

Vergaderjaar 2006–2007 C

30 180

Conferentie van Voorzitters van de parlementen van de Europese Unie

Nr. 3

VERSLAG

Aan de Voorzitters van de Eerste en van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal

Vastgesteld 14 september 2007

Van 24 t/m 26 mei 2007 vond in Bratislava, Slowakije, een conferentie plaats van de Voorzitters van de parlementen van de Europese Unie. Namens de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal nam de Voorzitter, Yvonne Timmerman-Buck deel. Namens de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal nam de Voorzitter, Gerdi Verbeet deel. Zij werden begeleid door de Griffiers van de Eerste en Tweede Kamer, Geert Jan Hamilton en Jacqueline Biesheuvel-Vermeijden, en door adjunct-griffier Gonnie de Boer.

Het programma van de conferentie, de conclusies van het voorzitterschap en de speeches die de Voorzitters uitspraken zijn bij dit verslag gevoegd.

Adjunct-griffier,
De Boer

Toekomst van Europa

Het meest gevoelige onderwerp op de agenda betrof de toekomst van Europa en met name de naderende onderhandelingen over het nieuwe Europese Verdrag dat in de plaats moet komen van het gesneuvelde Grondwettelijk Verdrag. Er werd met name kritisch naar de delegaties gekeken van de landen die het Grondwettelijk Verdrag niet hadden geratificeerd, nadat bij verschillende gelegenheden in de afgelopen maanden Nederland ook in verschillende verbanden aangesproken is op zijn min of meer categorische afwijzing ervan. Over de tekst van de conclusies van het Voorzitterschap is ook heel lang onderhandeld, waarbij opvallend was dat de meeste nationale parlementen – ook van landen die het Verdrag wél hebben geratificeerd – begrip hadden voor de bezwaren van de Nederlandse en enkele andere delegaties (o.a. uit het Verenigd Koninkrijk (VK) en Polen) tegen onderdelen van de initieel voorgestelde tekst. Even opvallend was, dat de aanwezige delegatie van het Europees Parlement zich ter plaatse actief verzette tegen het doorklinken van dat begrip in de tekst. Uiteindelijk is de hele verwijzing naar het Verdrag waar de discussie over ontstond uit de conclusies geschrapt.

In de bijdragen van de Voorzitters op dit onderwerp klonken als rode draad door: concrete actie, tastbare resultaten, transparantie en betere communicatie. Om burgers weer te enthousiasmeren voor het Europese project, moeten grensoverschrijdende en alledaagse problemen door de Europese Unie (EU) worden aangepakt. De internationale ontwikkelingen van de afgelopen jaren hebben ertoe geleid dat mensen zich onzeker voelen over hun positie op de arbeidsmarkt, over het milieu en over hun veiligheid. Op al die terreinen is winst te boeken door als EU lidstaten samen te werken. Institutionele hervormingen zijn daarbij niet een doel op zich maar een middel om oplossingen te bereiken. Wel is meer transparantie gewenst, om duidelijk(er) te maken hoe en door wie besluiten worden genomen en waarom. Communicatie is een essentieel onderdeel van het bewerkstellingen van die transparantie.

Uiteindelijk is het aan ieder parlement voor zich om zich uit te spreken over een nieuw verdrag. Maar ten opzichte van de onderhandelingen werd door bijna alle aanwezigen gepleit voor een constructieve, positieve grondhouding, waarbij respect bestaat voor zowel de meerderheids- als de minderheidsstandpunten.

Interparlementaire samenwerking

Bij de Voorzittersconferentie in Athene in 2003 is een werkgroep in het leven geroepen om richtlijnen op te stellen voor de stroomlijning van interparlementaire samenwerking in het EU-kader. Onder Nederlands voorzitterschap zijn in 2004 deze «Hague Guidelines for Inter-parliamentary cooperation» vastgesteld. Parallel hieraan is in Den Haag een discussie gestart over het saneren van de wildgroei in interparlementaire organisaties («rationalising inter-parliamentary cooperation»). In 2005 is in Boedapest besloten dat er onder leiding van het inkomend Deens voorzitterschap een rapport zou worden opgesteld met voorstellen om de interparlementaire samenwerking te rationaliseren en efficiënter te maken.

