



Toespraak

Statement at 25th anniversary of free elections in Poland by the President of the Senate of the Netherlands, Ankie Broekers-Knol

4 juni 2014

Dear Marshal Borusewicz of the Senate,
Dear Marshal Kopacz of the Sejm,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The dream of freedom and democracy is a dream that you never relinquish. In far too many places in the world, this still remains a distant dream. For Poland, however, the path to freedom and democracy has been a successful one. On behalf of the Senate of the Netherlands I would like to congratulate you on the 25th anniversary of what has been a major democratic political transformation. I am very honoured to be here today to celebrate this with you.

The Netherlands and Poland are closely bound by a common history. In Gdansk, Dutch facades on warehouses are testament to the ancient trade relations between our two countries. During World War II, the 1st Polish Armoured Division and Polish paratroopers were involved in the liberation of the Netherlands. We will forever be grateful for the help we received from Poland during that dark period in our history. Sadly, the freedom that Poland helped to achieve in the Netherlands was not granted to Poland for many years.

The year 1989, however, marked a new beginning. In many ways, Poland embodies the tremendous changes that Europe has seen in the last few decades. Poland lies at the heart of the cultural development of Europe, as it has done for centuries. It has become a textbook example of a free parliamentary democracy. As the EU's sixth-largest economy, it is a major economic player that has managed to sustain solid economic growth, even during the financial crisis. Poland also plays a leading role in the EU's foreign and security policy, most recently during the crisis in Ukraine. Poland is a true European friend and ally, and a valued member of the European family.

In my view, we, the European countries, have a shared responsibility to continue to invest in the norms and values that we stand for and in which we believe. It is important to keep developing mutual understanding between like-minded countries. We uphold norms and values such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights and freedom. As all of the countries present here today know, these values do not come for free.



With this in mind, I would like to conclude by quoting the honourable Lech Walesa during the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Solidarity trade union in August 2005. He said: "We hold our heads high, despite the price we have paid, because freedom is priceless."

Thank you.