

# Afterword: ‘In the Beginning Was the Election’

A Personal Contribution from Francesco Frangialli.

*The Executive Council chooses the Secretary-General: Manila 1997, Natal 2001, Nessebar 2005*

Every four years, a frisson of excitement runs through the World Tourism Organization. We’re entering an election period! A Secretary-General will be chosen! All international organizations, including the United Nations, go through such electoral periods.

All else being equal-the World Tourism Organization has terms-of-office lasting two or four years. Every two years, its sovereign body – the General Assembly – meets, bringing together all the Members: states, territories, enterprises, associations, non-governmental organizations. At the Assembly session, the member countries vote on a biennial budget and a programme of activities. They renew half the members of their governing body, the Executive Council. The Council members, like the Secretary-General who heads the Secretariat, are elected for a term-of-office of four years.

Appointed by vote, and-since the innovation I introduced in 1997-elected on a programme, the Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization is something more than just a senior international official. It is true that diplomatic dealings and alliances – or oppositions – between countries can come into play in the Secretary-General’s appointment, and the origins and nationality of the candidate also matter. On the whole, however, it is a fundamentally democratic process in which the determining factor is the ability of the candidate to convince the countries that he represents the best choice for the institution and for them.

Pursuant to Article 22 of the Statutes, ‘*on the recommendation of the Council, the Secretary-General shall be appointed for a period of four years by a two-thirds majority of the Full Members present and voting at the Meeting. His mandate shall be renewable*’.<sup>1</sup>

*Après moi le déluge!* Following the practice of other international organizations, UNWTO decided in 2005 to limit the number of terms of office of the Secretary-General to two. But this provision was adopted far

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<sup>1</sup>The sovereign states.

implementation in the future and did not apply to me. I have been elected three times: 1997 (Assembly in Istanbul), 2001 (Assembly in Seoul and Osaka) and 2005 (Assembly in Dakar). Barring a rollback, which seems improbable, it will not be possible to surpass this record. In November 2015, my successor, Taleb Rifai, said he would not seek re-election at the end of his second term.

The provisions of Article 22 should not be misconstrued: while it is true that the mandate of the Secretary-General is conferred upon him or her by the supreme organ that is the Assembly, there has never been an instance of a candidate presented by the Executive Council failing to be appointed by the Assembly. Politically speaking, therefore, it is in the Council that everything is played out. The United Nations and most of the organizations related to it have put in place similar procedures.

The UNWTO Executive Council is a body composed of one member of the Council for every five Members of the Organization. It had 26 members in my first election and 28 in my third. Given the Council's geographically balanced composition, the members of what amounts to an 'electoral college' are scattered around the globe, and campaigns need to be waged taking advantage of these electors' presence in previous sessions of the Council, major international conferences or fairs or by visiting them in their own countries. I calculated that for my first election in 1997, I flew a distance equal to that from the Earth to the Moon!

Voting in the Council for the selection of the Secretary-General is secret. In 1996, at a session held in Tozeur, Tunisia, we specified the rules for the election in order to guard against possible difficulties. These rules covered procedures for the submission of applications; the introduction of an oral presentation by each candidate; how to proceed if a member country is suspended for not being up to date with its contributions; as well as whether or not to allow a country to be represented by another. It was a wise precaution – the latter two issues would emerge a few months later at the session in Manila, Philippines, where the election was to be held.

The designation of the Secretary-General by the Executive Council feels like a family gathering. It is true that, in principle, it is the countries, not individual representatives, who decide the direction of the vote. But some heads of delegation are family members of the UNWTO and may have their own inclinations. Perhaps more than in other comparable international institutions, the personal dimension comes into play, for example, when the decision is left to the representative of the country or is influenced by him or her. It may even be that, taking advantage of the protection afforded by the secret nature of the vote, the head of delegation could ignore the instructions received. I calculated that in Manila (when I was a candidate for the first time), I benefited from the votes of six delegates (of whom, to my great pride, four were women) who had ignored in my favour the instructions given by their diplomatic authorities.