Gelet op de onenigheid die in Den Haag en in Boedapest bestond over concrete hervormingsvoorstellen waren de verwachtingen redelijk laag. Het rapport dat in 2006 in Kopenhagen voorlag was dan ook – hoewel een stap in de goede richting – op het punt van sanering slechts inventariserend. De Denen hebben vooral de mogelijkheid aangegrepen, om aan te haken bij de discussie die in Boedapest werd gevoerd, over het beter laten

functioneren van de Hague Guidelines. Er is vervolgens een werkgroep in het leven geroepen om de volgende vragen te beantwoorden, cq. voorstellen te doen op de volgende onderwerpen:

- Kunnen de Hague Guidelines voor interparlementaire samenwerking worden versterkt?
- Kan de afstemming tussen de verschillende interparlementaire fora (waaronder de Voorzittersconferentie, de COSAC, vergaderingen van vakcommissies en commissievergaderingen van het EP en het parlement van het EU-voorzitterschap gezamenlijk) worden verbeterd en zo ja, hoe?
- Kunnen de nationale parlementen de samenwerking met het EP en de Europese Commissie versterken?
- Kan het huidige regime van voorzitterschap van de EU Voorzittersconferentie worden verbeterd?

Ter voorbereiding op het rapport van de werkgroep zijn questionnaires met de bovenstaande vragen aan de nationale parlementen gezonden.

De werkgroep is op 1 maart 2007 in Bratislava bijeengekomen om een concept rapport en concept herziene Guidelines op te stellen. De rapporteurs (Slowaken, Denen, Finnen) waren pragmatisch te werk gegaan en zowel het rapport als de nieuwe concept Guidelines waren gebaseerd op de inmiddels ontstane praktijk en deden praktische verbetervoorstellen. Aan de wezenlijke aard of inhoud van het interparlementaire verkeer werd niet getornd. Desondanks ontstond over de voorstellen een hoog oplopende discussie over het mandaat en de precieze opdracht van de werkgroep, met name ingegeven door de Italiaanse en Hongaarse parlementen. Na de Griffiersconferentie in maart is dan ook slechts geconcludeerd dat het rapport, zonder de gewijzigde Guidelines, aan de Voorzittersconferentie kon worden voorgelegd. De Voorzittersconferentie heeft het rapport aangenomen en heeft ingestemd met voortzetting door de werkgroep, onder het inkomend Portugees voorzitterschap, van de discussie over de herziening van de Hague Guidelines. Namens de Tweede Kamer zit de stafmedewerker van de Griffier in deze werkgroep.

Voorts is over twee praktische punten wel overeenstemming bereikt. Het eerste betrof het verminderen van de kosten van het organiseren van een Voorzittersconferentie voor het gastland, door de delegaties zelf hun hotelkosten te laten dragen. Het tweede betrof het invoeren van een nieuw systeem voor de toewijzing van het jaarlijks voorzitterschap van de Voorzittersconferentie. Tijdens de Griffiersvergadering is tevens besloten dat het parlement van het land dat in de tweede helft van het jaar het EU-voorzitterschap bekleedt, in de eerste helft van het volgende jaar de Voorzittersconferentie organiseert. In beginsel zullen Portugal in 2007–2008 en Frankrijk in 2008–2009 het voorzitterschap van de Voorzittersconferentie bekleden.

Raising National European Awareness

Conform de oproep van de Nederlandse leden Timmermans en Van der Linden uit de Conventie, wordt sinds 2005 in veel nationale parlementen in de één of andere vorm jaarlijks gedebatteerd over het wetgevings- en werkprogramma (WWP) van de Europese Commissie. Dit debat is in zowel de Eerste als de Tweede Kamer van de Staten-Generaal bijzonder nuttig geweest voor het aanwijzen van voorstellen die in aanmerking komen voor een subsidiariteitstoets. Het in COSAC-verband identificeren van een aantal voorstellen voor een gezamenlijke toets door meerdere parlementen sluit hier goed bij aan, dit is ook in de praktijk gebleken.

