

## **We May Cook Frogs Differently But Together We Can Change the World and We Should Never Go Back to Yesterday**

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Ambassador Howard Gutman  
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Goede middag. Bonjour.

Nederlands is niet gemakkelijk voor mij; het is heel moeilijk.

Et mon français est très mauvais aussi. Voilà trois ans que j'étudie les deux langues: le français le lundi, le mercredi, et le vendredi; et le néerlandais le mardi et le jeudi, mais je deviens vieux et donc même après trois ans d'études, je trouve les deux langues encore très difficiles,,, Et donc, je continuerai en anglais.

I want to thank Frans for that wonderful introduction. But it causes a difficult situation for me.

You see, when someone says nice things about you and then it is your turn to speak, people assume that you have to say nice things back. So it waters down whatever I would say about Frans as people are thinking that the speakers of course are obliged to be extremely courteous to each other.

But in the case of Frans Van Daele, you don't need for him to have said nice things about you to use superlatives in talking about him. Quite simply, Frans Van Daele is one of Belgium's leading diplomats in Belgium and, indeed, one of the leading diplomats in the world. He is respected worldwide, but no place more than in Washington where he helped lead the diplomatic community . . . except maybe that he is even more respected in the Gutman home, in the U.S. Embassy Belgium, and in the U.S. Mission to the European Union.

Though we both strive for the same goals, the advancement of U.S. Belgian relations and of the community of the brotherhood of man, and for all of our sincere mutual admiration, Frans and I are different . . . very different . . . different about diplomacy . . . maybe as different as Belgium and the United States, or at least as different as Belgium and parts of the United States.

Indeed, I have in the past given a whole speech dedicated to what Frans has taught me about diplomacy and about those differences. . .

A speech entitled "We Cook Frogs Differently."

You see, for a short while after I arrived in Belgium as the United States Ambassador, I studied the country and its role and place within Europe. I learned about the character of the country and its people, and about the buzz of the home of the EU, NATO and a vibrant country all mixed together.

I realized that there were many wonderful countries in Europe. But too often other countries and particularly Europe North and Europe South tended to speak past one another. That sometimes they like other countries all around the world, spoke simply to be heard, with sometimes predictable tones and messages. But I quickly came to realize that Belgium was different. Belgium spoke passt no

one but to and with each one. Belgium never spoke simply to be heard. When Belgium spoke it did so for only one reason – it had something to say. I realized indeed that, more than the rest, Belgium, though smaller and perhaps with less total wealth, led Europe in credibility. And credibility is the most powerful force for persuasion and persuasion is the most powerful tool in diplomacy. And I realized that Belgium also had the stage when it wanted it within Europe at any and all times: the podium and the microphone of Europe are always squarely in Belgium. And I realized that together credibility and a pulpit combined to make a potentially very powerful voice. I was then still new to the job, having arrived in August 2009, but I was genuinely excited by my conclusion. And I was convinced that, given that Belgian credibility and given that pulpit, between Belgium and the United States, we could change the world together for the better.

In one of my earliest meetings still in 2009 with the then Belgian Government, I made my pitch to then Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy and to Frans. I urged them to join with our Embassy, to join with President Obama and his then new agenda, together to help change the world. I urged Frans to use that Belgium credibility and the pulpit to have the Belgian Prime Minister speak at the Grand Place and call on Europe to act. If Belgium urged Europe to work together and with the United States, to lift what was then an overwhelming economic crisis or to get Europe participating together to then help President Obama close Guantanamo; or to then keep NATO moving in the right direction in rebuilding civil society in Afghanistan and far more, who in Europe would say no. If Belgium made the call, who would not answer?

When I was done with my analysis and my plea, it was clear Frans too valued the word and importance of Belgium, but I suspect changing the world together in a week seemed like a rather big hurdle. So when silence finally hit the room, as Herman paused, Frans asked me in response:

"Howard, do you know the two ways to cook a frog?"