To be a candidate for the position of Secretary-General of the UNWTO, one must necessarily have the support of one's own country.<sup>2</sup> With Antonio Enriquez Savignac having left his post in 1996, less than two years after having been brilliantly re-elected, I was in charge ad interim of the functions of Secretary-General until the election scheduled a year and a half later. Many delegates, rightly or wrongly, identified me with the institution. It was therefore quite natural that I came to consider running.

Anticipating no difficulty, I went to the Quai d'Orsay (the French foreign ministry) to visit the Director for international organizations and the United Nations, to ask for his support. He was quite kind and sympathetic but indicated that this would unfortunately not be possible. France, he informed me, was engaged in many competitive processes of the same nature, and he did not see himself campaigning in an additional election and asking our ambassadors to carry out more approaches to the governments of the countries where they were posted to solicit support for another French candidacy. I explained that, as Secretary-General ad interim and being well known to the member countries, I thought I was in a rather favourable position. He agreed, but that was not enough to win an endorsement. An inspiration then came to me: I said that I was not asking for any funding, and that the campaign I intended to carry out would not involve the need for 'bilateral mutual support' a diplomatic practice whereby two countries, through an exchange of beneficial actions, support one another's candidates in different institutions. I requested only a *note verbale* giving me the official support of France. This formula was found palatable. The Director gave me his consent and sent the *notes verbales* to the governments of the members of the Council. My campaign could begin! I learned later that, from the 13 high-level posts open that year, France had presented 12 candidates and had been defeated 11 times. The only exception was the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which was added almost as an afterthought!

We were four candidates. I was in competition with Moustapha El Alaoui, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Tourism of Morocco and cousin of the king of this country; Ignacio Aguirre, former Secretary-of-State and Ambassador of Spain after having been adviser to the UNWTO's first Secretary-General and founder, Robert C. Lonati; and Dawid de Villiers, former Minister of environment and tourism of South Africa. These were indeed three heavyweight candidates.

'Dawie', in particular, was an extraordinarily accomplished figure. After studying philosophy and theology, he had become a very young parliamentarian. He had served several times as a minister in the 'white' governments of his country and as ambassador to London. He was a liberal and, with close relations with Frederik de Klerk, he had negotiated with the future President

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<sup>2</sup>This is not the case in all international institutions; In UNESCO, for example, one must be presented by a member country, not necessarily one's own.

Thabo Mbeki the transfer of power to the ANC (African National Congress), the end of apartheid, the conditions of the transition and the new constitution of South Africa. It was therefore only natural that he found himself again in the post of minister after the 1994 elections and the change of majority. In 1996, after the national party left the national unity government, he decided to reconsider his future career. It was Antonio Enríquez Savignac and I who urged him take an interest in the UNWTO. Little did I imagine that a few months later, after the electoral process had been opened, I would receive a call from him to inform me that he would be running against me. But he did so in a spirit of great sportsmanship – Dawid had been 22 times captain of the Springboks team and was better known to South Africans for rugby than for politics.

My three competitors enjoyed prestigious support: the King of Morocco for one; that of Spain for another; Nelson Mandela for the third. Quite a lineup! Backed only by my 'essential services', I began to feel a bit forlorn.

'Promises are binding only to those who believe in them.' Charles Pasqua was not a participant in the election, but I kept his words in mind. Moustapha El Alaoui, Ignacio Aguirre and I were garnering support, official or not, written or spoken. I estimated that the cumulative number of promises made was between two and three times that of the countries comprising the Council. But the die, then, had already been cast...I had carried out my campaign and 'locked up' a significant number of votes. Many of these were from countries where my competitors had the support of the head of state... but I had that of the delegate who was actually to vote.

