

A self-made man behind the Sorbonne-Abu Dhabi

Some newspapers have called Pascal Renouard de Vallière the “Prince of Lobbyists”. What is a lobbyist? Someone responsible for acting on someone else’s behalf to negotiate a contract, set up a deal, and, more generally, achieve a goal. The lobbyist’s greatest asset, and the reason he is called upon, is his social network and address book. Lobbying, although fully recognized and appreciated throughout the world, is often vilified in France, where the word "network" is uttered with a combination of fear and disdain. Those who do not believe in lobbying are hypocrites: aren't families the oldest of networks? In fact, this occupation is as old as Herod, and as crucial as a cornerstone to a building’s sturdiness. With regard to goals, it is difficult to imagine one more ambitious or noble than that of Pascal Vallière, who gave his time and talent over years to create a branch of the prestigious Sorbonne University in the United Arab Emirates!



Born in Issy-les-Moulineaux, Pascal de Vallière grew up in the Belleville area of Paris. One of his first jobs was thematic compilations of fashionable songs and "mixes" at a time when community radio stations did not yet exist. Luck (but luck has to be sought at times) brought the young man before a Saudi prince who, impressed with his work, preempted all future musical endeavors.

Thanks to his irresistible audacity and enthusiasm, Pascal de Vallière soon became one of the prince’s right-hand men and came to know the reigning family of Saudi Arabia. In 1983, he left to work in Saudi Arabia at the age of 22, and remained until 1996, acquiring greater insight into the country and its mindsets every day. In 1990, he created the Association des Relations Franco-Saoudiennes.

In 1996, he transferred his business to Cairo to better fulfill the needs of his growing social circle, which had by then extended significantly beyond the borders of the Saudi Kingdom. In fact, a personal friend of Prince Sultan Bin Faisal Al Saud, the direct nephew of King Fahd, he also manages the private interests in France and Europe of a number of members of the reigning family and businessmen throughout the Arabian Gulf.

Throughout these busy years, Pascal de Vallière perfected his business as an advisor in international relations. His social network is impressive and he dreamt of using it for great causes.



In June 2004, he was struck by an intuitive idea. One equal to the man. In other words, almost excessive. Pascal de Vallière's effectiveness starts with his physical presence, an enthusiasm for life and unequalled dynamism, topped off by an amazing ability to persuade. But none of this matters as much as his major strength:

This individual is authentic and generous, whether in his actions, his beliefs or his word. Above all, and this is what opens every door, his sense of friendship is legendary and no one remembers having ever asked for help and not receiving it. Finally, his passion for French culture and his country, more than an affirmation, is a true driver.

Which brings us back to his 2004 idea: he was accompanying the spouse of the Egyptian president, Suzanne Mubarak, in whose honor a conference was being held at the Sorbonne Paris IV. On the sidewalk where the official party was expected, Pascal de Vallière started talking with the President of Paris IV, Jean-Robert Pitte. He expressed surprise at there being no sign of French values, culture and language in the Middle East, a region in which English and American universities compete with each other for center stage and the elite of the Arab world. In a later discussion, he very simply proposed creating a branch of the Sorbonne in Abu Dhabi. He was also behind another fabulous project, the Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi. His career abundantly illustrates the entrepreneurial spirit of a pioneer.

Jean-Robert Pitte, fascinated by a Sorbonne project in the United Arab Emirates, remained somewhat skeptical about its chances of success. Pascal de Vallière then advanced the initial investment and took the President of Paris IV to Abu Dhabi. This was the beginning of a number of years of disputes and tough negotiations ... but the obstacles in no way demoralized our advisor in international relations. Rather, they seemed to strengthen his intent to succeed. He threw himself entirely into the battle using his own funds.

On February 19, 2006, the Minister for Higher Education and Research, Gilles de Robien, signed the agreements on the creation of the "Paris-Sorbonne-Abu Dhabi" university at the Emirates Palace.



Official recognition soon followed. On November 5, 2007, Olivier Dassault, Member of Parliament and President of the Group d'Amitié France-Emirats Arabes Unis, awarded Pascal de Vallière with the Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite medal in Sorbonne's grand amphitheatre. On this occasion, Jean-Robert Pitte gave a moving tribute to the recipient for his idea to carry one of the most prestigious symbols of excellence in French culture over to lands he never thought he would see. And for its successful journey.

In January 2010, Bernard Kouchner appointed Pascal Renouard de Vallière Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

Unfortunately, not all the parties to this historic event have done the same. Despite promises at the highest of levels, Abu Dhabi's authorities, surprisingly forgetful and ungracious, have still not paid the project leader for his work, nor reimbursed the many expenses he incurred.

Pascal de Vallière is legitimately and deeply distressed about this situation, although monetary gain was never and will never be part of his generous nature. In fact, what is most hurtful is these people for whom, by virtue of their origin and ancestry, a man's word is universally recognized as an ancestral tradition of greater worth than any type of signature, are lacking in honesty.



It is the first time in his life that he has seen distinguished individuals from the Arab world he so loves (his second culture, his second homeland) fail to be honorable. He is as hurt as if he himself had betrayed his own word, something he could never do himself, as everyone knows.