

"The Future Together"

June 14, 2010

Ambassador Howard Gutman

Cercle de Lorraine

J'ai tellement de respect pour la langue française bien parlée que je continuerai en anglais.

Ik heb zo veel respect voor de schoonheid van un taal, dat ik niets meer ga zeggen in het Nederlands.

Thank you so much for your wonderful introduction. And thanks so much to the Cercle de Lorraine for the honor of appearing today.

It is indeed an honor. For I have researched the last 5 years of speakers at Cercle de Lorraine – over 80 speakers – and most have been Belgian and the remainder have been European. I am the first American in quite a while.

You see, it has been a long time since we have spoken to one another. A long time since we listened to one another. Since we have heard each other.

And that is what Barack Obama knew, when he called me last year and told me he wanted me to represent him and the United States in Belgium. He told me that he believed people in Belgium, in Europe and around the world were taking a new look at America. The question was what would they see. Would they see our renewed commitment to dialogue and to partnership? To listening and not always speaking, and to never lecturing? Would they see our commitment to a better planet not just for our children, but for theirs, and for all among the brotherhood of man? Would they see the integrity of our words; the transparency of our deeds? Would they believe what we had to say?

And even if they did see it, even if they did believe it,

Even if you do see it, even if you do believe it in Belgium, in the Cercle de Lorraine, what then?

Would you accept our openness as a sign of admiration and respect, or mock it as weakness?

Would you trust us and come for the ride even when what we ask were tough, as I hope we always will do for you? Will we be there for each other?

We of course will never demand, and indeed never really ask. Rather, we would always discuss. Partners discuss. And we can only march forward as partners.

But when we discuss, we will as partners get to "yes?"

Not to "maybe." Not to "we are busy, come back later." Not to "let's see what others do."

But to "yes." Will we get to "yes?"

History instructs that these should not be difficult questions. The graves of hundreds of young

American soldiers at Flanders Field who died fighting with Belgians in World War I; the more than 13,000 American soldiers buried in Belgium in World War II, and the devotion of the thousands of Belgium families who have adopted those gravesites stand as a daily tribute to our past as the closest of allies.

But the past – even for dear allies – does not automatically become prologue. Allies must always renew their bond through mutual respect and mutual interest. In the last several years, we had caused that bond to weaken. So history alone would not get us to “yes, together.”

And I knew from the crowds in Berlin and from the roar of the cheer that swept across Europe that President Obama was rightfully respected, rightfully admired, rightfully beloved. He is indeed a rock star. But that left a gap between feelings for the man as opposed to for the country that he leads . . . or for the policies he must pursue.

Can we close that gap as partners so that support runs not just to individuals, but to the collectives that they lead? To be about policy – sometimes difficult and never certain -- and not just about personality?

I have spent ten months learning the answers to these questions. Learning how strong the Belgian-American partnership can and should be.

I have spent and will continue to spend an hour each morning, each day, studying French one morning and Flemish the next, to be a better listener and a better partner.

I have travelled through all of Belgium, from Knockke to Bree, from Tournai to Dinant to Bulligen, shaking hands and listening to Belgians, in search of these answers. For partnerships can be discussed in Minister's offices, in Parliament and in chateaus . . .

But partnerships are built with the people . . . all people. With counts and barons, CEOs and lawyers, and with mothers who would gladly work two jobs to provide for their families, but cannot find even one.

Along this path, I have been greeted warmly by most. Long welcomes. Huge ovations.

And, yes, I have been mocked by a few . . . still skeptical about who we are and what we want . . . and from the skeptics I have thereby learned that I must work only harder. We must work harder together.

Because the answers are there. . .

The answers are about our future . . .

Our future together.

The answers about our future and our partnership are everywhere I have travelled -- on the beach in Ostend, in the port of Zebrugge, under the monument in Ieper, at the Carnivale in Aalst, near the Krackling in Geerardsbergen, with law students in Kortrijk, on the port in Antwerp, next to Kim

Clusters in Bree, mourning lost school children in Mortsel, by the canals in Ghent, next to the Belfy in Brugge, under the carillon in Mechelen, at the racetrack in Waregem, at a designer's shop in Hasselt, next to Soske in Leuven . . . The answers are there.

Amidst the Cathedral in Tournai, at the Doo Doo in Mons, at midfield at the Standard Game, in the Christmas Village and Sunday market in Liege, at a corporate headquarters in Wavre, in a café in Nivelles, along the Meuse in Dinant, at a fair in Namur, with the Gilles in Binche, among technical students and firefighters in Charleloi, in the underground garage at Louvain-La-Neuve, in the town square in Malmedy, in a housing project in Amay, standing at attention in Neupre . . .