And I said "No Frans, what are the two ways to cook a frog?"

And Frans explained: "Howard, the first way to cook a frog is you heat up the water to a boil so you can quickly cook the frog. You then throw the frog in. But the frog feels the heat and immediately jumps out and you have no dinner. But Howard," Frans continued, "the second way, the Belgian way, is to fill the pot with cool water. You place the frog inside and he swims happily. You then turn on the heat and slowly heat the water and the frog never reacts, and voila, you have dinner."

Having listened to the story, I immediately responded: "But Frans, there is a third way to cook a frog, the Belgian and American way. You boil up the water so that you can cook the frog quickly. You put the frog in the water and before he can jump out, you slam a lid on the pot. And voila, the frog goes nowhere. Help me slam a lid on the pot Frans."

Believing always in the power of Belgian credibility, our Embassy website for the past three years has urged: "If You Want to Be Heard, Say It In Belgium." And, as you all know, Europe took steps to prove us right by selecting then Herman and Frans to lead the European Council.

Truth be told, Belgians along the way have questioned whether we were sincere in our belief in the importance of Belgium or whether we were just saying that. But now that three years have passed, now that I am the second longest serving U.S. Ambassador to Belgium in 31 years, history has

removed the doubts.

Belgium has been heard about Afghanistan. In 2010, President Obama asked for surge troops in Afghanistan, promising to foster civilian reconstruction and stability and promising to draw down troop levels when conditions permitted us to do so. While other allies struggled, Belgium responded favorably, went in with additional troops and indeed has supported NATO's efforts to begin the transition to an Afghan-led security effort. While some other new leaders have announced the complete withdrawal of all troops from Afghanistan this year, the new Belgian government announced that Belgium will remain side by side with America as we initiate the transition through 2014 and has pledged the full amount of the NATO ask for post-2014 financial support to the Afghan security effort.

When human rights were at risk in Libya, Belgium helped lead flying 620 air to ground bombing missions in Libya while the United States flew none. Instead we armed and fueled allies like Belgium who put their pilots in harm's way in defense of the citizens of Libya as they demanded democracy and their human rights. Belgium has been heard about Iranian sanctions, closing the Port of Antwerp to the Iranian state shipping line and denying the regime in Tehran access to its financial system. On the need for compromise and action in the eurozone crisis. And on so much more.

But there is more to do. Belgium's voice can continue to be critical to influence others. There is a critical vote coming up in the UN on the composition of the Human Rights Council. The U.S. has used its seat on the Council so far to great effect: in Syria, Iran, Libya, Cote d'Ivoire, in favor of freedom of assembly and association; freedom of expression; on behalf of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. The Council has been better, stronger, and more effective with the U.S. as a member and we would like to remain there. Belgium can help and can also help with others who have to decide.

There is more to do in combating terrorism. In preventing Hizbollah from contributing to the atrocities being committed in Syria. The U.S. has designated Hizbollah for its material support of Asad's regime, support which has contributed to the slaughter of over 30,000 Syrian civilians. Belgium has been a strong voice in condemning the human rights violations of the Asad regime, and can help raise awareness of Hizbollah's role in these atrocities.

And on more. On the leading issues today, Belgium can help and can help leading others who have to decide as well.

Because together, the U.S. and Belgium today form the strongest of partners. We have progress and we have momentum.

But we also have to ensure that we maintain that progress and that momentum. That progress and momentum were threatened in the mid 2000's and we can never relapse back to that point. Indeed, I recently met in Brussels with a delegation of 16 United States Senators and Congressmen and women. And I told them that I was convinced that if you could study the history of only one country to learn about diplomacy, about foreign relations, and about why foreign relations matter -- that that country should not be China or India; Mexico or Canada; or even France, Germany or England. It should be Belgium.

And I got the same looks of disbelief from these U.S. officials as I am getting now from this

audience.

