

Communication of Civilizations

Special interview with H.E. Dr Jorge Luis Jure Ambassador of Uruguay

PERSONAL QUESTIONS:

My Lebanese background in Uruguay:

Being Uruguay a laic and old-standing liberal melting pot since the XIX Century, my Lebanese, Italian and Spanish roots mixed without problems.

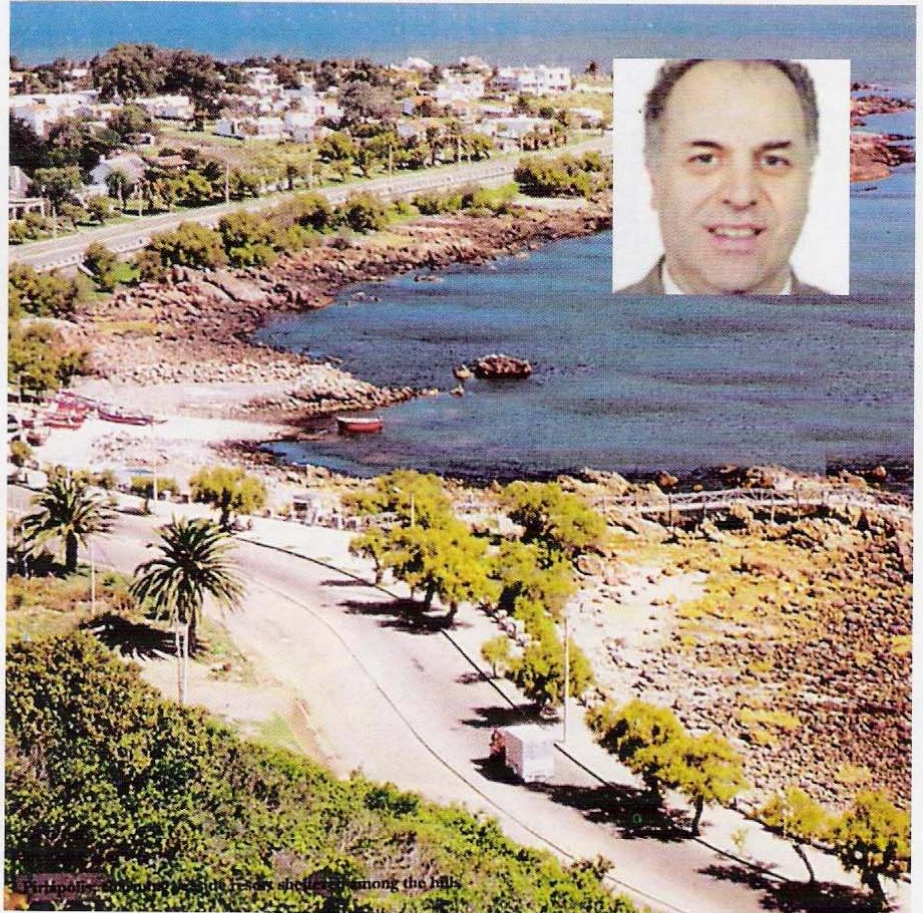
Because like a Uruguayan humoristic writer, named Wimpy, used to say: as Mexicans descend from the Aztecs and Peruvians from Incas, we Uruguayans descend from ships!, meaning we all are immigrants in one or other generation.

We all feel Uruguayans regardless of our multiple roots. These origins become old stories, food, images of different landscapes and an inclination to be warm-hearted toward the countries of our ancestors, namely in my case, Lebanon, Spain and Italy (or, more likely, Chabtaine in the Batroun, Asturias and the Piedmont).

Also the fact that religion has long been considered a private affair, having the Uruguayan State no official one since the beginning of the XX Century, helped the multi-ethnic, multi-origin Uruguayan population to mix, as did inter-marrying or having no single-national origin neighborhoods: there is nothing like an "Italian quarter" or Russian, French or Lebanese one, since they all mixed up several generations ago.

Diplomatic career:

I feel that all that the curiosity for all those different backgrounds of



my Country prompted my interest in traveling, knowing other peoples and finally led me to the diplomatic career.

