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THE PRESIDENT**



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**Speech by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
at the symposium commemorating the 25th anniversary
of the Haiku International Association**

I thank you for this invitation to speak on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Foundation of the Haiku International Association. I discovered haiku poetry in the summer of 2004, almost ten year ago. In some way I'm young, as far as haiku is concerned ! Congratulations with this anniversary.

Before I say a few words on "Haiku and Europe", I want to share a few reasons why I am attracted to haiku, and how a politician in particular can come to haiku poetry. It may seem somewhat paradoxical, but life itself and every human being are full of paradox. When you have no rational explanations you can always speak of mystery and paradox !

What does poetry have to do with politics? Or rather what does a poet have to do with politics and vice versa ? There will be links because a person does not change substantially depending on his activity. And yet in each of us there are facets to our personalities, each with its own need for expression. We are all partly 'compartmentalised'. Between poetry and politics I do not see many links. Between the poet and the politician, there are many more. Thus, a haiku poet engaged in politics cannot be extravagant, or excessively vain, or over the top. He should incorporate into his actions a sense of balance, a desire for simplicity and harmony, the feeling of belonging to a larger whole. Certainly, a good politician does not need to be a poet and does not even need to love poetry and, perhaps, a poet should best remain away from political action. In that sense I am a "politician-haiku poet" rather than a 'haiku poet-politician'!

P R E S S

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But I am not the only "politician-haiku poet". I was pleasantly surprised when some time ago someone sent me a booklet with the collected haikus of Dag Hammarskjöld, which are included in his posthumously published diary *Markings*. I had read that book almost fifty years ago, but at the time his haikus simply passed me by. The greatest Secretary-General of the United Nations apparently took to haiku, not as a solace but as a need. So I am in good company ! And it is no coincidence that this event takes place in the Swedish Permanent Representation to the European Union !

As I said, we are all complex personalities. Haiku poetry is in line with my personality. I like nature and the seasons – not as a scientist, not as an ecologist, but as an aesthete. I like conciseness –expressing myself using as few words as possible whilst being as clear at the same time. It is the Latin tradition in which I was raised. And I like paradox – a surprising and seemingly contradictory approach to things.

So, haiku fits me. There are also other aspects of haiku that I hold dear: simplicity, certainly in our sophisticated, cynical world, and harmony in this realm of competition, rivalry and jealousy.

Dealing with the world of men increases one's longing for Paradise, for the absence of conflict, jealousy and vanity. A longing for peace and reconciliation, and for unity. This does not bespeak weariness, but a desire for simplicity.

I developed this way of life long before I discovered haiku. Haiku was in some way a coronation of this behaviour and mind-set. It was a logical consequence. I came to haiku. Haiku didn't come to me. Let me put it in another way. It is a way of life. Haiku does not change your life, but because your life changes, one comes across haiku.

Now for a few words on the relation between haiku and Europe. Of course, the homeland of haiku is Japan. Without Japan, no haiku. Last Novembre, I went to Matsuyama, the haiku-capital, the centre of the international haiku movement. I visited the Shiki Memorial Museum honouring the great poet Masaoka Shiki. I am happy that in my second haiku book published a few months ago, my stances have been translated into Japan, thanks to Professor Willy Vande Walle, an outstanding Japanologist and also a fine 'connoisseur' of the greatest haiku poet of all, Matsuo Basho.

But Haiku conquered the world, starting with Europe. It shows that haiku and the philosophy behind haiku are universal. I compare it with classical music, not only emblematic of European culture but now considered as world heritage. It has become universal. All that is profoundly humane has the vocation to become global. Every culture integrates cultural imports of course into its own paradigm. Haiku has become in that way a bridge between Japan and Europe. I'm even an proponent of haiku-diplomacy ! With my function I have tried also to contribute to the spread of haiku in Europe. I'm a P.R. man for haiku, more than a potential Nobel Prize Winner for literature !

I also hope to have contributed to haiku poetry being more respected as a fully fledged form of poetry.

Europe was born from the ashes of wars and built on the longing for peace and reconciliation. Europeans are now averse to conflict but still long for harmony. That is also why haiku has the potential to become popular on this continent.

After leaving this high office I will be able to devote myself even more to haiku. The real Haiku-Herman is still to come ! Again I came here to testify, and to encourage your association to continue its work. Haiku is more than a pastime. It is a way of life, it embodies values. Of course I cannot leave you without quoting my latest stance. I wrote it after a short walk in the night. All of a sudden there was a surrealistic view. The heaven was black of course, but with the full moon it was not dark. The windy weather blew the clouds more rapidly. I took my pencil and wrote :

Wandering clouds
Full moon and black heaven
Chiaroscuro

Trekkende wolken
Volle maan, zwarte hemel
Clair obscur beweegt.

Nuages mouvants
Pleine lune et ciel noir
Clair Obscur en marche
