



Permanent Mission of Belgium
to the OSCE

PC.DEL/221/08
14 March 2008

ENGLISH only

Statement delivered by Amb. Bertrand de Crombrugghe
706th Meeting of the Permanent Council, Vienna
13 March 2008

Mr. Chairman, Dear Maria-Pia,
Your farewell words were very kind indeed. I am overcome with gratitude but let me remain a little cautious. I have the dilemma to skipper between two familiar sayings. One is that "Flattery is the food of fools". The other is that "To refuse praise reveals a desire to be praised twice over".
Desperately looking for an exit, I hope I have found one : "Praise hurts no one, as long as it is not inhaled".

Dear colleagues and friends,
Upon departing, after almost five years, I know what I leave behind : a group of outstanding and exceptionally kind friends and brilliant colleagues. Not only during the last days, where you have engulfed me and Thérèse - who is behind me - with generous invitations and farewell lunches and dinners, but all during our time at the OSCE, you have made for a perfect combination of work, travel, dialogue, conversation, sympathy, friendship and entertainment. The atmosphere in this organization is quite unique. True, the OSCE requires a lot of hard work - something you all know I am not frightened by -, but it more than compensates with the human factor. As a collectivity we together reach all around the Northern Hemisphere. We share perceptions and cultures on a scale that can appear vast but actually is rather privy, together as we are around one table, and even more often, around lunches, receptions or dinners. I consider this time in Vienna to have been a great chance and opportunity. It was a shortcut to much of the issues that enliven international relations on a daily basis. I know I will miss you all.

A farewell, they say, is an occasion to share some discernment, some good judgment. I tend to think that such kind of wisdom is not personal but comes from working together. I had any contribution to make, I hope I have made it before, not awaiting this moment, or I would look stupid by now. Besides, I am a realist : you may give advice but you can not prompt behavior.
So, I'd rather like to tell a story, one of my favorites, come to us from Ancient Greece.

It is about Phoebus, the Sun, and Boreas, the northern whirlwind. At some remote time, in the leisurely manner that is the privilege of heavenly figures, Phoebus and Boreas together observed a lonely man walking through an empty countryside. It was early autumn. The mortal creature had shown

foresight. He had a coat on - just in case - a solid one, double lining, strong tissue, and fasteners all ready.

Boreas felt a teasing and, turning to his friend Phoebus, says : "I bet that in no time, I blow that coat away from the earthling. Nothing resists the power of my gusts. No binder, no sash, no girdle, no belt will hold when I am determined to sweep clean the plain."

"Save your words, Phoebus answers, and show us. You have a license to obstruct my rays."

And Boreas fills its lungs, which are quite large, and rounds its cheeks, which swell like airships. The air gets on the move and menacing clouds gather on the horizon. The little human feels something is coming. He accelerates the pace and buttons up. But the wind gains strength. Boreas blows in earnest, makes uproar, creates a storm. He tries to rip open the collar, to bite through with rain, to pierce with cold, by all means to penetrate the details of the man's coat. But as he puffs and labors, the man tightens his own grip, leans forward and buttresses against all that air coming his way. Boreas kicks up a din, shakes like a demon. Hedges are snatched away, fences lay to the ground, trees tear off, roofs are wrested from thatched cottages, all just for a mantle. Yet, as Boreas thrashes about, the man's determination redoubles. He holds on even firmer to his coat. Much is destroyed on the passage, but the earthling remains steadfast.

Phoebus is amused and gets ready to put an end to the vain toiling. Boreas is nodded to the side. Phoebus's rays start parting the ugly clouds. Daylight returns. The human being looks up, heaves a sigh of relief, and relaxes. Soon he starts sweating under his coat, and then takes it off, quietly, with minimal effort.

Such is the victory of gentleness over violence.

Dear colleagues, the OSCE, I always thought, is all about effective gentleness. And a wonderful script to play.

My last words are naturally words of thanks. Thanks to Marc, the Secretary General, and all the members of the Secretariat, thanks to the Institutions and their personnel, thanks to the dedicated men and women in the Field operations, thanks to all those to whom the Belgian Chairmanship, and me personally, remain indebted for the exemplary support received before, during and after 2006.

At the risk of appearing selective, but conscious of the fact that they are often forgotten, yet very close to us all, I would like to thank very especially Michael Plutt, Elke Lidarik, Michèle Aberl, Micky Kroell, Ghada Hazim, and the whole team of Conference Services. It is just amazing how many small and big problems they resolve on a daily basis, how well they ensure that information circulates smoothly among all of us, and with how much kindness and dedication they do all this ! I think they deserve a special mention at this occasion.

Mr. Chairman,

I wish you well at the helm of this organization, which is lucky to find Finland, its cradle in so many ways, to steer it safely through turbulent times. And thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to express myself upon leaving this most hospitable organization and most pleasant city of Vienna.