

“Then say it in Belgium!”

Article in Catholic Vers L’Avenir (10/1)(circ. 95,000)

Yesterday, the new U.S. Ambassador to Belgium delivered his maiden speech. He had chosen Charleroi for this major première.

A close collaborator of President Barack Obama and a former lawyer, Howard Gutman was named U.S. Ambassador in Belgium in late July. He only took up his duties in late August, and his visit to Charleroi was naturally his first public speech.

For his maiden speech, the Ambassador had personally chosen to deliver it in Charleroi. The fact that Charleroi has been a sister city of Pittsburgh for a long time perhaps played a role. But Howard Gutman’s choice can also be explained by the presence in Charleroi of several U.S. businesses – like Caterpillar in Gosselies and Johnson & Johnson in Courcelles.

In his speech in the Université du Travail’s auditorium, the Ambassador talked about these big businesses as well as about the projected technological campus.

Before going to the UT, the Ambassador went to the City Hall where almost all local officials welcomed him, along with a pipes band. Thereafter, provincial deputy Yves Lardinois welcomed him with chocolates made by UT students.

In his speech, Ambassador Gutman called on a reinforced partnership between Belgium and the United States on major dossiers like Afghanistan, economic recovery, the closure of Guantanamo, and climate change.

The Ambassador concluded by underlining Belgium’s weight on the international scene: ‘Of course, your financial and human resources are smaller than those of other countries. But your moral conviction is not measures in these terms,’ he said. Lastly, asked why he chose Belgium, Ambassador Gutman did not hesitate to compliment our country: ‘Just like Washington DC is the head of the United States, Belgium is the heart and soul of the EU. If you have something to say and want to be heard by all, then say it in Belgium.’