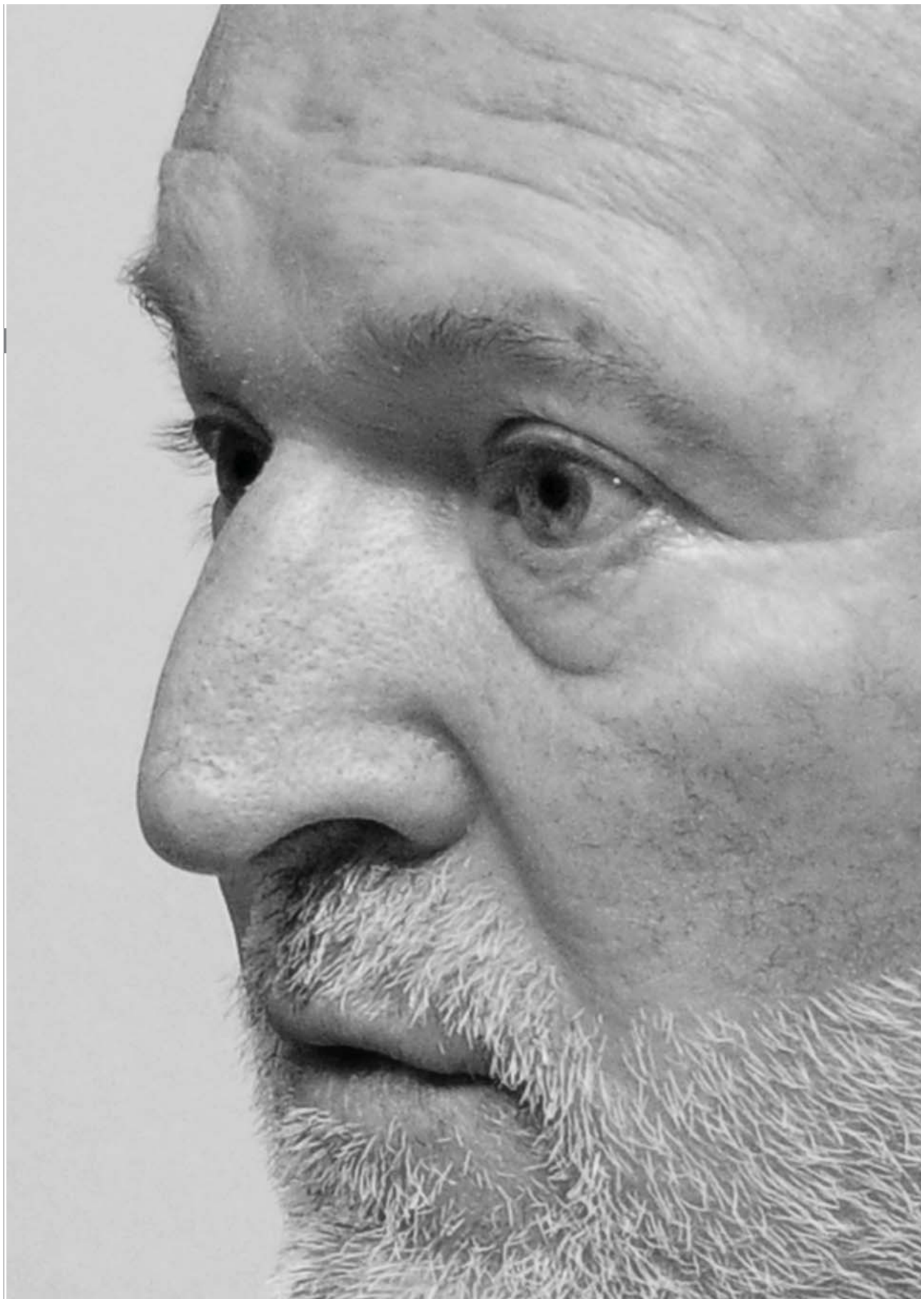


Interview

H.E. Ambassador Erwan Fouéré, European Union Special Representative and Head of the European Commission Delegation

