



(seul le texte prononcé fait foi !)

**Allocution de bienvenue**  
**par Monsieur Paul Helmingier,**  
**bourgmestre de la Ville de Luxembourg**  
**le lundi 24 novembre 2008 à l'Hôtel de Ville**

Your Excellency,  
Dear Dr Arajärvi,

On behalf of the City of Luxembourg and of the college of aldermen, it is my honour and privilege to welcome you to our city. As the capital city of one of Europe's smallest states, we are particularly proud to receive the presidential couple of Finland, the eighth biggest country in Europe in terms of area and at the same time the most sparsely populated in the European Union. In greeting you, Mrs President, we welcome the appreciated and acknowledged representative of your great country, its people and their cultures.

Royal Highnesses,

Please allow me, on behalf of the City of Luxembourg, to thank you for honouring us with your presence today. Your attendance at this ceremony is lending a special glamour to our reception of our illustrious guests.

Royal Highnesses,  
Excellency,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Official visits are often opportunities to remind us of a common historical background. Like that of most other European countries, Finland's history has been one of conflict and fight for independence. Historically a part of Sweden and from 1809 an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire, Finland's declaration of independence from Russia in 1917 was followed by a civil war, wars against the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, and a period of official neutrality during the Cold War. Finland joined the United Nations in 1955 and the European Union in 1995 and, in the present time of financial and economic turmoil, your country does not regret, I am sure, to share with us a common currency as a valued member of the Eurozone.

Finland has recently been ranked the second most stable country in the world in a survey based on social, economic, political, and military indicators. As a country and as a city which themselves regularly come out on top of international comparisons of national performance, we look with envy at the breadth of your excellence in high-technology manufacturing, public education, health care and, last but by no means least, the protection of civil liberties.

Luxembourg being a dunce (bad pupil) in the PISA study, we definitely envy you the quality of your education system!

Mrs President,

On March 1, 2000, you were inaugurated as president of Finland, the first woman to hold that office. After earning a degree in law in 1970, you began your professional career as an attorney before entering politics in 1974. From 1977 to 1996 you served on the Helsinki City Council, and in 1979 you were elected to Parliament. While retaining your parliamentary seat, you broadened your experience in domestic and international politics by holding a number of Cabinet posts for all of which you were the first woman!

Mrs President,

Dear Dr Arajärvi,

You are with us for just a couple of days – hopefully you will want to come back. 619 of your fellow countrymen have so far chosen to live in our city. I have to confess that even though so many Finns live here and while many of us quite regularly enjoy a good sauna – mostly with the required amount of olüt and vodka, but without, unfortunately the headlong rush through snow into a frozen lake - the depth of Finnish history, culture and folklore are not very well known in Luxembourg. The Finnish Christmas Market which we will have the opportunity to visit later on will at least give us some sense of the colourful, congenial warmth which glows below the perceived coolness of your countrymen. Having lived through a Finnish winter and spring right up to Midsummer Night when I was my country's delegate to the first stage of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation, I bear testimony to the serene beauty of your country, to the warm hospitality of its people and to the immense diversity of its culture and traditions from Porvoo and Turku all the way up to Oulu and Rovaniemi, from the Gulf of Finland to way beyond the Arctic Circle.

Luxembourgers will have another opportunity to meet a renowned representative of Finnish culture in March 2009 in our concert hall, the Philharmonie, where your fellow countryman, Osmo Vänskä will conduct the Minnesota Orchestra.

And of course, I would be remiss if I did not mention that, in sports, the one thing that Luxembourgers associate with Finland is our country's first ever Olympic athletic gold medal obtained by Josy Barthel in the men's 1500 metres at the 1952 Summer Olympics in Helsinki!

Royal Highnesses,

Mrs President, Dear Mr Arajärvi,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like the Finns, Luxemburgers had to fight for their freedom and independence. Today both Finland and Luxembourg consider their European commitment as both a guarantee of their independence and a token of peace which we want to share with all peoples. I will have the privilege next month to attend the ceremony in Oslo where your predecessor Martti Ahtisaari will receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his untiring and often successful efforts to broker peace among often ancestral enemies. And, two weeks ago, in the course of your many international activities, you attended the UN General Assembly's meeting on the Culture of Peace, an historic event, since the heads of state of several Arab countries were present in the General Assembly Hall when President Shimon Peres of Israel made a strong appeal for peace and welcomed the

peace initiative put forward by the Arab League. One of the goals of the meeting - dialogue between the western countries and the Islamic world - was achieved. At this high-level meeting you strongly advocated a negotiated solution between Israelis and the Palestinians to bring about a lasting peace and you stressed the importance of inter-religious dialogue. You said - quote- *“We are invited to move into a new era of respect for a variety of convictions. We are challenged to recognize the universal spiritual and human values of the religions that have shaped our common world. We have to do our part today in order to provide for a better world for generations to come.”*

Your Excellency,  
Dear Dr Arajärvi,

Again please allow me, on behalf of my fellow citizens and in my personal name, to welcome you to our city and to say how deeply honoured we are by your visit.

Tervetuloa! – Welcome again! and kiitos for your attention.