



Interventie

de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn,
ter gelegenheid van de bijeenkomst van de Voorzitters van RvE-parlementen

datum 24 oktober 2019

Theme 1: "Our Common European Home": the next 70 years

Dear Madam President, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to represent the Senate of the Netherlands in this European Conference of Presidents of Parliament of the Council of Europe. In July of this year I was elected as the new President of our Senate. This is one of my first interparliamentary conferences in that capacity. I relish this opportunity to meet with you, my colleagues, and I look forward to the chance to get to know you better over the course of these two days.

The Council of Europe is a remarkable organization, remarkable in its ambitions and remarkable in its achievements. This year we celebrate the 70th anniversary of this pan-European ambition to unite our countries on the principles of the rule of law, human rights and genuine democracy. The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, but I am proud to note that the first initiatives in this direction took place on the premises of my own Parliament a year before. In May 1948 750 delegates from around Europe, as well as observers from Canada and the United States met in the Hall of Knights in The Hague in the "Congress of Europe". It brought together important political figures such as Winston Churchill, Konrad Adenauer, Francois Mitterand and Altiero Spinelli. They discussed, among other things, the creation of a European Assembly, realized a year later with the foundation of the Council of Europe. Sir Winston Churchill, when describing his idea of European unity and co-operation, spoke of "*a dynamic expression of democratic faith based upon moral conceptions and*



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inspired by a sense of mission. In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law”.

That is the foundation of our Common European Home, as laid by the generations before us. Over 70 years a unique multilateral organization has been built, that commits 47 member states to over 220 conventions. It has played its role in allowing European history to take a course that was unimaginable in the immediate postwar years. It has given direction to the development of many individual countries. It has weathered through many a crisis in international relations.

It is a solid construction, but our Common European Home, impressive as it is, needs constant maintenance and repairs, like every house. If we neglect it, it first starts to leak and then falls apart. There are many and very diverse challenges to the Council of Europe, like corruption, populism, “fake news”, climate change or terrorism, to name a few. And let me be clear – all of them need to be taken seriously. But in my opinion no challenge to the Council of Europe stands out like the very rejection of multilateralism itself does. Our predecessors who gathered for the Congress of Europe in The Hague in 1948 had come to the hard-won insight that multilateralism is the best means to avoid conflict and ensure democratic security for all citizens. That insight is no less valuable seventy years later.

In this organization we see it happening when human rights issues are politicised and instrumentalised, when open debate on differences of opinion is replaced by power play or filibuster, when human rights commitments, that member states have voluntarily agreed to, are



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ignored. We see it happening when frozen conflicts persist with the result that people living in these areas are denied access to the fundamental human rights monitoring mechanisms, that the Council of Europe provides.

A diminished faith in multilateralism might be a symptom of a general questioning of crucial democratic processes, institutes and structures. Why work together, if it seems easier to find a quick solution unilaterally? My answer is: because we need each other to make solutions last, to make them sustainable.

Colleagues, it is up to us as Parliamentarians and political leaders to ensure that our Common European Home remains fit for purpose for the next generation. We have to use this organization to keep discussing the issues that divide us with the goal of finding common ground in living up to our human rights commitments. Because, as the American President Abraham Lincoln used to say: "A house divided against itself cannot stand". Let us make sure that all our citizens have equal access to human rights, democracy and rule of law.

Thank you.