**ROLE MODELS,
MORAL
VALUES AND
POLITICAL
CULTURE...
A PERSONAL ACCOUNT**



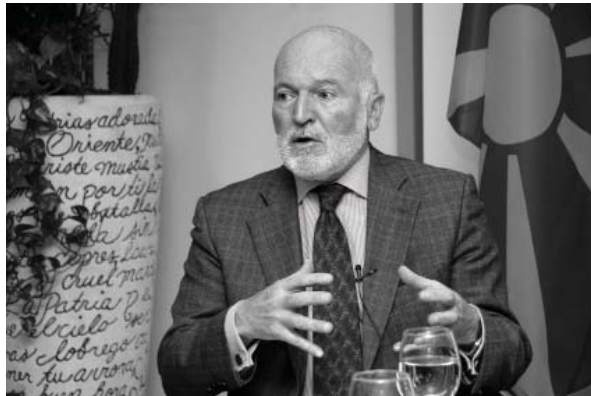


H.E. Amb. Erwan Fouéré (1946), Ireland, a career European official, who has served as Head of the European Commission Delegation in Macedonia, Slovenia, South Africa, and Mexico. Bachelor of Civil Law, University College, Dublin, 1967, Bachelor of Laws, University College, Dublin, 1968, Diploma in European studies, Institut Européen des Hautes Etudes Internationales, Nice University, 1969, Post graduate Research Assistant at the Max Kohnstamm Institute for European studies, Brussels 1970-72. Awarded the Order of Good Hope, Class II; Grand Officer by President Mandela (January 1998).

INTERVIEW:

His Excellency Ambassador Erwan Fouéré
EU Special Representative and Head of Delegation
of the European Union in RM

ROLE MODELS, MORAL VALUES AND POLITICAL CULTURE... A PERSONAL ACCOUNT



Ambassador Erwan Fouéré was one of the main inspirers of our project on political culture and dialogue, from which this publication originates, which we based on our talks over a year ago. One of the most remarkable and charismatic diplomats to have set foot on Macedonian soil since its independence, a man committed to his mission for Macedonia, he visited every square foot of the country, talked and listened to countless numbers of people. Popular with many and controversial to some, he made a difference during his mandate. This interview coincides with very difficult times for the Macedonian democracy, the closure of the EUSR office, and with the start of our long prepared publication.

At the end of our meeting he told us he would retire. That is hard to believe. We firmly believe that we will see him in action one way or the other in the many years to come.

INTEREST If you don't have dialogue then you don't have trust between the different communities and you don't move; you don't move forward. That's a constant waste of energy on trying to defend one's own interests, and the broader interest of society is totally lost.

CURE : What is your definition of political culture?

Erwan Fouéré: Probably the best definition of political culture is what I witnessed in South Africa, a country which had a system of apartheid, where the vast majority of the population was denied basic human rights. Then, we had a leader who spent 27 years in jail and when he came out, his whole mission was to preach reconciliation and promote dialogue and stretching a hand to those who had kept him in jail. And this for me was an extraordinary example of moral authority and of the highest values that so often is missing in our societies. Particularly in post-conflict societies like Macedonia, where you have different ethnic communities, different political interests, but where there is an objective which brings together the entire country: which is to move forward and be a part of the European family of nations. And the sad thing is that you don't have a culture of dialogue existing here.



So this is one dimension of political culture which is particularly important. If you don't have dialogue then you don't have trust between the different communities and you don't move; you don't move forward. That's a constant waste of energy on trying to defend one's own interests, and the broader interest of society is totally lost. This is why we have always been advocating strongly the importance of dialogue, in strengthening the political institutions and trying to reach political consensus. Another part of, I would say – political culture relates to laws and implementation of laws that govern society. For example – antidiscrimination. How to make sure that all practices of discrimination against people on the basis of: people with disabilities, their ethnicity, their religion, their sexual orientation - the least is a guarantee to prevent that from happening? We have

1 Interviewers: Xhabir M. Deralla, Herald Schenker, Ilir Ajdini, Dzvezdan Georgievski

the EU laws at the EU level, and it is an obligation for all member countries or all countries who want to become members to adopt all these laws and to implement them.

So, these are all values that in some societies might be accepted, but unfortunately, not in others – for historic reasons or other. It needs to be defined by law and there needs to be effective monitoring and implementation and so on. Another important aspect of political culture for me is that nothing is irreversible. This is what I have witnessed in the European Union, but also, in particular, in the Balkans. Even if you have established rules, if you have an established framework and all that, there is always a danger that, if the checks and balances are not strong enough, a different government will come in and put everything into question, in a manner which could go against the basic values.