Ignacio Aguirre, for his part, had a formidable weapon: the promise of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that a voluntary contribution of 50 million dollars would be made to the UNWTO if he were elected. Selling the same horse time over time, Ignacio cheerfully promised this financial manna to the member countries of the Council one after the other. Spain was indeed throwing in everything for the election of its candidate. While the French ambassador in Manila opted to offer a very traditional cocktail reception for the delegates at his residence (this was the only expense incurred by the French Government for my election), Spain organized an event which was reminiscent of the most glorious times of the 'Invincible Armada'. The *Juan Sebastian Elcano*, the training ship for the Spanish Royal Navy, a magnificent schooner with four masts and a crew of 257, which by a happy coincidence was calling at the port of Manila, was instructed to remain at harbour up to the date of the election – to the great delight of its sailors, who thus had more time to enjoy the hospitality of the pretty Filipinas. As a Grandee of Spain, Ignacio Aguirre was able to receive his guests on board the day before the election, but this would not be enough. The *Juan Sebastian Elcano* was going to be his *Titanic*!

In many countries, the ministries responsible for tourism, or those ministries of economy when tourism was attached to them, such as Portugal or Chile, leaned in my favour, whereas ministries of foreign affairs, which usually called the shots, had taken on other commitments.

As for Chile, my friend César Gómez, National Director of Tourism, had done everything possible to ensure that his country supported me. But, obliged by Hispanic solidarity, Chilean diplomacy had committed in favour of Spain. However, once this formality was fulfilled, he confirmed that he would feel free of any obligation in the event of a second round. So I was counting on Chile, as I did with Tunisia and also Portugal, for a backup vote in case I did not reach the 14-vote majority required in the first round.

The situation of Mexico's vote was very similar. As ambassador to Costa Rica, Ignacio Aguirre was well known and highly esteemed in this part of the Americas, as confirmed to me – by the French ambassador to Mexico, Bruno Delaye, whose support I felt would just be token. However, I did not lose hope, as I had excellent relations with the charming Minister of Tourism, Silvia Hernández. Shortly after, she ran into one of my most ardent supporters, Frank Pringle, a senator and a minister from Jamaica, and told him that she had decided to vote for me.<sup>3</sup>

However, 'the fat was not yet in the fire'. A week before the Council session, King Juan Carlos made an official visit to Mexico City. The Spanish diplomatic corps was well organized and had prepared a letter which it transmitted to President Zedillo, who, upon the departure of the King, called Silvia Hernández to inform her of the commitment he had just made to support the Spanish candidacy. Undoubtedly disappointed, the minister decided not to go herself to Manila but rather to send her deputy.

With Mexico, I had yet another vote in reserve in case of a very possible second round.

Cameroon's vote was quite the highlight! The minister of this country, Pierre Souman, had assured me of his support, and I knew I could trust him. But the UNWTO's session coincided with the general elections, where he was running for a congress seat in the north of the country. He therefore apologized and informed me that he was designating his technical adviser, Dionysos Mballa, to take his place with precise instructions to vote for me.<sup>4</sup>

But I then looked at the flight schedules and came to the conclusion that it was by no means certain that the said adviser would arrive in time. I therefore called the French Ambassador to Yaoundé and asked him if he could, as a precaution, have a mandate of representation from Cameroon sent to his colleague, the French ambassador in Manila. This he did with even more dispatch. The election came, but not the diplomat from Washington. So it was to the great despair of the three other candidates to whom the vote of Cameroon had also been promised, that our ambassador in Manila – very dignified, but not really having an African appearance – rose to cast Cameroon's vote in my favour.

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<sup>3</sup>In my opinion, Frank Pringle was the archetype of the old British colonial. Sitting down one day at a hotel bar, he ordered a whisky: 'Give me a whisky-a double. I hate to drink alone'.

<sup>4</sup>The name has been changed.

