

SPEECH 25.05.2018

FP-AP & PRO LEGE

EUROPA QUO VADIS

Madam Speaker,

Madame la Présidente,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first apologize for my poor knowledge of the French language. I can roughly follow it but have difficulties in speaking. One needs to practice to keep it alive. You may not believe it but French was my best language during my school years in the early fifties. And now, I am sad to say I have almost forgotten it as I have had few opportunities to speak it. French is an important language in Europe and my sons have chosen French in the school system.

The Belgian Senate has a very special place in our association of Former Members of Parliaments of the Member States of the Council of Europe: it is our administrative seat. In the early years of the Belgian association Pro Lege, the secretary was a young man who was also involved in the work of the Belgian delegation at the Council of Europe. As a good PR-man, he convinced other associations of Germany, France and Italy to work together and together with Turkey the FP-AP was founded in 1994.

Every two years the presidency is handed over to another country almost like in Rotary and a new President is elected and in this case me from Sweden. The "General" on the other side guarantees the continuity of the work and he is leading his troops towards a consensus. Dear Roland Roblain, your skills of working with 23 associations, representing different cultures and nationalities

from around Europe characterizes your endeavor, courage (true, we can sometimes be very demanding) and diplomacy.

But, today we all know that you've to struggle with something more important than paperwork: your health. I and naturally all of us can only wish you, your wife and your children the very best luck and courage to keep you on track and we're all convinced that at the end everything will be fine again.

Madam Speaker, your words on the future construction of a new Europe touches us. You did not forget to mention that above all one has to feel at home in this part of the world. Europe has today on one hand generations that have known borders, the Cold War or foreign currencies very well and because of that clearly understand that standing together make us stronger, better and give us peace (*l'union fait la force*) and on the other hand we've generations that find it natural to cross borders, have a single currency, surf randomly on social media, only to find out how susceptible they are to populism thinking of "what we can do by ourselves alone, will be better".

That way of thinking is no good and can lead to a dangerous situation in our societies. We have had enough of that and want a peaceful Europe. One could say with the words of President John Kennedy, said: One should not expect what the country can do for you but what you can do for the country. Those words were formulated by his speech writer Ted Sorensen who had grown up under tough circumstances during the depression in Nebraska. I would like to see more of that attitude in Europe.

Today, we should tell Europeans that these assets are not self-evident. It took us a long time to construct together our European institutions. To stay in touch with our civil society, former parliamentarians still can have an important role to play. Their expertise should be shared with younger generations. In Italy, Finland and in Austria they are sent to schools to teach the young ones the rules of democracy, rule of law, etc... crucial parts of basic education, the best guarantee for a better future and so important as the history has taught us.

Madam Speaker, we are very grateful that the Belgian association, in close cooperation with the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives, gave us today the facilities to let us discuss over a new blueprint for the "fortress Europe". The seminar this morning with top notch speakers, Pierre Defraigne,

Franklin Dehousse and Herman van Rompuy, will help us to think and rethink Europe in a way that reminded me of the famous polish novel with the title “Quo Vadis” by Henryk Sienkiewicz. It was written in 1895 about the Roman Empire during Emperor Nero’s reign – also a difficult transition time - and he received the Nobel Prize in literature for the novel in 1905. Where is Europe on its way to day, nobody really knows and one can only say “Europe, Quo Vadis”

As a small token for our gratefulness I would like to give you this small present.

Rune Rydén – Brussels 25.05.2018