

**Opening speech by the President of the Senate of the Netherlands,
Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol,
on the occasion of the Interparliamentary Conference on the
CFSP/CSDP
7th April 2016, The Hague**

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,
Good morning.

On behalf of the States General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I bid you all a warm welcome. Yesterday evening we had the opportunity to meet one another in the beautiful, historic Mauritshuis. Late in the evening, we all heard the result of the Dutch referendum on the Association Agreement EU-Ukraine. The advisory referendum is a new democratic instrument in our country. For the first time in our history, this instrument has been applied.

It is clear that the outcome of the referendum differs from the opinion of the majority of parliament. As the referendum is advisory, the government now has to take the Dutch support for the Association Agreement back into consideration and present a new bill to parliament. We will have to let this process run its course to see what the outcome will be. Both the result of the advisory referendum and the instrument as such will be subject of analysis in our country in the

time to come.

As you may well know, the word 'referendum' stems from the Latin verb *refero*. It means 'bringing the question back to the people'.

Therefore, if anything, a referendum is a reminder that we as parliamentarians should never take our task of representing the will of the people lightly.

This is especially true for the important issues that will be discussed during this conference. Needless to say, this conference comes at a challenging time. The world is dealing with several crises: the struggles and instability in the Middle East and Africa, the distressing developments in Russia and Eastern Europe, the influx of refugees and the shocking terrorist attacks. Just eleven days after the *European Day of Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism*, Europe was struck right at its heart, in Brussels. And the disastrous series of terrorist attacks has not stopped there. In addition to all this, just a few days ago we were confronted with the news that - once again - heavy fighting erupted in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

It appears as though the frequency of crises – and their duration – is increasing. In his book *World Order*, Henry Kissinger signals that we are facing a period in which forces beyond the restraints of any order will determine the future. Kissinger states that the reconstruction of the international system is the ultimate challenge to statesmanship in our time.

This raises the question: what are the challenges for the European Union when it comes to safeguarding its position in the international system? And how can the EU help counter the violence within and outside its borders? It is evident that there is a joint responsibility to ensure peace and stability, but what can we as parliamentarians do to contribute to that?

I believe the key word is cooperation. One of the most important steps we as parliamentarians can take to contribute to peace and stability is to optimise and intensify our cooperation.

Let us build on the unique formula of the EU. Our governments are working together more and more closely in the areas of foreign affairs, security and defence. So by improving parliamentary cooperation in these fields, we can make sure that new initiatives for cooperation are truly feasible. This is important, because as Willy Brandt – the former German chancellor — once put it:

"Frieden ist nicht alles, aber ohne Frieden ist alles nichts"

Peace is not everything, but without peace everything is nothing. Cooperation does not mean that parliamentarians have to agree with each other on all matters. But by meeting face to face and discussing issues that concern us all, we learn from one another. And more importantly: we learn to better understand each other's points of view. This ultimately works to the benefit of the citizens of EU member states. In this, we are supported by the High Representative of the EU

for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, who stated just a few weeks ago that European and national parliaments can play an essential role in these difficult times and should remain connected. We regret her absence here today, but I have no doubt that she knows that we are in conference today.

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 we deal with foreign, defence and security policy and the way we cooperate.

The fact that cooperation in these fields is challenging can be explained by the fact that defence, security and foreign affairs are historically the core business of sovereign states and therefore the most difficult to share with other countries.

Nevertheless, the time has come for us as parliamentarians to fully realise that in this day and age, it is crucial for EU member states to cooperate in these fields. I believe that together we can contribute to the unity that Europe so desperately needs.

L'union fait la force. Our unity is our strength.

Inter-parliamentary conferences offer national parliaments and the European Parliament a chance to work on maintaining good relations and a strong cooperation. They are therefore an indispensable

instrument to us all. But the conversation should not stop the minute we put our headsets down and leave this 800-year-old hall.

We owe it to those we represent – the people of the European Union – to pick up the phone, send an email, take to Skype or Twitter, or even WhatsApp, and make sure we parliamentarians indeed remain connected. It is vital that together we contribute to peace and stability. Not only in our region, but - if possible - in the world order.

For your information: tomorrow morning from 10.00 until 10.30 the Prime Minister of the Netherlands will be present here to address you and to take some questions and answers.

I wish you all a very inspiring conference. Thank you.