After studying Diplomacy in the university, I joined the Diplomatic vice in 1978. The diplomatic life took to work as Consul of Uruguay in New York, where I enjoyed and shared activities of a large Uruguayan community and where part of my family finally stayed to live. Later I went in post London and Paris. Attached to friends from each of those countries, I have always tried to keep in touch with them there.

Being now posted in Lebanon has been my personal and odd choice of a Country that I value and admire for its problems and which I mostly identify with my Lebanese family's traits of compassionate warmth, dignity and love.

These experiences have made me realize that lasting peace is, at the end, depended by the personal attitudes of citizens more than by the decisions of the political leaders. Knowing and trying to

understand and accept different people might give us the encouragement to keep conquest, racism and exclusion in the waste bin.

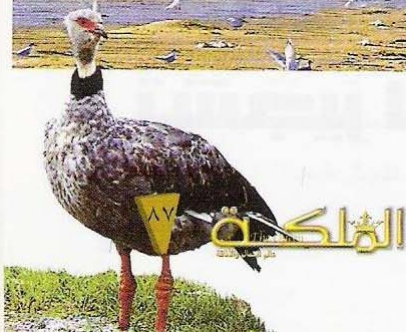
GENERAL QUESTIONS:

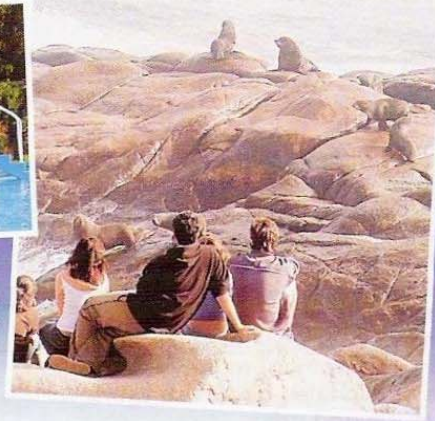
The Uruguayan Embassy:

Having a large Lebanese Community in Uruguay, the third largest after the Spanish and Italian ones, makes this Embassy to work closely with those Uruguayans who are descendants of the old Lebanese who arrived in my Country and their relations in Lebanon.

Other more traditional aspects of our Embassy's job is promoting the good products of Uruguay, like its cattle, meat, fish, rice, textiles, paper pulp or soy beans.

My Country is considered a quiet, stable and environmental respectful one and for those reasons has attracted many foreigners to live there, some of them choosing to spend their time in busy Montevideo or pleasant Punta del Este, both sea-side cities, for their retirement





and to defend its Nation of foreign intervention. But this was only true after decades of internal divisions pitting the Republic into "international civil wars", where different factions' war leaders allied alternatively with one or other of the more powerful neighbors, Brazil or Argentina, and the European real powers of the mid XIX Century, France and Britain.- By 1870 the "international civil wars" had been so violent, that one English author, William Hudson, wrote a novel about life in Uruguay, called "The purple land", depicting with this tragic name its soil dyed with the blood of its people.

For it was during most of the XIX Century that we learned by the hard way that, as our national hero José Artigas had put it bluntly in 1814: we couldn't expect anything but from ourselves.

Politics:

Gradually stabilizing and then flourishing out of its libertarian traditions, by the end of the XIX Century Uruguay became a laic, very liberal Republic. Good trade with Europe and British investments made it a well off Country, attracting literally hundreds of thousands of immigrants, many of them Lebanese.

Several decades of social reform tackled from the beginning of the XX Century gained the Country the label of being the first Welfare state in the World.

Slowly, that old convulsive land of Uruguay became, due to its peacefulness, progress and stability known as "the Switzerland of the Americas". The political system was made more inclusive and instead of having one President of the Republic, we had, starting in 1917, a Governmental Council, with 7 or 9 members, divided between majority and minority. The system, called "Collegiate Executive Power", inspired directly from the Swiss, worked in and out until the 1960's, where it was recognized as inefficient and replaced by a Presidential one.

Laicism, the neutrality of the State regarding religion, proved, since its beginnings in the 1870's, to be a factor of stability and integration in the Country. Religions –or the lack of them- remained respected as a private, personal affair. The laicism of the State was viewed as a way of protecting the individual against discrimination for his/her personal convictions or religion.