At Memorials in Bastogne, and Bullingen and Butchenbach . .

At the Mannekin Pis, Cinqcentenaire, in Molenbeek and Cureghem. And so much more.

The answers are there. I heard them. I saw them. I hear them and see them daily.

I learned that Belgians and Americans today indeed share common values. We share common goals. Common ends. A belief in common means to those ends.

We share not just a history on the battlefield. Not just undying gratitude particularly among a generation too close to dying.

We share not just respect for a transformative figure in history. Not just applause for a rock star.

But common values. Common goals. Common ends. A belief in common means to those ends.

And with proper communication and understanding, sharing common values, sharing common goals, common ends, a belief in common means to those ends,

Means we should share common policies.

Given who we each are and what we believe, if we fully understand each other, we should agree on what we need to do. Common policies.

Indeed, common values and common policies.

America under Barack Obama shared them with Belgium under Verhofstadt, with Von Rompuy, with Letermé, and with . . . tomorrow.

Two countries, one script, one page.

Whether your name is de Gucht, or de Crem, or de Clerk, or Di Reynders, or de Croo, or di Rupo, or De Wever or de Obama . . .

Who does not believe in the dignity of mankind? In peace before war? In social justice? In women's rights? In saving our planet for our children?

Who does not believe in climate and the need to pursue a binding and lasting agreement to limit our carbon? In the need to close Guantanamo and to do so now? In finalizing the withdrawal from Iraq? In ending gender violence in the Congo? In seeking peace and security for all in the Middle East?

Who does not seek to prevent nuclear threats from North Korea and Iran? Who does not support the restoration of functioning civil society in Afghanistan? The pursuit and prevention of terror, making our streets safe regardless of one's political beliefs?

Can it really be true? Do we share common policies? Surely you know Mr. Ambassador, that Belgians do not like war. That we are concerned about Afghanistan?

Of course. And Barack Obama and his America abhor war and are concerned too about Afghanistan.

But together, we abhor terror – whether in Mumbai or in London or at the World Trade Center. Together we abhor threats aimed at countries simply because they chose to adopt bans on certain clothing or certain buildings.

Together we rejoice when a regime that allowed 900,000 kids to go to school – all male—has been replaced by one with 6 million kids in school, 2 million of whom are female.

Together, we believe in civilian reconstruction. In a functioning lawful civil society. And together we recognize that you cannot restore functioning civil society – allow agriculture workers, police trainers, teachers, to work – without an atmosphere of basic security. And that basic security still requires effort, manpower and funding.

So together we want to take our best shot. If it succeeds, together we shall rejoice. If it fails, together we shall try something else.

I hear some ask... Can it really be true? Do we share common policies? Surely you know Mr. Ambassador that we value our privacy from government intrusion?

Of course, and Barack Obama and his America value the privacy of the individual as well.

But jointly we believe in preserving U.S. and European security by disrupting funding mechanisms for terrorist networks. Together we believe in ensuring the safety of air transport with measures that are effective but respect the privacy of U.S. and European citizens.

We sometimes forget that the financial data that had been gathered about the financing of terror by Swift provided 800 leads about potential terrorist events right here in Europe. Basque terror. Terror threats from extremists.

Can it really be true? Do we really share common policies? Hasn't Europe long been alone at the table seeking a binding international agreement on climate?

Indeed, for far too long.

But Barack Obama's America has joined you at the table. Yet together we realize that it makes no sense dining at a table for 2, when 97% of the future carbon footprint will be produced by developing nations who still have not joined us at the table.

I hear some ask... Do we really share common policies? Surely you know Mr. Ambassador that our port of Antwerp is a lifeblood of who we are. There are 72 Iranian ships entering Antwerp each year – more than one a week. Sanctions mean being responsible for the identity of cargo, undertaking searches and thereby somewhat restricting commerce. Restricting commerce can harm the pocketbooks of some.

Yes. But Belgium and America agree together to our cores that we must do all we can to avoid a military option to ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East. That that option would not only totally undermine commerce but threaten the security of our children. Belgians and Americans jointly understand the importance of the U.N. Security Council efforts to persuade Iran to fulfill its international obligations and demonstrate the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

And given that we share common values and common policies, we have so much work to do together. We have a future to build together. And this time, we have to get it right. And we have to get it right together.

We need each other to achieve our shared goals.

As I travel Belgium, I often hear protests that Belgium is but a small country. That Belgium has relatively little manpower, relatively little funding. How can Belgium be needed to achieve our shared goals?