But plainly the lessons from Belgium and about the Belgium-American relationship are critical ones. Those lessons are vital to our future. You see we have the strongest roots of our relationship as dear allies and partners dating back to the two world wars. The liberation of Belgium by the United States and our allies after the devastation of 2 world wars is and will always remain a preeminent and unifying part of our history. Among the images that will always stay with me are the throngs that come out to our commemorations in Bastogne and to our three moving Memorial Day remembrances. Images of museums in peoples' homes dedicated to the American GI. The crowd every single night at the Menin Gate in Ieper for The Last Call. I shall always be moved by the fact that Belgians never forget; by the fact that they today still tend to the graves that they have adopted of American boys who died over a half century ago.

But particularly because of how deep and how strong our roots are, the yesterday that existed when I arrived here in Belgium over three years ago – the yesterday of the mid 2000's is a place from which we may learn a great deal about foreign relations but to which we should never return. We should not return to that yesterday no matter who leads Belgium, no matter who leads the United States. No matter who the ambassador. . No matter whether he or she studies French and Dutch daily and tries to build a friendship with the Belgian people by visiting every city, village and commune or, alternatively, spends more time at the Embassy and is less known to the public.

You see, despite our history as the dearest of allies and the bonds that followed the world wars, in the mid 2000's, that relationship between us was widely described in the press as "frosty." As a result of policy differences, particularly over the handling of the Iraq war, the Belgian government considered closing the Port of Antwerp to U.S. ships, closing Belgian airspace to U.S. planes and subjecting U.S. officials to its law of universal jurisdictions for criminal charges in Belgium.

There is a temptation now to ask how could Belgian officials and politicians have formulated and undertaken such unfriendly actions? To ask where did that leadership come from? But the lesson from Belgium -- a lesson that should resonate through foreign policy circles or business circles or academic circles – is that politicians and officials don't create opinion. Citizens create opinion. Politicians and leaders don't create opinion; opinion creates politicians and leaders. Politicians and officials don't serve as the inspiration for policies. Popular opinion does. Politicians and officials follow the voice of the citizenry. Leaders of course lead, but they go where they can succeed. Leaders are required to get out in front, but they still must head in the direction that others tell them that they want to go.

And however the U.S. and Belgium got so far off track with each other, the U.S. had faltered in the minds and hearts of the citizens of Belgium. We separated from the people. Indeed, the Gallup Polling Company started in 2007 to track public opinion in every country in the world concerning America and U.S. leadership. And the results of the first poll showed that in Belgium in 2007, only 8 per cent of the citizenry had a favorable view of U.S. leadership while 65% had an unfavorable view and 27% were neutral or had no opinion.

Think about that. 8% favorable and 65% unfavorable. 8 to 1 times as unfavorable as favorable. Could there have been a greater call for change? For renewed leadership to rebuild the partnership?

And it is not about and was never about a popularity contest. It is about results. When the citizens are frosty and cynical, politicians threaten to close ports and airspace. In that world of cynicism and mistrust, in that environment, both American interests of any sort and the Belgian-American relationship suffer mightily. Ex-pats must feel at least somewhat uncomfortable amidst their neighbors; tourists hide the tee-shirts or guide books that would identify them as American. And in that environment of those days; U.S.-based businesses play down their home roots. And an Embassy finds frustration behind many doors. Indeed, diplomacy remains stalled at the door.

In that yesterday, we had lost our way with one another. We talked past each other. We failed to look each other in the eye.

We can not go back there again. That yesterday must continue to fade as tomorrow grows ever brighter.

But the path of change was as identifiable as the path of destruction. It almost always is. You just need to identify causes and react with solutions.

When we first arrived in 2009, we candidly admitted that the Belgian-American relationship had recently suffered and I explained the values of the then new President, the man who had sent me here. We promised to be better listeners and learners and to rebuild the partnership where it had suffered most – with the people. We outlined our plans as part of that reconstruction of the bridge with the citizens of Belgium to study both French and Dutch and to visit all of the people – to visit the 589 cities, towns and communes in Belgium.