DIALOG For me, the most important aspect of political culture is the manner in which the democratic institutions, like the Parliament, function. In that context, dialogue is absolutely the essence of a functioning Parliament and of course the Parliament is tributary to a political environment. If there's no dialogue between the leaders of the political parties – and I'm talking particularly of Macedonia, then there is no proper, functioning democratic process in the Parliament.

ity that has to be demonstrated by the government in power. Just because it has an absolute majority, that does not mean it can ignore opposition. On the contrary, it has a responsibility to reach out to the opposition and to create a climate more conducive for consensus building. This has been lacking over the past years in particular with this government. I take just one example, maybe I will be criticized for being very partial, but for me it was quite revealing. I arrived in November 2005. In 2006, the Parliament was debating the electoral law and the revisions of the electoral law. The Prime Minister at the time, as DPA was boycotting Parliament, he actually travelled to Tetovo with the draft to try to convince the DPA to embrace it and endorse consensus. That for me was an example of an effort at consensus on a very difficult law, which unfortunately, we haven't seen much of since.

For example, you have laws relating to media and the respect for the media, which vary a lot of course, but there are basic principles, that are inherent in the EU society, like respect for the independence of the media as a fundamental part of the democratic process. And now we have a new law, in Hungary, which will tend to limit that and which has been questioned by the EU institutions, and many other leaders have expressed concern. So, this is a society that went from a former communist process to post-neo and they tend to be going back to some of the practices of the past, so that's what I mean by irreversible. There needs to be much stronger checks and balances.

For me, the most important aspect of political culture is the manner in which the democratic institutions, like the Parliament, function. In that context, dialogue is absolutely the essence of a functioning Parliament and of course the Parliament is tributary to a political environment. If there's no dialogue between the leaders of the political parties – and I'm talking particularly of Macedonia, then there is no proper, functioning democratic process in the Parliament. And really, for a proper dialogue the government must take the lead and it must show openness, there is a magnanimity

CURE: May we take you back to the subject of South Africa? I was there on a study tour, and I would like to share an impression with you. What amazed me there was the optimism of those people after the fall of the apartheid, their confidence that authorities are doing something for the benefit of everyone. For example, you probably know it, cab drivers, sales persons, everyone, have the constitution of South Africa in their pockets. They were showing it to us, saying that we are their citizens, too...

Erwan Fouéré: Yes, great pride. They had a role model, Nelson Mandela, who really demonstrated that despite of the very divisive history, they can come together. It was in a sense, a miracle, a wonderful example of how reconciliation can work, but you need leaders who really would drive the process, it won't do it on its own. And it needs to be nurtured.

CURE: Do we have such leaders here?

Erwan Fouéré: Well, unfortunately, not just in Macedonia but in other countries as well, we are lacking leadership, we are lacking people who have courage and vision, like Vaclav Havel, who despite all the odds, really managed to bring the country through difficult time. Also, in Northern Ireland, we reached a peace agreement which



was very painful. I think, we are the only example in modern society where we gave up – Ireland gave up – a piece of its territory, Northern Ireland, and we had to change our constitution to accept that, in order to make peace with Britain. That was the courage and leadership of the leaders, which enabled lasting peace to come to those islands. You have other role models, like Mother Theresa who instilled a sense of moral values, by her own work, by her own example. These are models that can inspire, they emphasize that our society is shaped not by machines or procedures, but by people. We can really make a difference.

CURE: There is a contradiction between the reality of society and the legal reality. You can have the best laws, but if the society is not able to implement them, to back them, you can revert it many times, by just having another government. Now, you have had this experience not only in South Africa, but also earlier in your life, you were confronted with all kinds of variations of political culture. Would you want to draw a comparison?



