

THE OTHER SIDE

Alfredo Rocafort, President of the Royal European Academy of Doctors

I am 67 years old. I am from Barcelona in Spain. I have doctorates in economics and business administration and in law. I am married and have two daughters, Andrea (28) and Alba (21). Politics? I am a liberal. Beliefs? I am a practising Catholic. I am the president of Europe's most active academy of doctors.

“WE BRING TOGETHER WISE PEOPLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOCIETY”

“You have two doctorates...”

“Yes, in law and in economics and business administration. Plus seven honorary doctorates from various universities on four different continents.”

“Not bad!”

“It’s not such a big deal... compared to others such as the Israeli biologist Aaron Ciechanover, winner of the 2004 Nobel Prize in chemistry, who has no fewer than 75 honorary degrees!”

“Is that important?”

“They are a reliable indicator of excellence in a given field of knowledge, and it is worth grouping such people together in the interests of society as a whole.”

“How is that?”

“This is what we do in Barcelona via the Royal European Academy of Doctors (the RAED). Its numerary members hold doctorates in a wide range of disciplines.”

“What disciplines?”

“Health sciences (doctors, psychologists and so on), social sciences (lawyers and economists, etc.), the humanities (philosophers, anthropologists and others), experimental science (chemists, physicians and so on) and the technological sciences (architects and engineers).”

“And how many academicians are there?”

“There are currently 89 of us, but our statutes allow for up to 150 numerary academicians.”

“What is required to become a member?”

“You need to be a European with a doctorate, and with accredited evidence of merits in the fields of research, creativity, innovation or similar. Our acceptance committee studies each candidacy with great thoroughness.”

“What is the purpose of such an academy?”

“It is a uniquely multidisciplinary academy, which allows us to cross-fertilise knowledge and put it into the service of society as a whole.”

“How do you do that?”

“We hold conferences that are open to the public, we publish books and periodicals containing valuable contributions from our members, and so on. And we offer our services to anyone who might require them.”

“Who, for example?”

“Public institutions, or private ones. We are asked for opinions designed to improve state policy, or for the incorporation of measures of social responsibility.”

“You must be happy with this...”

“That is our aim! This also helps us to finance more activities, as we are currently maintained by the membership dues of the academicians themselves, some of whom are highly relevant members who have joined recently.

“Who are the latest new admissions?”

“The aforementioned Aaron Ciechanover, the urologist Josep Maria Gil-Vernet (who is 94 years old), biochemist Björn Nilsson (who is also the President of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences) and Ismael Serageldin, the Director of the Library of Alexandria, among others.”

“What have they had to do?”

“Enlighten us, with admission speeches and public responses from corresponding numerary academicians, regarding the value of their knowledge.”

“But I see that not all of them are European...”

“This is true. In these cases, we confer the status of corresponding or honorary academician.”

“Are there any more Nobel Prize winners?”

“The medical doctor Ernesto Kahan (institutional Nobel Peace Prize), and the mathematician Eric Maskin (Nobel Prize in economics), along with six more who will be joining us in 2017.”

“Six Nobel Prize winners! Who are they?”

“Alvin Roth and Cristóbal Pissarides (Nobel Prize in economics), Erwin Neher, Richard John Roberts and Werner Arber (Nobel Prizes in medicine) and Sheldon Lee Glashow (Nobel Prize in physics).”

“You must learn a lot from colleagues like these...”

“They have shown me how to be available. I always find them at my disposal whenever I request something, despite their full diaries. I’m thinking here of Rosalía Arteaga, jurist, anthropologist and former President of Ecuador. I called her unexpectedly to ask her to participate in one of our events. “Whenever you want!” was her reply.

“How long has the RAED existed?”

“Since 1914, by initiative of a Dr Alvaro Ezquerdo. It was based in Barcelona from the beginning, and has had a European outlook since I have been president, but without losing its original essence.”

“Can you define it?”

“It takes a critical approach. It is watchful, free and socially committed, as well as being interdisciplinary.”

“How did you become involved in this initiative?”

“I have advised companies throughout my career, and have 40 years’ experience of teaching students of economics; and have come to understand that the essential part of all this is not to profit economically.”

“No?”

“Contrary to what I might have taught 30 years ago, I nowadays explain in my classes that the business organisation is a social entity. Its essence is to be useful to society, as with each one of us.”

“Based on your knowledge, what awaits our economy in 2017?”

“Our rulers have squandered much, and they are now being more careful. Our macroeconomy will grow more than the European average, but will develop more slowly on a microeconomic level.”

“What basic advice do you give your students?”

“To be distinctive; to look for ways to stand out from the crowd - because there are already thousands of economists.”

“And the degrees and doctorates?”

“If you have the desire to work and are tenacious, these will come to you.”

VÍCTOR-M. AMELA

WHAT ACTUALLY COUNTS

Dr Rocafort, economist and jurist, specialises in cost accounting for the businesses that he advises. His opinions are much sought-after. “Accountants (or economists) tell you what is easy to tell, but not what actually counts”. He is referring here to a self-critical quotation from Plossl, expressing an effort to try and get beyond mere numbers. It is for this reason that he has been President since 2012 of the Royal European Academy of Doctors, the continent’s most active organisation of its type and the only one to admit members from all countries of the European Union. It helps society on the basis of its knowledge. And the initiatives do not stop there. The RAED will be hosting debates on religions this spring, and it will be holding its third international conference from 15th to 22nd July in the Baltic countries, with the attendance of a wide range of luminaries. All details can be found at www.raed.academy.