The election of Barack Obama and the appointment of Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State in the beginning of 2009 took us a long way towards rebuilding that bridge. They were for Belgium more than a catalyst for change; they were the embodiment of change. The Gallup Poll for 2009 showed that the change in leadership raised the favorability rating from 8% to 30% - a 22% gain – and cut the unfavorability from 65% to 23%, a decrease of 42% in the unfavorability. So that the rating as of 2009 was 30% favorable and 23% unfavorable.

We have to date worked hard to reap change, to rebuild the Belgian American relationship. As a country. As an Embassy, and even as an ambassador. We still study French one day and Flemish the next and we have to date visited 578 cities, villages, and towns, leaving me 11 to go.

The latest Gallup Poll of all the countries in the world came out on May 1 of this year. The eurozone crisis and Afghanistan fatigue contributed to the favorability rating for US leadership losing 10% in Germany and 15% in France.

But we are proud to note that in that same international poll released by Gallup in May ---4 months ago –Belgium finished first in the world with the highest gain in favorability rating for the U.S. leadership. There was another 15% gain in favorability and another 8% decrease in the unfavorability so that the rating – which was 8%-65% just 5 years ago now stands at 45% favorable and only 22% unfavorable – a more than 2 to 1 edge in favorability where a 1 to 8 rating once stood. Which means that Belgians view American leadership today more favorably than Americans view American leadership.

And again, this was never about a popularity contest. With the change in public opinion, came the change in action that we discussed: among other places, in Afghanistan, in Libya, and the other advances we discussed.

Rebuild a partnership and they will come.

And that change also means that Boston Red Sox tee shirts and U.S. guide books have reappeared in the Grand Place. Tourists are proud to meet Belgians and to talk about their country. It means that ex-pats again proudly discuss their home. U.S.-headquartered businesses operating in Belgium recruit employees and customers by flagging their U.S. roots. The Embassy finds smiles, not frustration, at the door, which is always wide open for the diplomacy of discussions among partners.

And so I maintain I was correct when I told those 16 stunned U.S. legislators recently that Belgium was the best and most important country in the world to study if you want to learn about foreign relations, about diplomacy, about why foreign relations matter and about change.

Now given where we are, given where we have gotten back to, and especially given where we had been yesterday, we must all fight – Belgians, Americans, each of you, and the chocolate shops and the waffle vendors and the Belgian business leaders and journalists, the poets, the politicians and all others– we must all fight never to go back to yesterday. No matter who may be in the White House. No matter which party has how many seats in the Belgian Parliament. No matter who may live in the glorious Residence of the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium.

You see, Ambassador Sam Fox, my dedicated predecessor, and President George Bush did not define America any more than Howard Gutman and President Barack Obama define America. America is 310 million citizens dedicated to the same values shared by 11 million Belgians – freedom, democracy, respect for our fellow men and women and for the brotherhood of citizens, love of family, pride in work, curiosity about tomorrow and much more. America is not about the guy on the lectern giving the long speech when we meet, but about all in the audience.

Sure we – Belgians and Americans -- may from time to time diverge in tactics – for dear friends and allies always do -- but we will always share our passions, our values and our sense of decency. No matter where the lanes lead in the years ahead, we must always, always remain on the same highway. We can not go back to yesterday.

#### MY FUTURE PLANS

Finally, with Election Night approaching and with our having already served three years and longer than anyone else in over 30 years other than one, many have asked about our plans. I serve at the pleasure of the President and so if there is a change in administration next month, we will leave by the end of the year and allow the new President to pick his own representative. If the President gets re-elected, we have been asked to stay till our successors are confirmed and so our tenure will continue likely to the Spring and maybe the summer.

But our hearts will always be here, with you.

Thanks so much and all the best.