Erwan Fouéré: Well, the most immediate one was Slovenia. I was there when they were preparing and finalizing their accession negotiations with the EU. There – what struck me was that – consensus prevailed, but that’s because the leaders really drove that. They had a professional public administration that was highly respected. The chief negotiator who is now commissioner, Mr. Potočnik [Janez Potočnik, the European Commissioner for the Environment], again gave an excellent example of inclusiveness in establishing a very direct

dialogue with all the different actors. He was an excellent example of creating a climate of trust with all the leaders. Latin America had other challenges as well. I set up the first EU missions in Mexico and Cuba, where there were human rights issues, there still are, also refugee issues, etc. Laws were not enough, we had to try to convince the regional leaders of the importance of respect for human rights and the importance of the rights of refugees and also, we had to go and mediate on the spot. I remember one case where there were refugees from different communities, living side by side and some of them had access to water and the others didn’t. They were fighting among themselves. There, on the spot, we had to mediate and to find a compromise. It’s not easy sometimes, but if you establish a trust with the interlocutors, then it makes the whole task better and more acceptable.

I guess a lot of that has come also from my childhood, when we were political refugees from the war. We were confronted with human rights issues and we were instilled with this imperative to always ensure proper respect for human rights of individuals, political refugees and that sort of things. That marks you for life, I think. And also, what is important is the direct contact with people through dialogue.

Again, South Africa is a great example, because of the amount of patience exercised by the leaders: sitting, listening to the people for hours. I’ve been to many villages, we had water projects and everything – and it was the villagers who ran everything. We would listen to what their problems were and then we would come up with solutions because everybody respected each other. There wasn’t arrogance. If the leaders come or the headman comes and doesn’t listen, that arrogance doesn’t help. A big problem with the political climate here is that the political leaders, the government, don’t listen at all, they have this arrogant attitude that everything they do is correct and that decisions on whatever are correct. Putting a funicular up Vodno or putting up all these monuments, they have the authority to do it, they have the money and therefore they will do it – rather than considering to open a consultation with the citizens, to find out what the view of the public is on these things, do they agree or not, particularly in a country where the resources are so limited. So again, it all comes down to dialogue and to respect of one’s political opponents.

CURE: You just mentioned you belong to a family of political refugees. Could you tell us about those days and how that affected your future?

Erwan Fouéré: Yes, indeed. I was born just after the war, but my father was very active in the Breton movement, to get recognition of linguistic rights for the Celtic minorities. There were many Bretons who were accused for collaboration with the Germans. This was a very easy accusation to discredit all the Breton movements and what they aspired, what they stood for. There were more people in prison immediately after the war than during the war in France. It was a very difficult period of retribution and “instant justice”, which really took many years to recover from.

So, my father went into exile after spending a year in prison without trial, he was sentenced in absentia. We went to Wales, because the Welsh nationalist party knew about the persecution of the Bretons at the time and welcomed all the Bretons and all other minorities. Eventually, we moved to Ireland and my father’s case was the first one that came before the court after the war, about five years after the end of the war. The charges against him were declared null and void and he was completely exonerated. By then we had established ourselves in Ireland and we started setting up our life there. But, he always maintained his views and his campaigning for the rights of minorities. He is now a hundred years old and he’s written many books and many of those are textbooks, used in universities, on the rights of ethnic minorities in the European federation. He established very strong links with many minority communities in Switzerland, in Italy, Austria and this has been very much a part of our life. My mother said that when she married my father she also married his political cause. She is also alive, she is ninety-three and I guess what kept them alive for so long is their mental and physical activity and also their dedication to their values and principles that they instilled in us.



I was always interested in European affairs and European integration. I set up the first Irish students’ European association at the university in Dublin. Also, I was vice-president of the Young European Federalists for quite a few years. I was very active. This was the time of the dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, when we were campaigning actively. I was in Amnesty International, writing letters for release of political

prisoners. So all of that marks one's life and I've always had a particular touch-to-print importance to human rights issues, I guess because of that childhood experience.

CURE: Do you have any more experience and examples to tell us about Slovenia? Maybe, as it is the closest country to Macedonia, in terms of the mutual past, meaning half a century in the same federation. Is there anything that Macedonia should learn from Slovenia or maybe from another country, apart from the impressive examples that you mentioned elsewhere in the world?