The story of Russia's vote was quite different, but equally fraught with the unexpected. At the end of January, in Madrid, I was visited by my friend Sergei Schpilko, a former rowing champion, and the number two man of the Russian Agency for Sport and Tourism. At the time, Sergei spoke English with difficulty (he has made progress since then), but to my surprise he asked the Russian-speaking official who was accompanying me to leave the room. First, he thanked me for everything I had done for his country as Deputy Secretary-General. Then he began to talk about the coming election, saying he had good news and bad news. The bad news was that his boss, the President of the Agency, had been approached by Juan Antonio Samaranch, President of the international Olympic Committee (IOC). I was only half-surprised. I knew that for his campaign, Ignacio Aguirre was relying on two Spanish friends and eminent international personalities, Juan Antonio Samaranch and Federico Mayor Zaragoza, the Director-General of UNESCO.

After hearing the bad news, I couldn't imagine what the good news could be. 'The good news', said Sergei, 'is that my boss will not be able to come to Manila. He has designated me to take his place. I will have his instructions for the vote, but I know that it is secret'. We agreed to speak no more of it, and we didn't. There was just the wry smile that Sergei Schpilko flashed at me as he stood up to vote.

Back in Madrid after the election, I invited Ignacio Aguirre to lunch to heal the wounds. Then, of course, we talked about the votes. With the secret balloting, we could not be sure of some of them. 'There is at least one about which I have no doubt', said Ignacio, 'Russia. They voted for me'. I didn't have the heart to disillusion him.

Now the big moment of the election finally came. The Council met under the chairmanship of Slaheddine Maawi. By consensus, in order not to 'contaminate' the rest of the session, the agenda item concerning the election of the Secretary-General was placed at the top.<sup>5</sup> We began with our oral presentations. The first, that of Ignacio Aguirre, was a good performance without any surprises (the 50 million was mentioned). Mine came next – very technical, and probably too long. While a photo of the King of Morocco was projected on the screen, Moustapha El Alaoui, when his turn came, surprised the audience with a highly impassioned presentation and a video. Dawid de Villiers, lastly, was brilliant as usual, but did not go beyond vague statements. The perfect amateur that he was, he had forgotten that we had to go through this exercise, and had prepared nothing.

The moment of voting arrived. As stipulated by the rules, the candidates went out of the meeting room after finishing their presentations and, as it happened, found themselves gathered around the coffee machine. The coffee had barely begun to flow when the Chairman of the Council called us back

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<sup>5</sup>This practice has been followed for subsequent elections.

into the meeting. There was a procedural problem. Morocco, which had presented a candidate and was sitting as an observer, objected to Ghana voting. That country was in arrears with its contributions, and Morocco suspected, not without reason, that the delegate would not vote in favour of the Moroccan bid. The Chair turned to the Legal Adviser, the international law professor Alain Pellet, who recalled the rule we had established at Tozeur, which was modelled on the practice of the United Nations: if any member of the Council objected, the country concerned could not vote; conversely, if no one objected, the right to vote would be exercised normally. Slaheddine Maawi consulted the members of the Council accordingly. Perhaps not to ruffle the exuberant lady minister of Ghana, Vida Yeboah, no one opposed, and she was able to vote to the great fury of Morocco which, not being a member of the Council, could not oppose it. Morocco subsequently held Tunisia (it had nevertheless voted for Moustapha El Alaoui) responsible for the failure of its candidature.

The counting of the votes began. With the number of voters being 26, the absolute majority required in the first round was 14. The tension was palpable. My name came out quite often at the beginning of the count, and then my tally remained stuck at 13 until the last envelope was opened – it was in my favour. The final tally was France 14, Spain 7, Morocco 3 and South Africa 2. The election had been decided in the first round, barely, but it had been decided.

The delegations of Spain and Morocco, each of whom had truly believed they would win, trusting in the promises received, were deeply shaken. Ignacio Aguirre suffered a slight dizzy spell and was taken to hospital for observation. Only Dawid de Villiers, who had gone through the entire affair with detachment, seemed hardly affected. He was among my possible choices for the post of Deputy Secretary-General. The next day I made the proposal to Dawie. Africa found itself represented in the leadership of the UNWTO by an elegant sportsman, blond with blue eyes!

