

Sad is my role and task here today!

To convey the condolences and deepest sympathy to Russell's family, friends, colleagues, all Inverness on behalf of Lluís Maria de Puig, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Organisation Russell so passionately loved. The whole Assembly, members of parliaments in 47 member states, and dozens working in the Secretariat are mournful.

Politicians engaged in international work frequently have a double life: one life back at home and another one abroad. Families often suffer a lot from husbands, wives, dads or moms being away so often. As I recall that Russell hardly missed any missions by the Assembly, I must say probably Russell was one of the worst of all of us. Such an unfair paradox it is, that the more Europe receives, the less remains for the family. So Joan, Graham, David and Andrew deserve enormous extra sympathy!

Russell's sons visited their father in Strasbourg, Graham and Andrew earlier, David in 2001. On this latter occasion David was sitting up in the balcony, and Russell, President of the Assembly, sitting in the Chair, said "I am so happy that he is here because I am very proud of him. Presidents get blamed for quite a few things that aren't their fault but if you see a big man in a red kilt striding about, I take full responsibility."- that is what he said, it can be read in the official records.

I wonder how much relatives and friends in Inverness know about his work in Strasbourg. But I would like to stress here and to you, that Russell was an absolutely outstanding phenomenon of our Assembly. It may sound as a common place but he was not merely a President from 1999 until 2002: Russell's wisdom, humanity and humour were appreciated and loved by all cross-party segments, and those aware of politics know how tremendous an achievement this is.

What was it, the magic of Russell? He had extraordinarily clear views on freedom and democracy. He himself often said that real-politics is easy, is rubbish, moral-politics must prevail. Some thought that Russell, always insisting on moral-politics, was naïve, but I strongly oppose them. In recent years, Russell was rapporteur on Kosovo and also on Montenegro. He was warned to pay attention to real-politics, but he insisted on the moral. It even happened that his report did not get a majority. But rest assured that, today, hundreds of thousands of people in the independent Kosovo and Montenegro put his name in their prayers. No, Russell was not naïve at all; he was actually endlessly seeking realistic solutions, but only those realistic solutions which are also based on moral.

The other magical thing with Russell was that his wisdom and commitment were always combined with such a unique charm and humour! Many years ago, when he was my predecessor as group leader, one of our colleagues from Croatia complimented him on being such a fine and clever Englishman upon which he replied immediately: "Next time you call me Englishman, I will call you a Serb!" This showed that this genuine European remained a real Scot as well.

In his very last speech in the Assembly, when he took the floor less than two months ago, Russell said how important humour was to him. The debate was about China, and Russell, in his speech, told us the story, when he, as President of the Assembly criticized China on the death penalty and his Chinese host replied: "If you don't tell me how to run my internal affairs, I won't tell you how to reform the House of Lords". And Russell was laughing at this nonsense and this is how he commented on this: "something that encourages me about dialogue with China is that we share a sense of humour."

Only a few months ago, Russell and I had a dinner in Paris. This was the first time that he mentioned that he felt his death was approaching. Again, even on this, he had to

make a joke, when he said that he himself would be the most appropriate person to speak at his funeral service. "I would deliver a fabulous speech" – he said and laughed in his typical Russell-way. And indeed, if he was standing here today before you, he would give by far the best speech today. Except that he could not say to you on our behalf how much we loved him. And he could not say to you on our behalf how many of us feel that his farewell is also an enormous personal loss for us.

Russell was cremated because he could not imagine his body enclosed in a coffin. He never believed in the immortality of the soul either. He was seeking and found the essence of his life in the timeframe given to him. Though, as long as we are alive, for those who loved Russell and learned from Russell, Russell will also continue to be alive as we look at one another, as we look into ourselves, as we try to make this world a better place. This is the knowledge we may derive solace from, even when he is not any more with us in person and when we miss him terribly.

Allow me, a Hungarian, to borrow the words of the poet Robert Burns: "The wide world is all before us - but a world without a friend."