



Words of welcome by the President of the Dutch Senate, Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol
Meeting of COSAC
Monday 13 June 2016, Hall of Knights, The Hague

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues, Excellencies,

Van harte welkom, soyez les bienvenus, herzlich willkommen, benvenuti, bienvenidos; a warm welcome to you all on behalf of the Senate and the House of Representatives of the Netherlands.

I consider it a great honour and a pleasure to officially welcome you to the final conference of the Dutch Parliamentary dimension. Seeing this historic hall filled up with so many parliamentarians from all over Europe reminds me of the time when I myself was a member of the Dutch COSAC delegation. For ten years I took part in COSAC-meetings and I have always found this platform to be of great value.

I remember when the Netherlands last held the Presidency in 2004, that COSAC members exchanged - **for the first time** - best practices in parliamentary scrutiny. In fact we as Dutch delegation wanted to have the third railway package as the topic for the exchange. There was a lot of fuzz on whether we should have such an exchange anyway and on whether this was the right subject. It happened to be my birthday and I remember very well that a notable member of the French Senate, Hubert

Haenel, clinched the matter by proposing to give in to the Dutch as a birthday gift to me. Everybody agreed to it , and so we had our first exchange of best practices. It was a rather unusual birthday present, but it was highly appreciated. And because it was so out of the ordinary, I still remember it to this day.

Needless to say, we have come a long way since then. The role of national parliaments and the European Parliament has become increasingly important, especially since the **Treaty of Lisbon** came into force in 2009. While at the time, the Lisbon Treaty was celebrated for making the EU more democratically accountable, the instruments it provides us 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.

Parliamentary cooperation is essential, especially in these **challenging times** for the European Union. Having only barely recovered from the economic and financial crisis we are now dealing with the migration crisis, while at the same time trying to keep all member states within the Union, doing our utmost to keep on bolstering the economy, fighting youth unemployment and protecting ourselves against a rising number of terrorist attacks.

In addition, Europe faces instability, conflict and disrupted societies at its borders. So it is of **vital importance** that we find a way to protect and safeguard our free, open, democratic society and that we stand firm to uphold the rule of law. Parliamentarians have an important role to play on that score. The rule of law is the foundation for the basic **values** of the EU: legality, legal certainty, equality before the law, respect for human rights, non-discrimination and - most importantly - access to independent and impartial judges for a fair trial.

These values form our European identity. And national and European parliamentarians all share a **responsibility** to protect that identity. We need to uphold the rule of law in our own countries as well as on a Union level.

In addition, we have a responsibility to urge our governments and the institutions of the European Union to recognize the urgency of problems and the need for Union-level agreements. The migrant crisis is a good example of this. For years we were warned, but still the EU was insufficiently prepared. I think we can all agree that an ounce of **prevention** is better than a pound of cure.

Tackling this crisis requires a **considerable investment** by all member states. Working together is the only way the EU can maintain its position as a solid block, as one of the world's largest economies. We are a unique political partnership that is the envy of many countries around the world.

In the world of today, no member state could succeed in maintaining its position by itself. In my view this is also true for the United Kingdom.

European member states have to **work together** to achieve goals that go beyond the interests of the individual sovereign state. A few weeks back, I said this to a fellow parliamentarian in connection to the migration flow. He responded by asking me if I sincerely thought that it is possible for 28 member states to devise a framework to cope with future migration flows. To which I responded: we are bound to. As 28 member states we cannot afford to sit and wait till the next crises occur without there being frameworks for solutions to cope with these crises.

United we stand. *L'union fait la force*. It is more than a slogan. It is a fact of life.

Today, we will not find solutions for all challenges that face Europe, but we will exchange opinions and form connections that can end up proving invaluable in creating the common ground that Europe so desperately needs.

Together, the national parliaments and the European Parliament are uniquely placed to offer a platform for debate that determines whether initiatives for European solutions can count on broad public support.

Let us use this interparliamentary conference to work together to strengthen interparliamentary cooperation. Let us - in general - strengthen parliamentary control over the European decision making process. Let us strengthen the Union and our individual member states by upholding the rule of law and by making our European decisions better democratically legitimized.

If we can manage that in the time to come, we will make the European Union sustainable for future generations, to the benefit of us all.

Thank you.