Many Lebanese descendents have been involved in politics and public affairs, including Senators, Deputies, Ministers, Diplomats and even one Vice President of the Republic, Dr. Alberto Abdala.

Economy:

Uruguay's wealth and strategic value laid primarily in its vast prairies, well-

years.

Some Lebanese are now discovering how good a-time they can enjoy in Uruguay, where there are no social or legal differences between someone born there or abroad.

The Country is ready to receive all Lebanese who want to invest, settle or just enjoy the Uruguayan cultural life in winter or its social events and beaches during the summer.

More knowledge about Lebanon in Uruguay and vice versa is-imperative to bring closer two Countries whose people can culturally understand each other easily. When you ask me about movies I think that screening the film "Caramel" in Uruguay will prove that people from all over the world share the same basic values of life and love. Filmmaker Nadine Labaki shows how tender and humorous a Country that has suffered so much as Lebanon could be.

QUESTIONS ABOUT URUGUAY:

History:

Well placed in the South Atlantic, between Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay was born of its fiery determination to keep its liberty as a people, while recognizing itself as part of the South American Nations.

The first struggles, after the fall of the Spanish Court in 1808, were to be equally sovereign than the Portuguese Empire of Brazil or the Spanish Viceroyalty's Capital, Buenos Aires, while looking alliances with them both. The leaders of what finally became Uruguay fought at that time to create a defensive league and federation with the neighboring states, not accepting on the other hand to be submitted to any of them.-

Departing from Independence, achieved in 1830, they fell though into internal political divisions that lasted most of the XIX Century.

One might assume that being an independent and small State between two big and powerful ones, would have just prompted Uruguayans to be proud

fed and numerous cattle, its meat, wool and leather, as well as in its strategic geographical position in the crossroads of the South Atlantic Ocean and the big rivers that come from the heart of South America into the Estuary called River Plate (Río de la Plata).

Later, from the turn of the XX Century, the textile and leather industries, as well as its ports and banking sectors, established themselves as some of the main sources of income.

Presently, fishing, wine, rice, grains and wood, as well as software and paper pulp add to the core of the exporting

the Uruguayan team won again the football World Cup in 1950, but since then has been placed 4th, 12th, or even lower in the World rank.

Nevertheless, the passion for football goes on and it's said that Uruguay counts with 3 and a half million of football coaches, meaning that every man and woman, regardless of age, is well opinionated about this sport.

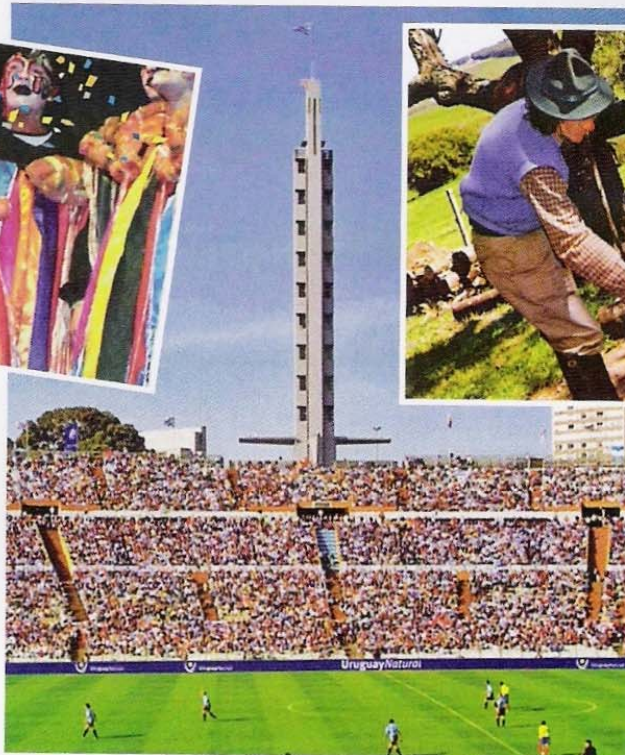
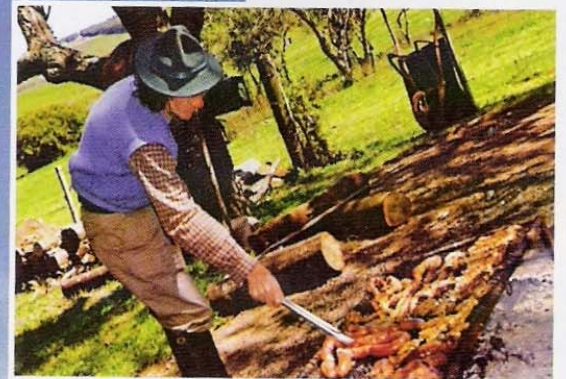
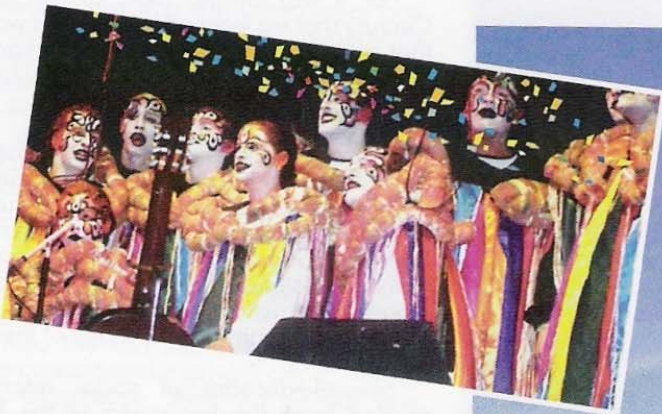
Music and arts:

Land of the famous tango "La Cumparsita", composed by Gerardo Matos Rodríguez, an Uruguayan student, in Montevideo, in 1917, the Uruguayan

every facet of Culture in the Country as in its political or commercial life: Rosa Acle and Adela Neffa in Fine Arts, Dadh Sfeir or Jorge Curi, among others in Theatre, Ivan Kmeid in Poetry are only a few names with Lebanese echoes that excelled in the Arts.

Cuisine:

Profiting of an abundance of good beef, Uruguayan meals rarely lack meat, either in barbecues or in a variety of dishes, mixing well with Italian and Spanish recipes of pastas, spinach and vegetables quiches and salads, fish, a large variety of cheese and Uruguay's



industry sector. Services, principally ports, tourism, transport, banking and construction constitute more than 80% of the Gross National Product.

Some features of the Country, as being formed mostly by immigrants, the smallness of its population, which amounts for only 3 and a half million of inhabitants in an area 18 times larger than Lebanon, a long egalitarian tradition and sound social policies from the beginning of the XX Century, have made of Uruguay a middle-class society, that enjoys low-profile values, little inclined to big media events, worried to solve the problems of poverty and, on the other extreme, ready to nest relaxed jet-set life.

Culture:

Sports:

The British influence, so present in all South American throughout the XIX Century up to the II World War, brought with it which is undoubtedly the passion of every Uruguayan: football and sports in general, including beach volley and football, basketball, sailing, rowing or rugby.

First World Cup champion in football in 1930, after winning Gold medals in the same sport in the 1924 and 1928 Olympic Games,

musical roots include, besides the tango, the more purely African "candombe", rhythm brought by the slaves in the XVIII Century to Montevideo, Uruguay's capital. Although population of African descendant only accounts for around 4% of the population, the candombe rhythm is considered a national one by all people. During Carnival crowds of all background parade following the candombe drums.

Many painters enjoy international recognition: Blanes, Pedro Figari, Frasconi or Rimer Cardillo, to cite some. Torres García, one of the founders of Constructivism in Barcelona, Paris and Montevideo, has left an influential school that continues to attire followers inclined to his comprehensive vision of the Universe and its representation.

Uruguayans with some Lebanese origin have been as much present in



national sweet, "dulce de leche", a milk and sugar spread.

Wines are all of French varieties, brought by the large Basque immigration. "Tannat", the best known variety, is a XIX Century derivation of the French "Madiran". Cabernet Sauvignons and Francs as well as Chardonnays are regularly awarded in the European wine competitions.

