

Charleroi, First American City

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‘It is an unusual event: the fact that the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium comes to visit us shows the bonds between our countries. Of course, we do not see the consequences of the change in the United States yet, but I hope that with time we will,’ said Stephane Devleeshauwer, one of the students of the Université du Travail who attended Ambassador Howard W. Gutman’s maiden speech in Charleroi.

‘The relax atmosphere contrasted with the importance of the event. During the Q&A session, the Ambassador talked about many things: his life, his ideals, his faith in the new man at the helm of the United States, Barack Obama. Howard Gutman scored with his simplicity, his empathy when he described his modest origin ‘in the Bronx, which is somewhat like Charleroi.’

‘It is a very strong symbol for this America that has at last turned the page of the arrogance of the Bush Administration. The Ambassador’s message was very clear: ‘I have come to see what the voices and hands of Charleroi tell me about my country. About where we stand in building a better partnership with Charleroi and thus with Belgium, and with Europe. About where we stand as citizens of the world.’

‘It is clear that the United States considers that it will not solve major world problems alone. Belgian diplomacy is happy about this. ‘While there was an after 9/11, there already is an after Obama election,’ according to Belgian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Olivier Chastel. ‘This charm operation proves that the United States is aware of the poor image that the Bush Administration left in Europe and that the world challenges required a common and concerted response,’ Chastel added.