

U.S. Ambassador Howard Gutman

Conservative *Gazet Van Antwerpen* (10/9) (circ. 103,000) publishes an almost page-wide interview with U.S. Ambassador Howard Gutman, in which he talks about U.S. diplomacy new style, the particular nature of Belgium, economic recovery, the U.S.-Belgian trade relationship, port security and General Motors in Antwerp.

A full translation of this interview follows:

Interview. New American Ambassador Howard Gutman Visits Antwerp

“I Also Want to Talk with Housewives”

“The spouse of Howard Gutman, the new American Ambassador in Belgium, for one will have warm feelings for Antwerp. For their wedding anniversary she got a couple of earrings that Gutman went to buy by himself in the diamond quarter. ‘Put even the earphones for a moment’, he said to his bodyguards, and he went to the shops. It illustrates the new approach Gutman represents.”

“The relations between Belgium and the United States have been tense for a long time. That had all to do with the policy of former President Bush. With the coming of President Obama, Ambassadors on most diplomatic posts have also been changed. Howard Gutman, in a former life a top lawyer, took part in the Obama campaign, raised funds and was rewarded with the Ambassador post in Brussels. ‘Let yourself be heard in Belgium, and the whole world hears you’, Gutman says. ‘Here is where all European institutions are located.’”

“Howard Gutman this week came on an official visit in Antwerp. After a passage at VOKA, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry for Antwerpen-Waasland, Governor Cathy Berx received him.”

Q: “Odd: as an Ambassador you already in Bree with Kim Clysters, at the celebration of Father Damian in Tremelo, and in Charleroi. You will go to Mechelen later on. It looks like you are doing things in a reverse order. Traditionally, Ambassadors first go on visit to major cities.”

Ambassador Gutman: “That is correct. But we go about things differently. As the United States we want to become partners with Belgium again. A partnership means that you do not leave anybody behind, that you take everyone along with

you. Certainly if you want to set economic recovery in motion. We therefore also listen to people. Certainly also to people who live in regions where things are hard. Like in Charleroi. You know, I myself am born in New York, in the Bronx. There life is not easy. But you can get out of it. That is why I want to talk with people who are going through a hard time right now. Look, I have already met with princes and barons here. But I also want to hear the story from mothers who have fallen out of a job and cannot make ends meet.”

Q: “For an American, Belgium is not an easy country. The regionalization and the fragmentation of competences are creating confusion.”

Ambassador Gutman: “Regionalism in itself is not a bad thing. When all lines converge in some point, also regionalist tendencies can contribute to one strong national feeling. That is no different in America. Texans for instance are also keen on their own identity.”

Q: “Economically things are not going so well for us. We do look with quite some irritation to America that was at the basis of the whole international crisis.”

Ambassador Gutman: “Let us no longer look to the past, but take on the crisis. With new ideas about IT, green energy or infrastructure development. President Obama lets it be heard that we want to take on the crisis. All together. Everyone needs to go along. This is a new style. Also Belgium can play a role in that. You are partners. That entails mutual respect. Look, if I am eating your waffles, then it also means that I am your friend. We are all growing towards each other.”

Q: “There is a structural disequilibrium as far as the trade balance is concerned between both nations. America exports much more products to Belgium than the other way around.”

Ambassador Gutman: “You see an imbalance in the statistics, but you need to take into account that many American companies let their export to Europe run via Belgium. The numbers need to be split out over several countries. In the meantime, American companies have also invested \$ 65 billion here and one out of twelve employed Belgians works with a U.S. company.”

Q: “In the ports of Antwerp and Zeebrugge, there is not single-minded happiness about Mega Ports, the scanning system which containers are subject to before they can be put on the boat to America. That means losing time and productivity decrease.”

Ambassador Gutman: “I start from the promise that we all should be concerned about security and that a system like Mega Ports can contribute to that. Zeebrugge and Antwerp can get turn that so-called handicap into an advantage in the longer run also. The speed with which containers with as destination the U.S. are scanned here, will encourage shipping companies to use the efficiency of Flemish ports and transfer their traffic to here.”

Q: “The American General Motors in the meantime confronts us with Opel’s problems.”

Ambassador Gutman: “As a government, we can only hope that GM comes to solutions. President Obama encourages the American car industry to invest in a new type of car, in fuel efficiency, in solar energy and in electric systems. It is up to the private industry to take things in hands.”

The text in the box reads:

Who Is Howard Gutman?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 53 years old• Grew up in a Jewish family in the Bronx, New York.• Harvard Law School• Successful lawyer in Washington, specialized in trade litigation• Assistant to the FBI with as specialization counterterrorism and counter-espionage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adviser for the Democrats• 2007: phone call from Obama to work at the elections• Amongst other things, Gutman raises \$ 500,000 in campaign funds and appears in many TV programs as a guest• 2009: Ambassador in Brussels

Note: the interview between Marc Balduyck, chief economy of Gazet Van Antwerpen, was set-up by the EMB / PD / Press Section