Hoewel sommige parlementen om uiteenlopende redenen nog steeds huiverig staan tegenover een gecoördineerde aanpak van het WWP is ook weer bij de Voorzittersconferentie opgeroepen om – behoudens het constitutionele stelsel van ieder land afzonderlijk en de parlementaire praktijk – zo mogelijk kort na de publicatie van het WWP hierover in de verschillende nationale parlementen een debat te voeren erover.

Verschillende Voorzitters benadrukten de noodzaak van een duidelijke, actieve betrokkenheid van nationale parlementen bij het Europese debat om zo het democratisch deficit te verkleinen en het Europese besluitvormingsproces transparanter te maken. Daarbij moet vooral worden gesproken over concrete zaken die op Europees niveau aangepakt kunnen worden, niet alleen over institutionele kwesties.

Steun aan parlementen in nieuwe en ontwikkelende democratieën

Op eerdere Voorzittersconferenties in Boedapest en Kopenhagen is gesproken over steun die EU parlementen bieden aan nieuwe en ontwikkelende democratieën («new and emerging democracies», NEDs). Bijna alle parlementen bieden namelijk wel een vorm van ondersteuning aan parlementen van jonge democratieën, zowel via politieke contacten als op ambtelijk niveau. Er wordt echter enerzijds door parlementen nauwelijks aanspraak gemaakt op voor dit soort projecten beschikbare fondsen, anderzijds wordt door de vele internationale organisaties die dit soort projecten (ook en veelvuldig) uitvoeren te weinig een beroep gedaan op de bij Europese parlementen beschikbare expertise. Een betere uitwisseling van gegevens over wie wat doet met welke middelen is dus wenselijk, met name om onnodige duplicatie en verspilling van middelen en expertise te voorkomen. Ook zou er meer samengewerkt moeten worden met de Europese Commissie, om gebruik te kunnen maken van bestaande EU instrumenten en faciliteiten.

De Task Force die in Boedapest is opgericht om aanbevelingen te doen voor een verbeterde samenwerking en afstemming tussen de EU instellingen en parlementen op het gebied van steun aan NEDs bracht in Kopenhagen een voorlopig en in Bratislava een verder verslag uit. Ten eerste is door de Task Force met de Commissie gesproken over nauwere samenwerking met en actieve consultatie van nationale parlementen wanneer er vanuit de EU steunprogramma's worden opgericht en uitgewerkt. Ten tweede is afgesproken dat de Interparliamentary EU Information Exchange (IPEX) Board en het EP samen gaan werken om een betere informatie-uitwisseling tussen betrokken partijen op gang te brengen. Tot slot is gezien in hoeverre samenwerking met de Parlementaire Assemblee van de Raad van Europa en de European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) op dit gebied gewenst is.

In Bratislava is besloten de Task Force haar werk voort te laten zetten en bij de volgende Voorzittersconferentie verdere, meer concrete voorstellen te doen voor onder andere procedures voor samenwerking en informatie-uitwisseling, deelname van nationale parlementen aan speciale tender-procedures en andere manieren van financiering van samenwerkingsprojecten, en voor samenwerking tussen verschillende interparlementaire fora op dit gebied. De Nederlandse Permanent Vertegenwoordiger bij het EP zit namens de Staten-Generaal in deze werkgroep. Nederland is voorstander van een betere informatie-uitwisseling en het voorkomen van dubbel werk of het inefficiënt benutten van middelen, maar dringt aan op maximale autonomie van nationale parlementen bij het bepalen van waar, wanneer en hoe NEDs worden gesteund.

Oekraïne

Door het Slowaaks Voorzitterschap was de Voorzitter van het parlement van Oekraïne uitgenodigd. De Slowaakse Voorzitter verklaarde dat Oekraïne het potentieel had om op termijn lid te worden van de EU, uiteraard mits het dan aan alle criteria voldoet. Ook stelde hij dat goede relaties tussen de EU en Rusland enerzijds en de EU en Oekraïne anderzijds elkaar geenszins uit hoeven sluiten. De Voorzitter van het Oekraïense parlement benadrukte groot voorstander te zijn van verdergaande economische en politieke samenwerking tussen Oekraïne en de EU. Ook vond hij het keurslijf van het Europees Nabuurschapsbeleid (ENB), waarbinnen Oekraïne een prioriteitspartnerland is, te nauw. Volgens de Voorzitter van de Verkhovna Rada moet de EU zich nu duidelijk uitspreken over de kansen die Oekraïne al dan niet heeft om op termijn toe te treden als volwaardig lid van de Europese Unie.

CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF EU PARLIAMENTS PRESIDENCY CONCLUSIONS

Preliminary remarks

The National Council of the Slovak Republic hosted the annual Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments on 24–27 May 2007. The Speakers or their appointed designates from 44 parliamentary chambers from 27 member states of the European Union, as well as the Speakers from Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine, and the Vice-President of the European Parliament participated in the Conference. The Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pavol Paška, chaired the proceedings.

The Future of Europe, Interparliamentary Cooperation, Raising National European Awareness and Assistance to Parliaments of New Emerging Democracies were the key topics on the Conference agenda. The discussion on the Future of Europe was opened by the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Pavol Paška. The main rapporteur on this topic was the Speaker of the parliament of the Member State holding the EU presidency, Mr. Norbert Lammert, President of the German Bundestag. The EU Commissioner for Taxation and Customs Union, Mr. László Kovács, presented a report on the topic of Raising National European Awareness. The President of the Supreme Council of Ukraine, Mr. Oleksandr Moroz, presented a report on Ukraine, the Eastern Neighbour of the European Union.

Conclusions of the Presidency

The Speakers welcome among themselves Bulgaria and Romania as fullfledged Member States and express their support for their endeavour to actively participate in the activities of the European Union as well as in this Conference. At the same time they reassure candidate countries of the European Union's common approach to the enlargement process on the basis of a renewed institutional framework.

Concerning the future of Europe

The Speakers acknowledge the initiative of the German Council's Presidency, particularly the Berlin Declaration adopted on 25 March 2007 for revival of the process of institutional reform and its vital contribution to the solution to the questions concerning the future of Europe, including the firm stance taken by the Presidency in favour of reaching a new institutional settlement before the European elections in 2009. The

Speakers request that the incoming Portuguese Presidency summarises the views and proposals of national parliaments on the future development of the European Union and communicates them to the Presidency of the Council in office, the European Parliament and the European Commission to be duly taken into account in the future processes of institutional reform. The Speakers at the same time call on the European Institutions to take into account the importance of the role of the national parliaments in the European integration and policy formulation and insist on their role staying at least equal in strength to the one foreseen in the Constitutional Treaty. The Speakers express their common interest that in June 2007 the European Council will find a consensus on a renewed common basis for the European Union.

Concerning interparliamentary cooperation

The Speakers welcomed the Report of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation and acknowledged its eminent contribution to the improvement of interparliamentary cooperation within the European Union. The Speakers call on all concerned parties to take forward the practical suggestions and proposals of the Report in order to reach better coordination of interparliamentary work in the EU as well as better planning and cohesion in work and agendas and avoiding duplication of effort. The Speakers welcomed the new scheme of appointing the Speakers' Conference presidency as most of the parliaments see it as a necessary step towards better coordination between the Speakers' Conference and the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council.

According to the new scheme the parliament of the Member State holding the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of a calendar year would normally hold the presidency of the Speakers' Conference and organise the actual meeting in the following calendar year. The Speakers gave also their support to the proposal on arrangements concerning the new scheme of Presidency appointment:

- the Conference shall decide about two years in advance, which parliaments will assume the EUSC Presidency;
- the Secretaries General shall come with necessary proposals in such situations where, for example, because of elections held in the chamber concerned, the Presidency cannot be assured according to the agreed new scheme.

The Speakers welcomed the willingness of the Portuguese parliament to implement the new scheme already for the next Conference and take over the Presidency for the Conference in 2008 and France as the next parliament hosting the Conference in 2009.

The Speakers welcomed the proposal of the Working Group to reduce the costs of the parliament hosting the Speakers Conference by each parliament covering all accommodation costs concerning its participation at the Secretaries General meeting and the EU Speakers' Conference itself. The Speakers call on the incoming Presidency to make necessary arrangements in order to implement the decision.