Well, one thing in Slovenia that made the accession process so successful was the personality of the chief negotiator and also the methods. He established a core-negotiation team, where you had representatives of the government, technical people, political parties, civil society organizations, business community and the media. So, each time Slovenia went to the negotiations in Brussels or elsewhere, people knew that what was presented was really the view shared by all political forces and actors in the society in Slovenia, which made the voice of Slovenia very strong, very effective. If you have a situation when a negotiator goes and it is known that behind him there is a country that is totally fractitious, where there is no interaction, where there is no inclusiveness in the negotiating process, then it weakens the voice.

Certainly, I think that Macedonia will have to take a leaf out of Slovenia's book, with regard on how negotiations should be conducted and they need to behave in a totally different manner to what they are now. They are really not making the effort to reach out to the civil society or they are being very selective, and this creates this terrible division in society that you have here. It also creates this fear which is totally unnatural. It is very sad because it is affecting the contribution that citizens can make to civil society and organizations, to the development of the country. Slovenian experts came here, offered technical expertise, they offered it all, but here the trouble is there is no continuity: you train some people and six months later they are gone. This is something that really weakens the government's capacity. I worry that as we approach elections, whether they would be early elections or normal elections that this intimidation and filling up civil service with party foot-soldiers will increase. This creates a terrible situation. It is poison which is being sown, and it will bear poisoned fruit for years to come.

CURE: In other words, the level of the political culture in Macedonia is still quite different from the one in Slovenia...

Erwan Fouéré: Yes, it unfortunately leaves a lot to be desired. I think that even though there are some good MPs, some good civil society organizations, this divisiveness, this polarization and this tendency by the governing party to divide people into what they call patriots and traitors, this is really the worst recipe for a country.

CURE: In the beginning, when you were talking about South Africa, you mentioned vision. I think it is the key. Do you see a common vision for the future of this country being developed here?

Erwan Fouéré: Unfortunately I think this is what is lacking here. The vision that we see is more a vision for each political party of how to stay in power, to have its own agenda. It is not a vision of the country as a whole that really can make a difference in order to achieve the objectives that the country has set itself, objectives that have the entire support of the people. All the citizens of Macedonia – that's the greatest asset that Macedonia has – to be all so much in favor of the European Union. Until such time arrives, there is a long term vision for the country, which is really one, which reflects the interests of all the sectors of society and of all the citizens.

Here we have this abusive power, I'm afraid it's abusive power and again it reflects the approach here: for many it is about how to share the spoils of power with one's friends and party foot-soldiers, not how to ensure that the power that is exercised



is one which will really bring benefits to all the citizens, irrespective of their political affiliation. It's a big concern to see that at the municipal level, you have a small minority of municipalities that are run by opposition mayors, where they have terrible problems to have their voices heard, because they are opposition. This is not right, all the decisions relating to the distribution of regional funds need to be much more transparent, and need to be on the basis of objective criteria.

This was one of the points that were mentioned in the progress report, to emphasize the importance of the continuing decentralization process. The short answer to your question is that you need people with that long term vision for your country.

CURE: We've been discussing a lot about the manner in which some politicians behaved towards your work and personality. How would you judge the personal attacks on you? Is that a consequence of lack of political culture or elementary manners? Or both?

Erwan Fouéré: Both, I'm afraid it's a bit of both. Again, these are actions that undermine the image of the country and demonstrate a total lack of understanding of how the European Union operates. The impression, I think they were trying to make, is to try to show that I was giving my own personal opinions, whereas all that I do here is on behalf of the European Union. I'm the messenger. But somehow, they wanted to twist whatever I said, to say it's just my personal views. I think, the most shocking experience was in the European Parliament, where the MP Mr. Gjorchev spoke out in a man-

ABUSIVE POWER Here we have this abusive power, which reflects the approach: how to share the spoils of power with one's friends and party foot-soldiers, not how to ensure that the power that is exercised is the one to bring benefits to all the citizens, irrespective of their political affiliation.

ner which shocked all the MP's who were there. They couldn't believe that this was happening. But again, it demonstrated to the members of the European Parliament the situation here. It was a lack of culture and a lack of basic human values, I would say. It is very sad, because, after all, he comes from a party which promotes Christian values. I didn't see anything Christian in what he did, at all. I'm sure, as Mandela always says, that in every individual there must be something good, somewhere, but I have yet to find it.

CURE: Do you regret anything during your mission here? Anything that you believe you could have done better? And, do you think that the European Union has a share of responsibility for the low level of the political culture and weak democratic capacity of the country?

