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In recent decades the idea of creating a European Senate as an institution within the European Union has been elaborated in several documents, both from national parliaments and from research institutions. Most of these are not of very recent date. In fact they date from at least 10 to 15 years ago. May I start with the disclaimer that the thought of a European Senate has never been discussed in my Senate, the Senate of the Netherlands. My remarks therefore will be of a more personal nature and I am only personally accountable for them.

Whenever we scrutinise a proposal in the Dutch Senate, we always begin by asking ourselves two questions:

1. What is the problem?

2. Can this proposal fix it?

In the discussion of today on the proposals for a European Senate, I will do just that.

As for the first question: the underlying problem the different proposals hope to address is the growing disconnection between the EU and its citizens.

This is an issue we talked about during previous EU Speakers-conferences and that will be central to the discussion on the future of Europe.

In the current discussion, the term 'democratic deficit' is often used. The term 'democratic deficit' however, refers to a lack of formal representation in the decision-making process. But that is not the real problem. Citizens are formally represented in their national parliaments, their governments, and the European Parliament. Therefore, the problem can better be described as a lack of connection - a disconnection - between EU citizens and EU institutions.

Now, the disconnection between citizens and the EU has a number of reasons.

One important reason has to do with the EU *'doing the right thing'*. We have come to realize that the European Union has spent too much time on the small issues and too little time on big issues. As President Juncker stated at the beginning of the term of his commission: "*The new commission has the ambition to show European citizens*

that its focus will be on the major issues, and leave the other issues to the member states."

What matters now, is the focus of the political agenda of the EU, and national parliaments have an important role in that matter. I'll return to that point later on.

Another reason for the disconnection, is the complexity and lack of transparency of the EU's institutional architecture. In the increasingly globalised world of today, there is a lot of uncertainty about the future of the EU, and a feeling that people have no control over that future through the democratic process.

Despite the fact that the EU has been hugely successful in raising the standard of living of its citizens, citizens do not feel the EU institutions sufficiently respond to their concerns. They do not feel their voices are being heard.

This brings me to question number two: how can a European Senate fix it? How can a European Senate fix the problems I just mentioned?

Founding a European Senate would add a third source of democratic legitimacy on a Union-level. The first source being the Council of Ministers as the voice of national governments. The second source being the European Parliament, as the elected voice of all Europeans. A third source, introducing a European senate, would be an addition to the democratic process as a solution for the problems I just mentioned.

In my opinion, a European Senate would not help but only hinder the democratic process. And it will most certainly not solve the disconnection between the EU and its citizens.
I will give you four reasons why I believe that. And I will also tell you what I think can actually contribute to solving the problems.

The first reason why I believe a European Senate cannot solve the disconnection, is that I believe the problem has more to do with lack of connection, rather than process.

Adding yet another institution to the collection cannot solve this. In fact, it will only make the decision-making process more complex and less comprehensible.

The second problem I have with a European Senate, is that it is nearly impossible to find a suitable and effective role for it in the Union's decision-making system. If the new chamber were granted substantial power, the system would become even more complex and cumbersome than it is today. But if the chamber would be granted little or no power, it would most likely be criticized for being an expensive talking-shop. So whether it is weak or strong, a European Senate would - I am afraid - only further distance people from the EU.

The third roadblock I see, is that a European Senate would inevitably clash with other institutions. Don't get me wrong, this can also be a good thing. In theory, adding another source of democratic oversight could add to the system of checks and balances. In practice however, this addition could lead to unworkable situations.

A European Senate would create the risk of competing democratic legitimacy with the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and national parliaments. This will most certainly lead to conflict and makes it impossible to time the European Senate's role in the process. Involving the Senate at the beginning of the decision-making process will be futile, because the proposals are often substantially amended by the Council and the Parliament. Involving the Senate at a later stage would run the danger of second-guessing by the Council of Ministers. The fourth and final reason why I do not believe in a European Senate, has to do with its composition. In all the proposals I've seen so far, the European Senate would be comprised of existing members of national parliaments.

This so-called 'dual mandate' poses both a political and a practical problem.

The political problem is that a number of parliamentarians will be involved in the decision making process on European legislative proposals both at a national level and at a European level. This may bring them in a situation of conflicting interests.

