



**Words of welcome by the President of the Dutch Senate, Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol
Meeting of Chairpersons of the COSAC
Monday 8 February 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.

For those of you who might be hoping that I will continue this speech
in six different languages: I'm afraid I have to disappoint you. There
are not many people who can manage that, apart from the First Vice-
President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans. But many
years ago at one of the COSAC-Chair meetings I met a fellow
parliamentarian who actually did master many languages. I admired
him for his command of six languages including his native tongue. He
then explained to me that he learned all these languages through his
various marriages. Slightly taken aback, I could only remark that that
is a very expensive and complicated way to learn a foreign language
and become multilingual. However, it shows that COSAC meetings

are never dull and that they provide you with information of an unexpected and diverse nature.

As for today, I am happy to say that we can rely on excellent interpreters, so I will continue this speech in English.

As you might have gathered, I have been a member of the Dutch COSAC delegation in the past, before I was elected President of the Senate. For ten years I took part in COSAC-meetings all over Europe (Chair and Plenary) and I have always found this platform to be of great value. I therefore consider it a great honour and a pleasure to address you all this morning and to officially welcome you to the first conference of the Dutch Parliamentary Dimension.

Committees on European Affairs play a vital role in making sure that national parliaments effectively perform their task of scrutinizing European legislation and maintaining the political dialogue with Brussels. In order to achieve this, it is vital that national parliaments maintain good relations and a strong cooperation amongst each other and with the European Parliament.

As parliamentarians we all have a joint responsibility to bridge the gap between EU citizens and the EU. We have a responsibility to secure democratic and transparent EU decision-making and to

safeguard checks and balances within our own member states as well as in Brussels.

Although the role of national parliaments and the European Parliament in the EU has strengthened since the Lisbon Treaty, there is still a lot to be done to improve the way national parliaments deal with European policy and the way national parliaments and the European Parliament cooperate.

I am very glad that in this meeting you will examine the Europol-case as an example of how cooperation on a European level works in practice. It is a worthwhile exercise to look at practical ways in which we can improve our cooperation and exchange best practices.

Inter-parliamentary conferences like the one we are having today are a valuable instrument to us all, as they allow parliamentarians to meet with one another face to face. They are about direct communication; about making contact and discussing issues that concern all of us. By doing that, we learn from one another. And more importantly: we learn to better understand each other's point of view, which works to the benefit of the citizens of EU-member states.

Europe is currently facing many challenges. Having only barely recovered from the economic and financial crisis we are now dealing with the refugee crisis, while at the same time trying to keep all member states within the Union, doing our utmost to keep on bolstering the economy and protecting ourselves against a rising number of terrorist attacks.

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.

Today, we will not find a solution for the many 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.

When it comes to meeting with one another face to face and having an open exchange of views, technology can be of great help. We therefore decided to slightly upgrade the level of innovation. For instance by creating an app where you can find all necessary documents and information. It even offers a chat-function that allows you to send each other short messages. We believe innovation can

enhance a lively debate and make it easier for participants to contact each other directly.

As Mr Azmani has just mentioned, the hall in which we are hosting this conference is 800 years old. It forms the historic heart of Dutch democracy and is therefore the perfect place for parliamentarians to meet, learn from another and better understand each other's point of view.

The fact that we have filled this hall up with new, innovative ways of communication, for me, symbolises European cooperation: respecting historic ties that bind us together and at the same time finding new, effective ways of working together. If we can manage that, we can work together to make the European Union sustainable for future generations, to the benefit of all.