

Address by Mrs Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Dutch Senate, on the occasion of the celebration of 100 year independence of the Republic of Finland

8 December 2017 at the Nieuwe Kerk, The Hague

Madam Ambassador of Finland, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be invited to speak at this festive occasion of 100 years of independence of Finland.

I congratulate you and the Finnish people on this centenary of independence. We all know Finland as a robust sovereign state in Northern Europe, stretching from Lapland to the Åland Islands and from Ostrobothnia to North Karelia. After centuries of Swedish rule and more than a century of rule by the Russian Empire, on December 6 1917 the Finnish Parliament approved the government's resolution on independence.

Oi Suomi, katso, sinun päiväs koittaa.

Yön uhka karkoitettu on jo pois.

(Finland, behold, thy daylight now is dawning
The threat of night has now been driven away)

As it happens, today is also the day Jean Sibelius was born in 1865. Finland's famous and beloved composer created the composition that later became known as the 'Finlandia hymn'. The lyrics that were added by Koskenniemi, start with these two lines. Today two years ago, on Sibelius' 150th birthday, many Finns sang 'Finlandia' on the Senaatintori, the square in front of Finland's government building. As President of the Dutch Senate I find it quite interesting that your government and its palace used to be called 'Senate'!

Sibelius produced several compositions at the turn of the nineteenth century that contributed to Finland's identity and that brought international attention to Finland as an emerging country. Especially, when the music of what is now called 'the Finlandia' - a protest

against Russia withdrawing Finland's autonomy - was performed during the World Exposition in Paris in 1900.

The events leading to the decisive moment for Finland on December 6 1917, were numerous, so I will highlight one that bears resemblance to the history of The Kingdom of The Netherlands. 1809 was of great importance to Finland as it was the year that Sweden ceded Finland to Russia, more specifically to the Romanovs, the ruling family in Russia. The Grand Duchy of Finland, with the Czar of Russia as Grand Duke, was not fully annexed by the Russian Empire, but became an autonomous region, linked with and joined to Russia through the person of the Czar. This allowed the development of Finnish national institutions, that would eventually lead to the independence of Finland shortly after the Russian revolution in November 1917. Within two months the Netherlands recognised Finland's independence, on January 28 1918 to be precise.

The Netherlands, to refer to the resemblance, was reshaped in 1815, together with a large part of Europe, as a result of the Congress of Vienna. As from that moment the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was considered to be a personal possession of the King of the Netherlands, as was the case with Finland and the Czar. King William I at first, and later on his successors William II and William III, received the title of Grand Duke of Luxembourg. When King William the Third died in 1890, his daughter Wilhelmina (10 years old at the time) became Queen of the Netherlands, but she could not succeed him as Grand Duchess of Luxembourg, because the in Luxemburg applicable Lex Salica did not allow female succession. The crown of Luxembourg passed to a male of another branch of the House of Nassau. This ended, rather peacefully, the union between the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Finland's path to independence was not as smooth. It took two more years for Finland's independence to be fully established. After these difficult years of unrest and troubles peace was restored, democratic parliamentary elections were held, and the Constitution was adopted.

Finland's position in Europe in the post-World War II years has been an admirable and delicate balancing act between the Eastern and Western parts of the world, known as the

Paasikivi-Kekkonen doctrine that has earned admiration throughout the world. Not in the least by his personal moral authority, his vision and worldwide reputation President Kekkonen managed to organise the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1975 in Helsinki. This resulted in the signing of the Helsinki Declaration which is a fine example of what is known as active neutrality. One can conclude that the Helsinki Declaration has played an important role in easing the tensions between East and West and has eventually led to the end of the Cold War.

For this festive year 2017 the government of Finland chose 'Together' as a symbolic and appropriate theme that underlines unity and cooperation in Finland but also in the relationship between Finland and other countries like the Netherlands.

Let us have a closer look at what Finland and the Netherlands share and have been working on together in the past and are working on in the present.

Apart from the resemblance regarding the 'Grand Duchy', there are more similarities to be drawn. Finnish women - in 1906 - were the first in Europe to gain full eligibility to vote for the unicameral Parliament of Finland, the "*Eduskunta*". Finland unmistakably was a source of inspiration to the Netherlands. Next week the Netherlands will commemorate the 100th birthday of the constitutional change that - eleven years after the Fins - brought universal suffrage and eligibility for men, and, a few years later, for women.

Another parallel is the membership of Finland and the Netherlands of two geo-political fora for co-operation. Finland has been working with the Nordic countries in the Nordic Council since 1952 and the Netherlands formed the Benelux together with Belgium and Luxembourg a few years earlier in 1944. Both fora still have an important position and work closely together, next to our shared membership of the European Union. The partnership between the Nordic countries Finland, Sweden and Denmark, the Baltic states and the Benelux, known as the 3 + 3 + 3 - concept, bundles mass and gives clout within the Union of - at this moment still - 28 Member States.

EU-membership brings me to the fourth similarity between Finland and the Netherlands: within the EU, both countries joined the Eurozone. From the Nordic perspective, the membership of Finland to the Eurozone is remarkable. Finland is still the *only* Nordic country that joined the Eurozone. During the years in which the Euro was in deep crisis, Finland and the Netherlands were able to hold on to their triple A-status (based on the rating for their extremely strong capacity to meet their financial commitments) for a long time. Also the way our governments dealt with the financial difficulties in several other countries in the eurozone was similar: strict but fair. On many other European and international issues, such as human rights, rule of law and climate change we often hold the same opinions.

In addition, on a non-political and non-diplomatic level, Finland and the Netherlands share a number of things as well. Let me highlight two of them.

First of all, Finland is of course world famous for its design and technology - ranging from Iittala and Marimekko to Nokia and Kone. Like most Dutch people, my first mobile phone was a Nokia. But in the Netherlands, especially in Amsterdam, Finland is even better known for one man. Legendary football player Jari Litmanen was so popular during the nine years he played for Ajax, that a whole generation of Jari's was born at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twentyfirst century.

And finally I would like to add, on a more mundane level, that Finland and the Netherlands share the same dish. As I understand, pea soup is the national dish of Finland, traditionally served on Thursday with pancakes. One of the traditional Dutch winter dishes is a full bowl of pea soup served with sausage.

To conclude, I congratulate Finland and all Finnish citizens wholeheartedly on this hundredth day of independence. In the Netherlands we cherish the good partnership between Finland and the Netherlands, both bilaterally and within the European Union, and we hope and trust that this partnership will be everlasting. Finland is an icon in Europe and the world, a prosperous country dedicated to peace, to human rights, to a balanced position in an often troubled world.

It has been my honour to celebrate this day together with you:

Hyvää Itsenäisyyspäivää! (Happy Independence Day!)