The Speakers called on the incoming Presidency to promote the work of the Working Group on Interparliamentary Cooperation in order to conclude its work so as to strengthen the Hague Guidelines reflecting the recent development of interparliamentary cooperation and to present the result before the next meeting of the Secretaries General. The Speakers welcomed the Working Group's idea of a yearly timeframe of interparliamentary cooperation and called for the continuation of the discussion on this issue.

Concerning IPEX

The Speakers welcomed the successful launch of the IPEX website, and noted that a majority of the national parliaments are actively contributing information concerning their parliaments' EU scrutiny. In order to improve the exchange of information even further, the Speakers encourage national parliaments to include English or French summaries of important decisions on IPEX.

The Speakers invite COSAC and IPEX to enhance their cooperation as a means to eliminate duplication of work, and as a means to ensure that the information provided by IPEX, is relevant for the end-users of EU information in the national parliaments. The Speakers also invite COSAC and IPEX to take whatever action they may deem appropriate in order to minimise duplication of work with regards to the calendars on the two websites. The Speakers call on IPEX to create a common portal for the various interparliamentary websites, as a means to facilitate the exchange of parliamentary EU information. The Speakers call on the European Commission and the Office of Official Publications to cooperate with IPEX with a view to improve the transmission of Commission documents to IPEX.

Concerning cooperation between the various forums/parties of interparliamentary cooperation

The Speakers noted that even after the new rotation scheme of appointing the Presidency, the presidencies of the Speakers' Conference and COSAC will not fully coincide. For these reasons and in order to reach better coordination between the two conferences, the Speakers called on the presiding parliaments of both conferences to find ways of better coordination, mainly in terms of agendas, communication of conclusions of each conference to the presidency of the other and timing of meetings in order to strengthen parliamentary participation in EU policy formation.

Concerning the cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Commission

The Speakers welcomed the implementation of the European Commission's commitment to transmit directly all new legislative proposals and consultation papers to national parliaments, as a mean of increasing parliamentary scrutiny in particular with regard to the subsidiarity and proportionality principles and contributing to the transparency of EU decision-making and thus improving the process of policy formulation within EU. The Speakers call on the European Commission to facilitate the publication of the Commission's responses to the opinions of the national parliaments on EU legislative and non-legislative documents on the IPEX Website.

Concerning the cooperation between the national parliaments and the European Parliament

The Speakers support the evolving cooperation of national parliaments and the European Parliament, which is exercised within the different levels of interparliamentary cooperation, such as the Joint Parliamentary Meetings, Joint Committee Meetings and the cooperation on IPEX, and welcome the steps taken by the European Parliament together with the parliaments of the countries holding the EU Council Presidency in order to make this cooperation more efficient. The Speakers thank the European Parliament for its invaluable contribution to IPEX through its contribution to the development of the IPEX website. The Speakers call on the

European Parliament to monitor and improve the performance of the website in order to secure a high level of service for the users of IPEX.

Concerning Raising national European awareness

With regards to and in spite of the different EU scrutiny models exercised by national parliaments, the Speakers welcomed the fact that national parliaments have succeeded to reach in certain domains, such as subsidiarity and proportionality checks examination conducted under the co-ordination of COSAC, more active and efficient participation and at the same time enhanced the role of national parliaments in the EU processes. In this context the Speakers encouraged national parliaments to further intensify the cooperation, and invited COSAC to continue to play its coordinating role, including fully using the facilities of IPEX. The Speakers took note of the Information on parliamentary discussions related to the European Commission Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme that was elaborated by the Slovak Presidency. The aforementioned Information presents a useful source on the EU national parliaments' scrutiny and provides a comprehensive review of national parliaments' debates on the European Commission Annual Policy Strategy and Legislative and Work Programme. Moreover, the aforementioned Information provides an overview of particular actions taken by different parliament/parliamentary chamber in 2006 in order to bring the EU closer to its citizens.

In this light, the Speakers encouraged parliaments to discuss, in the form they find most appropriate, the Legislative and Work Programme and to make the best possible use of the aforementioned Information in order to further develop and improve the quality and content of their debates. The Speakers expressed their appreciation of the activity of COSAC in order to promote an exchange of information regarding the different debates in national parliaments on the Annual Policy Strategy of the Commission and the presentation of the document made by the Commission followed by a debate at the latest meeting in Berlin on 14–15 May 2007.