Four years later, in 2001, my re-election came under the best auspices, which is not necessarily always the case at UNWTO. In 1985, Robert Lonati, after some prevarication, tried to run again – one too many times – and had to give up. Willibald Pahr of Austria was elected over Dina Essakali, Morocco's candidate.

Back in 1989, and to the surprise of many, Pahr, the outgoing Secretary-General, had been defeated by Antonio Enríquez Savignac. The campaign had been very tense. Pahr made the mistake of letting the Council session take place in Cancún, in the backyard of his Mexican competitor, who took full advantage of the resources this situation presented. I was then my country's Director of Tourism, and I had delegated my international relations officer, Alexandra Subremon, to represent France at this session, as I had opted to go on another trip on the same dates to Japan. On my return, my colleague described to me the vexed face of the ravishing hostess whom the Mexican organizers had arranged to accompany me, and who had seen her arrive

instead of me. The other 'companions' did not suffer the same disappointment and were able to demonstrate their expertise...

The election that was looming was not nearly as exciting. The only problem that arose for me in 2001 had to do with my relations with the host country, Spain, which were already beginning to be difficult. I had beaten its candidate four years before, one of their best diplomats, and the sting had not completely gone away. Above all, taking into account the increasing decentralization of public competences in the field of tourism in the developed countries, I had taken initial steps, which I was to develop later, in order to strengthen the position of the local authorities in the life of the UNWTO. Spain, entangled in its regional problems, drew a line in the sand in this matter. Scathed by the defeat of Ignacio Aguirre, it dared not, however, try its luck again. It therefore sought a volunteer among the Latin American countries. The problem was that all of them were satisfied with my management and supported me.

So to Natal, Brazil, we went. Spain's Secretary-General for Tourism, Carlos Güemes, made a long statement, alternating criticism and encouragement. The secret nature of the deliberations does not allow me to be certain, but I believe that in the end he voted for me. 22 member countries took part in the election. I obtained 21 votes and there was one blank ballot.

I had announced that, if re-elected, I would continue to form a team with Dawid de Villiers.

One could not imagine a more loyal, pleasant and devoted deputy.

In 2005, I again found myself in a favourable situation. Although the tension with Spain was far from having subsided, I had achieved a great coup with the transformation of the UNWTO into a Specialized Agency of the United Nations, a process that went more easily and more quickly than one would have dared hope. Tourism was beginning to be recognized for what it was by the international community, and everyone could see it, starting with the host country which was also reaping rewards from this new stage. It became difficult to accuse me of neglecting the intergovernmental nature of the UNWTO when, thanks to my efforts, we had become an integral part of a system based on this very principle.

Yet Spain, more than ever, was focused on the issue of local authorities and wanted me replaced. In 2003, at the General Assembly in Beijing, it had secured – in clear contradiction with the Statutes – the non-acceptance of the territory of Bermuda as an Associate Member, whose candidature was put forward by the UK. Spain was not alone. Even France lent a friendly ear to this rejection. Paradoxically, those countries which at the domestic level were making progress towards decentralization, refused to accept the consequences of the same

principle in terms of international relations. How could one understand this? Moreover, this issue was alien to most developing countries, which were uninvolved in any form of decentralization or even de-concentration. This narrow vision, which prevented us from being fully present in parts of the world where responsibility for tourism development was devolved to autonomous, albeit non-sovereign, territories, discouraged me.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, the Executive Council was drawing near. It was to be held at the coastal resort of Nessebar in Bulgaria, where Dimitar Hadjinikolov was at home in more ways than one – I later learned that he had a personal financial interest in the hotel where his government had organized the session!

