



THE EMBASSY OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA  
TO BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG AND THE EUROPEAN UNION  
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## **EC President Herman Van Rompuy says "the relationship between Europe and Sri Lanka is strong and a very old one"**

President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy has characterized the relationship between Europe and Sri Lanka as “strong and a very old one”, and that between Belgium and Sri Lanka as “excellent”. Mr. Van Rompuy, who was previously the Prime Minister of Belgium, made these observations when he and Madam Van Rompuy participated as the Guests of Honor at a concert by Sitar Virtuoso Pradeep Ratnayake and his ensemble held at the Palais des Beaux Arts (BOZAR) in Brussels on Saturday (2 October 2010). The event was part of the cultural programme held to coincide with the Asia-Europe Summit Meeting (ASEM8) which is taking place in Brussels from 4-5 October.

Reminiscing on his visit to the island in 2000, President Van Rompuy said “ personally, I have the best memories of my trip to Sri Lanka. At the time I was an opposition member of the Belgian Parliament.” He recalled visiting Colombo and Kandy and meeting with Sri Lankan leaders. The EC President who along with other guests had prior to the concert savored “Ceylon tea” at the Sri Lanka tourism, travel and trade promotion held at the BOZAR, reminded his audience that “tea was first planted in Ceylon by the British”, and that “two more members of our EU member states – the Portuguese and the Dutch have influenced and marked the history of the island”. He added “Sri Lanka and Europe have influenced each other for hundreds if not thousands of years. Let me stress this was not all one way. Around 500 BC Sri Lanka had already constructed some of the largest reservoirs and dams of the ancient world.” Noting that “the art, musical, theatrical and dance heritage of Asia is exceptionally rich and sophisticated, and continues until today to exercise a strong influence”, the EC President described Pradeep Ratnayake “as a living example of blending different influences from the North Indian to jazz and western classical music”.

Sri Lanka’s Ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU Ravinatha Aryasinha in his remarks, described President and Madam Van Rompuy as “long standing friends of Sri Lanka”, and that “President Van Rompuy's presence at the concert is no doubt testimony to the importance attached both by the EU, as well as Belgium, to relations with Sri Lanka.”

On the part of the Government of Sri Lanka, the Ambassador said “support to the Asian cultural programme of ASEM through enabling the participation of Pradeep, salutes the efforts made under the current Belgian Presidency of the EU, to bring Europe and Asia closer together”.

The Ambassador added that “Pradeep Ratnayake and his music in many ways mirrors modern Sri Lanka; steeped in a historic tradition, but bold enough to experiment with the best, whether from the East or West. His melodies convey both the serenity and vibrancy of Sri Lanka's polity. His constant quest to surpass himself, epitomizes the ambitions of a country, that seeks to become the pride of Asia”.

The Ambassador also thanked the BOZAR and the main sponsors of the event - Sri Lanka Tourism, Sri Lankan Airlines, and the Belgolux-Sri Lanka Business Council for helping the Embassy transform this occasion into a multi-faceted “Sri Lanka evening”. He hoped that this would serve as an appetizer, in encouraging those attending the concert to also explore Sri Lanka in greater depth – as policy makers, diplomats, scholars, traders, investors and tourists. He also thanked Sri Lanka’s Honorary Consul in Belgium Monique De Dekker-Deprez for her excellent support in organizing this event.

Pradeep Ratnayake was supported by Ravibandhu Vidyapathy (Sri Lankan percussion) Alston Joachim (Bass Guitar) and Chandralal Amarakoon (Tabla). Playing to a packed audience which comprised of members of the Diplomatic Corps, officials of the European institutions and the Belgian Government, members of the Sri Lanka community and music lovers, they received a standing ovation at the culmination of the 2 hour concert.

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