

Foreword

It all started, in a village in the Hérault, with a small company in difficulty, operating in a market sector in crisis – the building trade. I knew nothing about this sector, even less about scaffolding manufacture. Florensac! I remember the shock I had, coming from information technology and miniaturization, to discover factories which transform and treat steel with their presses, metal-forming machines, acid baths and heavy equipment – this world of pure force which I had to master. I did better: I learned to love the building trade!

In the following year, there was an opportunity for growth coming from the takeover of the assets of another local company and the creation of a subsidiary in Italy – a logic that became established over the next five years, at a rate of one or two acquisitions per year. Each of these, because it represented an opportunity rather than conforming to a pre-determined strategy, was a unique operation requiring special attention and a specific treatment and as such, each occupies a special place in my heart. Mefran, Socform, Mib, Mag, Etem, Sodetub, Ateliers de Saint-Denis – not forgetting any of the others that followed – will never be mere names on a list: they are individual entities, each with its own personality; they are the members

of a family, *our* family, better known today under the name of the Altrad Group.

The 1990s started with a deep crisis. Turnover declined and France was in recession. These were painful years but years when the human factor became particularly important. Obviously a company needs to be profitable – this is a minimum requirement for its survival – but it is above all made by and for men and women. For me, looking after our staff has been and still is the most important thing because without them profit cannot exist.

In this way, our family of companies was able to overcome this critical phase and was able, in 1993 to resume its development – this time abroad.

From the start, with the creation of an Italian subsidiary, I knew, without having prepared a detailed strategy, that logic dictated that, sooner or later, we would have to acquire companies abroad. But stronger still was the evidence coming from my own past and my own experience: in travelling from desert wilderness to urban civilization I have been able to measure the immense richness which can come from encountering a foreign culture, discovering it and learning to respect and love it. A company is not just – and this was my first discovery – an economic instrument: rather, it has a cultural dimension within its community, a dimension which it must assume so as not to separate itself from the men and women – and this was my second lesson – who are its flesh and blood. Thus it seemed doubly important to me – from both economic and human considerations – to extend the activities of the Altrad family internationally.

In this way, with the purchase of about a hundred companies or businesses across Europe and with the creation of numerous others, this family has become the Altrad Group. This is a logical development, in line with the past, but at the same time a step up in scale. Where, in the past, helped by experience, the arrival of each new member of the family could be rationalized

and accelerated, this group status has meant more of the same, but at the same time, something new and unexpected. To grow, it is also necessary to change.

How to respond to this internal challenge? Following the line that I have always taken so far, I have proposed a dynamic principle, a principle of life and growth in which, the achievements of all being preserved, everyone is asked to open up to others and to seize the opportunity – and risk – of improvement.

The artificial barriers have now disappeared between our companies, and multiple transverse communications have laid the foundations for a mutual knowledge base that we should, now and in the future, discover and share within the Group. Unlike with earlier companies, hostages to their certainties and prisoners of their obsessions about identity, the spreading and blossoming of the companies in our Group is now opening the way to a new dimension, built on the attraction of others and the love of difference. Far from the feeling of purity, a factor which leads to exclusion, we should make this taste for diversity evident and give form to the fundamental plurality of creation. Now is the moment, amongst ourselves, to combine the one and the many, to define, outside our respective limits, the values needed to institute social skills and to make our imaginations work together to see new horizons beyond the frontiers of yesterday. And give another face to the future.

MOHED ALTRAD