, par cette exposition originale, leur lance un message courageux et optimiste: malgré les critiques qui semblent menacer les résultats obtenus par le multilatéralisme depuis un siècle, les organisations internationales ne doivent pas se rendre, car «le bien vaincra toujours le mal».

Exposition «Tout un monde : l'art du Palais des Nations s'invite en ville» jusqu'au 30 septembre 2020 – Galerie D10 Art Space Geneva, en collaboration avec Lian Foundation . Contact : victoria@asd10.ch. Visite virtuelle : <https://gallery.asd10.ch>

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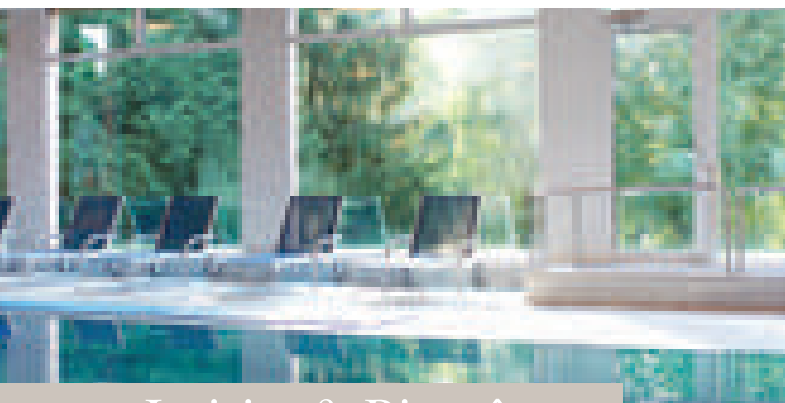
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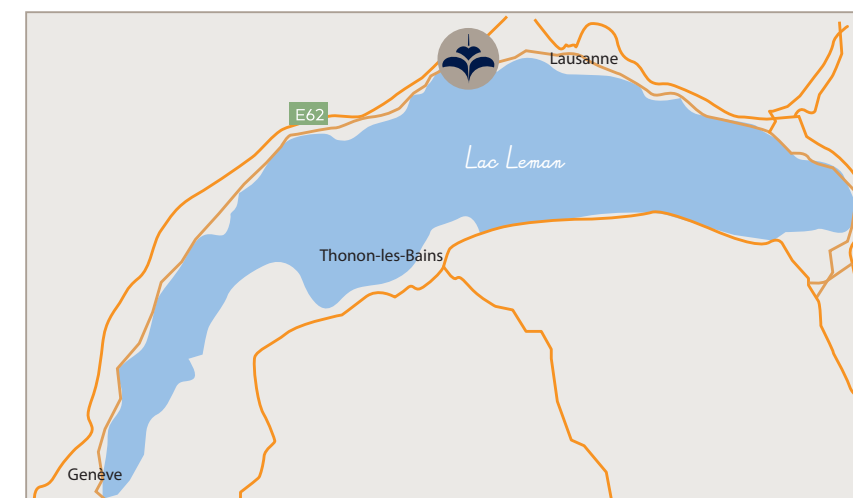
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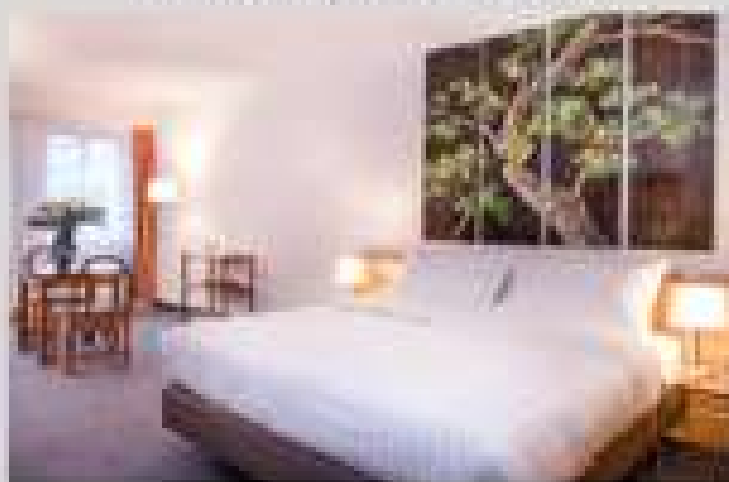
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