



Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal

Interventions of the President of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol, at the Conference of Speakers of the European Union Parliaments, 23–24 April 2018, Tallinn

[Spoken word applies]

Session I on the future of the European Union

Future of Europe

I think even now, almost two years after the Brexit-referendum, we are still in disbelief that the UK will eventually no longer be part of the EU. And seeing the immense consequences of this decision for the United Kingdom and for all of us, I can only shake my head and think "what on earth happened?"

The UK leaving the EU does bring about a new dynamic on the European continent. We have seen the Franco-German friendship rekindle. I think it is wise to foster this alliance and take their initiatives to strengthen the core of the EU into serious consideration. I however call upon the French and German leaders to actively seek support among the other member states in their views on how to move forward. But I also call upon all other member states to take an active stance. We need to put our cards on the table and acknowledge our own responsibility in how we want to move forward.

Of course we have to face the budget consequences of the Brexit. In my country, The Netherlands, we are of the opinion that the 27 should not maintain all expenses at the present level. Nor do we favour taxes at the European level.

Having said that, I for one believe that the European Union is where our future lies. Many of the challenges that we face are common to all of us and can only be tackled together: trade issues, climate change, terrorism and security or migration. As we stand in solidarity, we can achieve bigger things.

Citizens

Solidarity benefits our citizens and that brings me to the important fact that we must have the support of our citizens. For this support there is one keyword: transparency, transparency in decision making. As it helps citizens to be able to gain trust in the institutions.

The European Ombudsman, Mrs. O'Reilly, has recently published a report - amongst others supported by input from the Dutch Senate and the House - that stated that the Council has fallen short of what is expected in terms of legislative transparency - the Ombudsman even uses the term 'maladministration'. Last month the European Court of Justice based its ruling in the *De Capitani v European Parliament*-case for access to trilogues-documents also on the notion that openness in the legislative process contributes to conferring greater legitimacy on the institutions and increases the confidence of EU citizens in the institutions.

Now we believe that national parliaments have a key role in bringing about a change in the way European institutions deal with legislative transparency. Especially towards the Council, we can make our own government more aware about the findings of the Ombudsman



and pressure them to rethink the culture that surrounds the Council negotiations. The Council, and therefore the governments, is a legislator. As we all know legislators operate in public, and do not behave as diplomats who acts behind closed doors. So let us ask our governments to react to these latest opinions on more openness in the legislative procedures and keep transparency on the European agenda.

Session II on European security and defence

In the 21st century, we see new elements of warfare that change the way the game is played. Cyberwarfare, disinformation, terrorism and economic warfare are becoming almost as threatening as the traditional warfare. The combination of all these elements, so-called 'Hybrid warfare', places us for new challenges, in an era that is characterized by a ring of instability around our European borders. These elements increasingly have an undermining effect on our democratic societies, which is a very worrying situation.

European cooperation

It is a good sign that just now the European cooperation on the field of security and defence has at last grown to serious proportions. With PESCO, with the Global Strategy and with the European Defence Action Plan, major steps have been taken in the last two years.

I would like to underline that increased cooperation on the field of security and defense is not a matter of idealistic dreams of an ever closer Union. This increased cooperation is and should be purely a matter of self-interest. A matter of efficiency. A matter of 'L'union fait la force', unity makes strength.

It speaks for itself that all initiatives, within EU, within NATO and outside these organizations, should be complimentary to each other and should be developed in good cooperation within the existing frameworks.

It also speaks for itself that cooperation on these fields should only be increased with the support and trust of our citizens. Defence, security and foreign affairs are historically the core business of sovereign states and therefore the most difficult to share with other countries. Therefore, parliamentary control is essential.

Western Balkans

With regard to the security of the European Union, I would like to underline the importance of EU commitment to the countries in the Western Balkan. Stability in this region, that has been instable for so many years, is of crucial importance to Europe. We cannot afford a new crisis at the European borders.

The Western Balkans represent a geopolitically important part of our continent. Many competitors behind the scenes are struggling for influence in the region. Russia is willing to restore its footprint and has become more and more active in the last decade. China is set to become the number one foreign investor in Serbia this year. Radical Islamic groups are



spreading their hateful ideologies in the Mosques of Sarajevo, Pristina and Tirana, having convinced more than one thousand fighters from the Western Balkans to join the ranks of ISIS in the Middle East. All these foreign powers are more than ready to step into whatever vacuum the European Union leaves behind.

In that regard, we welcome the six flagship initiatives that were presented in February this year for an enhanced EU engagement in the Western Balkans. Combined with recent statements of the European Commission about the start of accession negotiations with Albania and Macedonia, in reaction to the progress reports of the candidate member states, I can conclude that the Western Balkans are on the agenda. Paramount is that these countries for their own interest and the benefit of their citizens want to adhere to the European values of freedom, democracy and human dignity.

Migration

The refugee crisis of the last years made two things clear: first, for too long we failed to recognize the urgency of the problems in the Middle East, the instability in African countries and the enormous flows of refugees that would inevitably move towards our borders at some point in time. We were warned, but we were not ready.

Second, we know that the issue of migration is a challenge that none of the European member states can manage on their own.

I would encourage the European Commission to translate the conclusions of the EU-Africa Summit of November last year into concrete actions. We need an ambitious agenda, out of our own interest, to be prepared for the challenges to come.