Concerning assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies

The EU Speakers applaud the efforts done and results achieved by the Slovak Presidency in implementing the objective set out by the Speakers Conference in Copenhagen concerning the improvement of the cooperation of EU Parliaments with Parliaments of the New and Emerging Democracies (NEDs). The EU Speakers welcome the commitment expressed by the European Commission for a better cooperation among the EU Parliaments and the Commission on NEDs and underline the need to strengthen the programmes of cooperation between Parliaments in the framework of the initiatives managed by the European Commission for providing assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies. The EU Speakers agree with the actions proposed by the Slovak Presidency for ensuring the follow-up of the initiatives and projects undertaken up to now and mandate the Task Force to keep on its activities under the authority of the incoming Presidency Parliament. The Speakers note that the parliaments of Central Europe have much to offer in the area of assistance to parliaments of new and emerging democracies as a result of the 15 years of transformation processes, during which they effectively implemented the achievements of the 50 years of European integration in their political, social and economic systems. The EU Speakers recommend the incoming Presidency with the support of the Task Force to:

- continue its cooperation with the European Commission focusing on the development of following issues:
 - a procedure for consultation with the representatives of the parliamentary administrations when drafting programmes, projects

- and strategies for technical assistance that involve parliamentary assistance;
- the exchange of information with EU parliaments about programmes, calls for tender, requests for parliamentary assistance submitted directly to the national parliaments;
- possibilities of access to European Community funding for Member States' Parliaments in the framework of EU external assistance schemes.
- follow-up the work on the implementation of a database on assistance to NEDs within the IPEX Website – including information from EU parliaments and the European Commission;
- take the appropriate initiatives for extending the coordination and the exchange of information on NEDs beyond the EU. To this end the incoming Presidency could:
 - ask the Conference of Speakers of the Parliaments of the Council of Europe to assess the possibility of using the ECPRD (European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation) for setting up a project – in cooperation with the IPEX – with the purpose of ensuring the exchange of information on NEDs Europe-wide
 - ask the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) to assess the feasibility of a global information network on assistance to NEDs, preferably in cooperation with IPEX and ECPRD. The cooperation with ECPRD and IPU would be useful in collecting information on the beneficiaries' needs as well.

Concerning Ukraine the Eastern Neighbour of the European Union

The Speakers confirmed that in order to support the momentum of the European project, it is of vital importance to encourage the contacts and ongoing communication with the EU neighbour countries so as to promote the continuing process of reforms, which may one day lead to the Ukraine's EU membership. The Speakers, following the country's overall progress and recognizing the development of the civil society and democracy, expressed support to the integration ambitions of Ukraine, appreciating that the Ukrainian integration ambitions go beyond the framework of cooperation laid down in the European Neighbourhood Policy and that the European Union has extended to Ukraine the most important offer – the European prospect. The Speakers called on the Ukrainian political leaders to resolve the current political situation in a manner consistent with standard democratic principles and thereby avoid potential radicalization in the society.

Transmission of the Conclusions

The Speakers called on the Slovak Presidency to publish the Presidency conclusions on the Speakers' website and to transmit them to the President of the European Commission, the President in office of the Council and to the COSAC Troika.

Speech by the President of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, Gerdi Verbeet, on the occasion of the Conference of Speakers/Presidents of EU Parliaments Bratislava, 24 May–27 May 2007

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,
 May I first of all say how delighted I am that our queen received such a warm welcome to Slovakia this week. Her visit certainly underlined the excellent relations between our two countries.

I would like to thank the National Council of Slovakia for organising this conference, which happens to come at a particularly crucial time in the history – and future! – of Europe. On the 21st and 22nd of June next, heads of state and government will meet. They will set out a path which will hopefully culminate, in 2009, in a new treaty for Europe. A moment to look forward instead of back and to decide what communal future we see for ourselves and for our European Union.