Erwan Fouéré: On that point, no, I don't think so: we have tried, we have been very consistent all the time, on what we believe is needed to be done. So, unfortunately, at the other end, the interlocutors did not want to take on board these recommendations and advice, even though it was repeated many, many times. So yes, I do feel very sad that all these values we're talking about sometimes are totally forgotten and that political dialogue is very often purely declaratory. Also, the commitment to EU reforms often tends to appear as if we're doing it because the EU says so, not because it's good for the country. I mean, even the Prime Minister last week was quoted when



he was criticized for being closer to the East than to the EU, he refuted that, rightly, but he said: if we were closer to the East, we wouldn't be spending all this time adopting painful reforms from the EU. This for me was quite shocking, because after all, these are reforms which are necessary for the country, even if the EU wasn't there. They are reforms that have been tested in all the other countries that joined, in 2004 and so on. They are reforms in public administration and judiciary that are vital to ensure that the interests of the citizens are fully respected, fully met.



Also, we have been at the receiving end of so many petitions from citizens here. My policy is that we respond to every petition even if, unfortunately, we cannot intervene in individual cases, but I believe that they address us because we are the last resort. And it's symptomatic of a dysfunctional legal system, of a dysfunctional administrative system, where they get no response when they address their petitions to the government or to a minister, to an MP. This is, again, a failure of a government to respond to the aspirations of the citizens, to respond to the problems that are evident there.

But nevertheless, I am very satisfied that we have maintained a consistency in our approach. I have a dedicated team that works all the time, I am very proud of what we have achieved here with my team, who are all deeply committed despite the criticism we get and sometimes this commitment is forgotten by those who criticize us; also the amount of financial resources we are investing here, grants in average of one hundred million euro a year, which is an enormous amount. I think, citizens throughout the country do appreciate that greatly, because when I travel around it is always so gratifying to see the response of the citizens in every community, even in the remotest community. This to me is very heartwarming and I share this with all my staff.

CURE: How would you judge the impact, the effect, of the low level of political culture, of political dialogue on the rule of law and the democratic development, especially regarding the respect of human rights and respect for minorities and especially in the area of discrimination, i.e. anti-discrimination efforts and processes in the country? What is the balance between the two areas, political culture and dialogue on one hand and democracy and rule of law on the other? Where should we start? What should we do?

Erwan Fouéré: As I mentioned at the beginning, an important way of defining political culture is how those rights are respected and how society responds to all these issues, relating to discrimination, etc. Of course, citizens take their lead from the elected representatives, but if the elected representatives of the government of the day promote policies which in fact enhance the prejudices then this is not helpful at all. One example was the debate on the antidiscrimination law, where the EU was heavily involved. We sent in submissions, the Commissioner sent a letter to the Prime Minister,

stressing the importance of an all-inclusive law, which really would create a very positive environment and would help to eliminate these prejudices. But unfortunately because of the attitude of some of the governing MPs that debate was extremely divisive and it exacerbated those prejudices, rather than reducing them.

Now we have this stupid debate on same-sex marriages, as if there was a queue of people wanting to register. It's not an issue, but unfortunately because it has arisen, suddenly, it's been used. Or the advertising on the abortion question, which is a very sensitive question. In Ireland, as you know, it was very, very, always very difficult, but at least there was a greater sensitivity in dealing with this than what we witnessed here. We have a manipulation by some groups who try to push through an agenda, which is not reflective of a democratic society, an open society. It's only raising latent prejudices. One can deal with prejudice or a latent prejudice by dialogue, by discussion, open discussion. That's what's lacking here, unfortunately. There I think, what CIVIL has done, what other civil society organizations have done is very important, because it's raising awareness of the dangers of these prejudices and is creating a greater tolerance in society. I hope gradually this will become the norm. The voice of civil society is vital in these areas.



CURE: About Macedonia's main problem, regarding international relations, the dispute with Greece... What is the level of political culture and political maturity of the actors in this country (government, parties, civil society, intellectuals, etc.) when it comes to the name issue, the dialogue and the means of communication with Greece, and in particular, Macedonia's treatment of the international community's advice? What does it express about our culture?