Our three presentations reflected our respective personalities. Mine was entitled: 'Consolidate, build and prepare'. It was based on progress achieved over the course of a decade and outlined further advances to be made, the main one being the fight against poverty through the development of sustainable tourism, particularly in Africa. It was a great programme, in which personal conviction was naturally conjoined with electoral interests! Tanya's platform was also like her – more enthusiastic than concrete. Its very title reflected this: 'World view. Broad tourism understanding. Extensive organisational development and transformation'. What this meant exactly, I leave to sharper minds to understand! Hadjinikolov's ambitions were more modest. For him, it was a matter of making himself known, rather than getting elected. He agreed with everything that I proposed and supported me totally – to the point that upon listening to his oral presentation, Tanya quizzically asked me sotto voce how much I had paid him!

The vote came. The result was clear. Out of 28 countries I received 20 votes, Tanya Abrahamse 6 and Dimitar Hadjinikolov 2 (it would seem, the vote of his country and that of Russia). To take the place of Dawid de Villiers, for whom the time had come to retire, I chose Taleb Rifai. An architect by training, he had won my esteem as Minister of Tourism and Antiquities in his country, Jordan, and as Chairman of our Executive Council. He was a senior official of the International Labour Organization and had very valuable experience in the United Nations system. He would succeed me in 2009.

Immense gratitude was expressed for the unfailing support received from Spain. Of this I never had a doubt!

*The General Assembly elects the Secretary General – Istanbul 1997, Seoul-Osaka 2001, Dakar 2005*

After the political choice represented by the selection of an applicant by the UNWTO Executive Council, the vote of the Full Members constituted a

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<sup>6</sup>Oddly enough, in the United Nations Charter, territories with advanced decentralization – such as Bermuda – because they were likely to move towards independence, are called 'non-self-governing territories'. They do, nevertheless, govern themselves – very much so.

formality, even if the sovereign states that make up the General Assembly are required to approve it by a two-thirds majority. The same applies to the United Nations. The Assembly decides on the only name submitted to it, and the procedure is not clear on what should be done if, by some happenstance, the single candidate thus presented were to be rejected, for example, if new elements were to come to light between the time of the choice by the Council in the spring and that of the confirmation by the Assembly in the autumn.

In accordance with the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, the heads of delegation are called one by one to approach the ballot box and cast their vote. This is a lengthy process and can take up to two hours. That is why the President of the General Assembly, while recalling this procedure and stating that it automatically applies, usually proposes that an exception be made and that a vote be taken by acclamation. But, it is immediately pointed out that if any country preferred to adhere to the normal procedure, such procedure would automatically be followed.

In my first election in 1997, the General Assembly was held in Istanbul. When the Turkish Minister who presided over the session raised the question of the procedure to be followed, the Lebanese Minister, Nicolas Fattouche exclaimed: 'It looks like it could take hours! Come on, we applaud all the choices of candidate'. His outspoken enthusiasm convinced the Assembly to follow him and elect me without further ado.

In 2001, the vote by acclamation also went smoothly. On the other hand, in 2005, in Dakar, there was a glitch. Spain was reluctant, when other countries were in favour of the vote by acclamation; and it fell to me to recall that if even one country objected (in this case, Spain), individual and secret balloting was obligatory. My reaction was, however, appreciated. I obtained no less than 85 votes out of the 114 countries that participated in the election.

On assuming office, the elected Secretary-General presents his report to the General Assembly. This is a natural opportunity for him to outline what he intends to do for the next 4 years. Generally, I would deliver this long major statement in three languages: English, French and Spanish.

In general, countries sometimes have some difficulty in admitting that the head of an international organization, just because he holds the country's nationality, is *not* their representative. In accordance with Article 24 of the Statutes of the Organization, I had taken an oath not to accept instructions from any government including my own. I was repeatedly reproached over this, openly or implicitly, but it did not bother me too much. Perhaps, pre-disposed to this by my origins as a magistrate at the Court of Auditors, where an oath of independence and fidelity is also made, I quite liked this situation, and, perhaps wrongly, I made no effort to hide it. After all, I was only a diplomat by accident.