This is not to say, however, that we should neglect the past. On the contrary, our past makes us – and the European Union – into what we are. The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Atomic Energy Community, the European Economic Community and finally the European Union, was a truly common effort, because we knew that there were problems that we could only tackle together. The treaties establishing these organisations, as well as the subsequent amending treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, regulated our cooperation but were thus never an end in themselves. They were, rather, a means to achieve our aims. The legitimacy for the existence of the EU is not laid in legal texts, but in the commitment expressed by our peoples and by us, their representatives, to resolve or set aside our differences to address ever more, and more complex, challenges.

So what happened in the Netherlands in June 2005??? Why did the citizens of one of the founding nations of the European Union so massively express their discontent with the way the Union works? Why did they question the benefit it brings them? The answer, dear colleagues, is complex. Many aspects have to be taken into account when assessing the reasons for and impact of the Dutch «no». However, it must at all times be kept in mind that this bit of past reality has now become a significant part of our future. We cannot disregard the «no» and pretend that the public mood is still the same as when the Convention on the Future of Europe started its work. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since that moment in 2002 and – not surprisingly – the political mood and landscape have changed accordingly. The Netherlands, by the way, are not unique in this respect. The tendencies that we have seen amongst the Dutch public have risen to the surface in quite a few other member states as well. Although I will focus on my own country in my reflections and glance ahead, I would ask you to keep this in mind.

The referendum in the Netherlands on the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe was initiated by the House of Representatives at a time of a general sense of uncertainty and a growing public distrust of politics. The consultation of the population on this document, indeed, was aimed at re-establishing a sense of trust between represented and representatives. The initiative, and the outcome, by no means sprung from a purely European agenda. Both the growing divide between politics and people and the negative result of the referendum were influenced by various economic, social and wider international factors. The main reason for the «no», however, seems to have been the lack of knowledge about and engagement with EU matters amongst the population. The fundamentally positive attitude that the Dutch largely have towards the EU seems to dwindle when they are confronted with a generally negative mood. And they were and are not equipped with enough knowledge to counter slogans that aim to push them in a particular direction. The only way in which we can achieve a higher level of knowledge about the EU and thus discussions based on facts, is by politicizing Europe. That is the challenge our parliament stands for now. We must put Europe on the agenda in the natural place debate begins and belongs – parliament!

Dear colleagues, we take this challenge seriously. I want to explain to you what has happened in the Netherlands since the «no» and give you an idea of what we plan to do in the next months and perhaps even years, to resolve the undeniable problems caused by the «no» to the Constitutional Treaty.

We believe the European Union must reaffirm the legitimacy of its existence. Freedom from war with our neighbours was and always will be the greatest achievement of European integration. There are new threats and new challenges, however, unforeseen or unprepared for in the 1950's and even the early 1990's, which urgently require a coordinated and cooperative approach. Trans-national issues such as terrorism, climate change, energy supplies and immigration are discussed in national newspapers, radio programmes and on many internet fora on a daily basis. It is clear people are looking for firm leadership and international cooperation in these areas. To put it simply, a great majority of the Dutch want the EU to get involved here. However, there are also plenty of issues on which the people say they want the national authorities to keep a tighter grip. During the period of reflection of the past two years, we have tried to assess where the major difficulties lay, but also where the biggest opportunities to move forward could be found. Concentrating on the latter, the committee on European Affairs has decided to organise a series of four town hall meetings around the country, in the first week of June, to hear what the Dutch population does want after June 2005. We sincerely hope that this will yield constructive input for the discussions in parliament preceding the European Council of June next. We do not want to make the mistake again of taking a position in Brussels which is not shared by a majority of the most important party involved – the people itself.

The Dutch parliament seeks a pragmatic approach which does justice to the questions and reservations that live amongst the Dutch population about European cooperation. On the other hand, we want to do similar justice to the populations of those countries that have already ratified the Constitutional Treaty. In doing so, we will not seek to avoid difficult yet very justifiable questions about the legitimacy, transparency and relevance of the European Union. We will address concerns about its institutions, its treaties and laws, and its influence on national decision-making processes. And we will treat the text of the rejected Constitutional Treaty as seriously as the other mentioned treaties that have led us to where we are today. We are convinced, however, that we – as founders of the original European Communities – are not the first that do or will confront the almost existentialist questions that are being posed about the legitimacy of the European Union. We hope, dear colleagues, that we can play the same leading role in resolving the problems mentioned as we have done in the past fifty years.

