



Words of welcome
President of the Senate, Ankie Broekers-Knol
on the occasion of the visit of the European Commission
January 7, 2016

Mr. President, Ladies and gentlemen,

Van harte welkom, Soyez le bienvenue, Herzlich Willkommen, a warm welcome to you all on behalf of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Netherlands. We are aware of the historical importance of this occasion: it is the first time the Dutch parliament receives the European Commission here in the Hague at nearly full strength.

I am honoured to welcome you to the magnificent Plenary Hall of the Dutch Senate. This room was built around 1655 as the meeting room of the representatives of the cities of Holland and has served as a 'parliamentary' meeting Hall ever since. When you look at the ceiling, you will see some of the 17th century trade partners of the Netherlands. To name a few: the French, the Germans, the Spaniards, the Italians, the Turks and the Russians.

From that day onwards the Netherlands has always been a country that highly values strong international connections. Under the Parliamentary Dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency

we strive to uphold and improve strong international connections through better cooperation between parliamentarians from EU-member states. We also strive to uphold the values that underpin the European Union, and the 'acquis communautaire'. This is the more important when there are disturbing signs that values like freedom of press and an independent judiciary today do not seem to be as self-evident in all Member-States as they used to be.

The role of national parliaments in the EU has become increasingly important, especially since the Treaty of Lisbon came into force in 2009. Through the subsidiarity mechanism and the political dialogue, national parliaments now have a formalised, direct relationship with the European Commission.

The Lisbon Treaty, at the time, was celebrated for making the EU more democratically accountable. But the instruments it provided are still relatively new and deserve our continuous attention. It is a worthwhile cause to look at practical, innovative ways in which we can improve for instance the yellow-card procedure or the correspondence in the political dialogue.

I believe interparliamentary cooperation can make an important contribution in this regard. By exchanging information and best practices not only between national parliaments but also between MP's and MEP's, we can ensure full democratic

scrutiny. Interparliamentary conferences are a valuable instrument as they allow for an open exchange of views between delegations.

I cannot stress enough how much we appreciate the active way in which the European Commission has been involved in these interparliamentary conferences. In order for the process of democratic scrutiny to fully work it is vital that national parliaments and the European Parliament maintain a good relationship with the European Commission. In the coming months we hope to welcome you to many of our conferences.

The fact that you are present here, at the kick-off of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in such large numbers is a very promising start indeed.

We are very glad to receive you here today in The Hague, the heart of Dutch democracy to discuss pressing issues that concern us all and I hope that the history and the symbolism of this hall will inspire us to work together to - once again - achieve strong international connections.

I now would like to give the floor to my colleague, the Acting Speaker of the House of Representatives, Kadhija Arib. Thank you.