Erwan Fouéré: Well, again, I think an atmosphere of divisiveness, when there should be an effort to promote a consensus around this and when I compare the atmosphere now, on this issue, to the atmosphere when I arrived, there's a world of difference. Now it's got much more emotional, much more confrontational and all this focus on identity - this of course is a perfectly correct concern for any citizen. But identity, as we've said many times, is not something that you negotiate and the name issue is about the name of the country, however illogical it may be, it's the political reality, there needs to be a solution to it. This was made clear by the European Union. We're very encouraged that the two prime ministers have been meeting, etc., but now there needs to be some sort of solution.

There was this – in my view – misuse of the identity issue for purely domestic political motives by this government. This has made the solution much more difficult; there is not a proper preparation of the citizens. This emphasis on the ancient history, how-



ever – yes, it reflects the history – but first of all, why now? Why do this now and why provoke in this environment? As you know, there were these unfortunate decisions, renaming the airport and also renaming the highway. As a result of that decision, the government lost 60 million Euro of Greek money, which had been committed to building that highway. But because the name was changed, that money was lost. There was no need to do these provocative acts, but they were done. This has made the final solution much more difficult. I have also said that the European Union is not in the business of changing people's identity. Identity is something sacred to each individual, to each nation and it's not something you can negotiate on a piece of paper. For me, Macedonians will always be Macedonians; the language will always be Macedonian, Albanian, etc. There can be no question about that, but the name is the stumbling block.

Because of the tactics of this government, unfortunately, I have to be frank, Macedonia lost a lot of friends in the EU, who were very keen to help Macedonia and put more pressure on Greece, I'm sure of it. But – because of these actions, one after the other, all these statues and everything else, all this money being spent, despite the high unemployment and people living in poverty – the friends said: What's the point? They had no stomach anymore, to put pressure on Greece. I think this is going to make the final solution much more difficult. There needs to be preparation of public opinion. If I look at my own country, I told you about how painful our decision was, to give up a piece of our territory, but the government prepared public opinion well in advance, this was important for the long term future of the country, of the region, to bring us prosperity, investments and all that. The proposal was overwhelmingly adopted by all the citizens. A year later, the government was reelected, to demonstrate the vision and the courage. This is what we need here.

**CURE: We haven't been able to exploit all our questions and issues.
Would you like to share a final thought with us?**

Erwan Fouéré: Well, there are so many thoughts that I will take with me when I leave Macedonia, but certainly the one thing I will cherish the most is the warmth and the friendship of the people, the hospitality of the people, even in the remotest areas, as I mentioned – you are welcomed with open arms. And what I also really enjoyed is the attachment to the local traditions. We are losing many of those traditions in our western societies, but here you have this really special attachment to these traditions, by the younger generations, as well. This is part of the fabric of society here, sort of bearers of value, as the Irish Nobel poet laureate, Seamus Heaney would call it: “bearers of value reflecting the moral and cultural tradition of a country”.

Also, what I’ve greatly appreciated here is the spirit, the very strong spirit, people really want to move forward, they want to get things done, but of course, they are frustrated when they don’t see a reaction from the elected political leaders. There needs to be much greater interaction between the citizens and the elected leaders. For me, it’s the strength of determination, this warmth and the friendship, that I hope, I’m sure, will be preserved by the citizens. I have always greatly appreciated this extraordinary hospitality that was extended to me, all over the country, whether I was going up Vodno or jumping in the Ohrid Lake or anywhere else, it was always great; I was very privileged to be here during these years.

CURE: Can we connect a question to that – How many clones of you are there actually? There are a lot of people saying that you cannot possibly be in all those places at the same time. Is there any place that you haven’t visited in this country?

Erwan Fouéré: (laughs) Thank you. Well, actually I did see someone dressed up as me at the Vevchani carnival. I get my energy from the people and also from my people, from my staff. I feel very motivated when I meet world citizens. For me, I think it’s a part of the work we must do. It’s not in Skopje where we would feel the pulse of the Macedonian nation. It’s not here that we can penetrate the heart and soul. The only way we can understand the Macedonian soul is to travel, to go out, to meet the poets, the writers and all those who express all of these values, the musicians, that I’ve been privileged to meet. These are all things that I will certainly remember and cherish.