You see, of course Belgium has a limited budget and limited manpower. But, though Belgium may be short on men and dollars, Belgium leads in credibility. I knew that and said that long before Europe decided that Herman Van Rompuy should lead Europe. Before Karl de Gucht was chosen as Trade representative. Before Guy Verhofstadt proved to be a leading figure in the European Parliament.

Belgium does not speak that often or that loudly. Belgium does not speak with a hidden agenda. When Belgium speaks on the international stage, it does so for only one reason: it has something to say.

So when Belgium speaks, people listen. Belgium indeed leads in credibility.

It is that credibility that Belgium can provide as we work together to reach our shared goals. Credibility often expressed in actions – though perhaps involving fewer men and fewer dollars. But when Belgium acts, it is a clarion call to some. A shining example to all.

Belgium has provided that credibility in helping us reach our shared goals of taking our best shot at civilian reconstruction in Afghanistan through its commitment to continue with the ISAF forces through at least 2011, to increase civilian aid, to send 28 additional military trainers. Such commitment is

appreciated to our core. Every man. Every dollar. Every liter of Belgian credibility expanded in support of our shared goals.

In reaching our shared goal of a peaceful and secure planet, free from the threat of nuclear horrors, we need Belgian credibility on Iran. Support for tough EU implementation of the U. N sanctions and enforcement of the sanctions in the home of Antwerp will send the message to all. It will rally all. It will proclaim that if Belgium can do it, if the home of Antwerp can do it, none have an excuse. For when we are discussing a nuclear Iran, can we afford any excuse?

In reaching our shared goal of a planet that can endure long after we are gone, Belgian credibility can again be a critical part of the solution. In Cancun, Belgium's voice will be important in the chorus of those seeking to require all to join in a legally binding regime, with transparency, and financing. That voice can reach those who might balk when others in the West urge this result.

And with all of Europe and the United States long agreeing that Guantanamo is morally, legally and ethically wrong, it remains open today. A blight on the past of my country, but a continuing challenge to us all. Belgium and many other countries have already relocated former detainees, and for doing so, already have our gratitude forever. But what is required to place the rest may be for the United States to try in our courts those who present real danger. And to seek Europe's help together as a collective to divide up the rest. For having Europe work together places the burden on none alone to open its backyard. None can say "Not in my backyard" we all work together.

So it seems far easier for all to act together. Who can lead that European progress along that moral path by asking all to work together? Belgium could lead, by making a call to its colleagues and urging all to work together to close the blight once and for all. And if Belgium made the call, who would not answer?

If Belgium made the call, that it is time to get terrorist financing information in the hands of all those in law enforcement who need it. . .

If Belgium made the call that the streets of Mumbai, London deserve better. . . If Belgium made the call that threats to its welfare and the safety of its citizens must be met by tracking the funding of terror with guarantees to protect privacy, who would not answer? The U.S. is ready to work in a manner that preserves the proper privacy of those who so deserve and meets the real threats that we all face. Cannot Belgium help?

There are some who tell me that I fail to see the problems Belgium itself faces. They claim problems of a dysfunctional society barely able to follow, let alone lead. That is not the Belgium I see as it enters its European Presidency. I have just witnessed what every society strives for: a democratic election, with energized citizens, free and active media, and statesmanship everywhere. I have just witnessed the strength of this democracy. A democracy that can help lead.

I will keep travelling, keep learning, keep listening. I will find surprises everywhere. I will find lessons. Indeed, I found lessons two weeks ago.

I found them in Molenbeek.

Muslim community outreach is a major part of our mission. After years of East v. West being pitted against each other, Barack Obama spent 57 minutes in Cairo and changed all of our outlooks.

We have to continue to unite East and West.

So I went once again to Molenbeek – my third trip. But this time to Serge Creuz School. 100% Multicultural. Perhaps 70% Muslim. Maybe 20% girls in headscarves. I did not know what to expect as an American Ambassador in Molenbeek, at Serge Creuz school.

But I know what I found. I know what I received. It surprised me. It is on YouTube. Watch it. It will shock you.

I have received wonderful greetings and ovations throughout Belgium. But none louder. None longer than at Serge Creuz. None louder or longer than in Molenbeek. For an American ambassador.

And there they sang our National Anthem. Hand on heart. Loud and clearly. The Star Spangled Banner. The camera on YouTube pans through the students, the girls with head scarves as together we sing. And then, they sang the Belgium National Anthem.

And, of all the groups I have met in Belgium, they knew it the best. Every word. Watch it on YouTube. They are part of the future of Belgium. They are part of the future of the East-West relationship. They are part of our future together.

Thanks so much and all the best.