If the position of a national parliament differs from the position of its delegation in the European Senate, this could also damage the role of the national parliament in scrutinizing EU-legislation and controlling their national government.The practical problem boils down to a lack of time. Parliamentarians will simply not have enough time to do both jobs properly. The experiences with the dual mandate in the

European Parliament until the end of the seventies of the last century were the very reason to finish the double mandate.

All these four issues - the increased complexity of the process, the lack of a suitable and effective role, the risk of clashes between institutions and the flaws of the dual mandate - have led me to the conclusion that I am not in favour of founding a European Senate.

None of us here in this room doubt whether there is a real added value to having a second chamber in our respective countries. But what works for a country, doesn't necessarily work for the EU as a whole.

The European Union is a unique form of governance and partnership. It is neither confederal, nor federal. It is unique; an organisation *sui generis*. That unique form of governance requires a unique form of democratic oversight. In my opinion a very important step was set in 2009 when the Treaty of Lisbon introduced a mechanism of subsidiarity scrutiny by national parliaments. Through the yellow and orange card procedures national parliaments have a direct role in assessing the compliance of draft legislation with the principle of subsidiarity. We have only just begun picking up this new role and I think there is a lot of room for further improvement.

We, the national parliaments, are the 'watchdogs of subsidiarity'. We do take this role seriously, but there is enormous potential to give further growth to this role, to enhance this role.

This requires that Members of national parliaments make sure that they are well-informed on European policy, so that they are able to play a much more active role in the decision-making process.

The House of Lords wrote a report on the European Senate in 2001 and there is one sentence that has stuck with me: *"Whether people are satisfied with their institutions will to a great extent depend on the quality of those institutions."*

If we as national parliaments want to preserve the quality of our work, we have to protect and widen our information position.
That means we have to strive for more transparency from the Council of Europe. If we can achieve greater accountability from the Council, we can better explain to the

public whether the EU institutions are doing the right thing and are not overdoing things.

Striving for more transparency from the Council also means that we have to hold our own governments to account for their input in Council-decisions.

We have to make sure our governments make an effort to be accountable both in being scrutinised on Council meetings in advance, and in reporting the outcome of Council meetings after the event.

All too often, members of the government make a political compromise in Brussels which they distance themselves from once they are back home. This sends a confusing and misleading message to the population. It is up to national parliaments to make sure that does not happen. If we want the trust of the general public, we need to make sure members of the government take responsibility for their actions in the Council.

If we want our national parliaments to play an active role in the EU decision-making process, we have to make sure we also play an active role in the discussion on the future of Europe.

It is my belief that national parliaments are ideally placed to make sure that the policies the EU pursues, are based on public support and that they benefit the citizens of our respective member states.

In addition to this, it is of the utmost importance that the European Union as a whole strikes a better balance between ambition and modesty regarding its own political agenda.

We need a European agenda that connects the ambition of the EU and its citizens more accurate than the agenda's that were developed in the past. Key topics of common concern are jobs, financial balance, energy, climate change, protecting external borders and working on a more common asylum and migration policy.

Referring to the choice of Britain for a standalone and the uncertainties that come with the changes of direction of the United States, Angela Merkel last week said after the G7 summit: "We Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands."

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,In order to create a better connection between citizens and the EU, it is important that we tackle the issue that is causing the disconnection.

Founding a European Senate is not the answer. The problems the European Union is facing today do not lie in its institutional structure, which does not mean that some adaptations could be considered. To name a few: the size of the European Commission and the size of the European Parliament. And if I may be honest, a real source of disconnection and frustration is the rather inefficient monthly relocation of the European Parliament between Brussels and Strasbourg.

Real added impact in the European Union in the near future has to come from national parliaments, working individually and collectively to strengthen their role in the decision-making process. We have just started to utilize the new instruments laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon. Together we must make sure that the decision-making process in the Council is made more transparent than it is now and that the EU has a more focussed political agenda.

If we fulfil our role as watchdogs of subsidiarity and as controllers of our Ministers as members of the Council to our best capacity, we can reaffirm the connection between EU-citizens and the EU.