Speech by the President of the Senate, Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the Conference of Speakers/Presidents of EU Parliaments Bratislava, 24 May–27 May 2007 «Future of Europe»

Mr. President,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is delightful to be in Bratislava especially right in the week that our head of state, Queen Beatrix, was so generously received by our host country on her state visit. My Dutch colleague and I have been invited to speak today, together with our French colleague, on the topic of «the Future of

Europe». This combination may seem logical, but to my opinion, all other colleagues could have been put on the short list to open this debate as well. Why? Because we all share the same ideals. We all want a prosperous and safe Europe. We are all part of a Union that embodies «no more war» and «no new dividing lines» on the European continent. Ideals, principles and passions that have to be just as vivid and important today as they were decades ago. Perhaps even more so.

Dear Colleagues, these shared ideals and common history make the case for Europe.

The French and Dutch referenda have been. They are in the past, period. We now – and so we should – look at the future. The European future – our future. We might endanger that future if we do not come up with new rules. We need renewed, future-oriented rules. This is also the firm conviction of the Dutch Senate.

The Netherlands is one of the six founding Member States of the European Communities and with great pride will always remain one of the six founding Member States. The Netherlands was and still is a pro-European country. The welfare of my country, our economic growth within such an open economy is largely due to the EU. The Netherlands truly gains by cooperation and European teamwork. The Dutch vote in the referendum did not change any of this.

The current challenge of a new European Treaty is not a challenge only facing France and the Netherlands. It is a challenge we all are facing. 27 Member states need to find a common solution that is acceptable to all 27. This means that every country needs to show willingness to change its position, including the Netherlands. It is not in the benefit of our citizens nor the EU herself if countries remain deadlocked in their views.

Suggestions have been raised to develop a Europe of multiple speed. To my opinion this definitely is not the answer we should be searching for today. We all must stay on board of the riding European train, because it is in the interest of our citizens. It is furthermore for all of us the only rightful way if you want to influence the course of this riding train.

As I said, the Netherlands is pro-European. Recent polls have overwhelmingly confirmed that a very large majority of the Dutch citizens fully support EU-membership. Europe is for, by and of our citizens. As representatives of these citizens it is our task to create, gain and uphold their support. In the Netherlands, it sometimes almost seems as if our politicians fear their own electorate. As a representative, it is not just your task to listen to the citizens. People also expect leadership and responsibility from the representatives they voted for. I realize that now it is time to show it.

Today we are gathered as Speakers of parliaments of the Member States that will negotiate a new treaty. We – our parliaments – are not at this negotiating table. We however have our own procedures and means to fulfil an important role in that process. Parliaments are the institutions to control and influence the position and views of our governments. The Dutch Senate uses its instruments to the fullest of its potential in the current debate on the European future. We had a debate with our Prime Minister only one week before the European Declaration of Berlin and we have scheduled another meeting just three days before the June summit.

The Dutch Senate is on top of the debate, the position of our government and the European views. We seek as much openness and transparency as possible, because this is the only way to a broadly based solution.

As the President of the Senate I can testify to you that the Dutch Senators all look in the same direction. That is to say, the European direction. There really is much common ground, although we have no less than ten political parties in our House. We have the unanimous position that the EU should accede to the European Convention of Human Rights. Therefore, the EU needs a legal personality. We are unanimous in our conviction that the role of national parliaments should be strengthened, complementary to the role of the European Parliament. We are also unanimously of the opinion that the European Commission should become smaller. A Commissioner for every EU-member state is redundant. And finally, a large majority believe that more qualified majority voting is absolutely necessary for the decisiveness of the EU. As you see, the Dutch Senate is very much committed, involved and communicates its beliefs to both government and citizens.

Esteemed Colleagues, the European drive and passion are the same in almost every country. The European foundations, ideals and principles embedded in ourselves and our citizens. The importance of which will always and everywhere prevail over any obstacles on our common road. Shared ideals have guided our history and will guide our future. I have confidence in Europe, in the European citizens and certainly as well in the Netherlands as a committed partner within Europe. As Goethe once said: «Who is sure of his own motives can in confidence advance or retreat». We want to advance, together with you.

Thank you.