



Eerste Kamer *der Staten-Generaal*

Closing remarks by H.E. Ankie Broekers-Knol at the end of the luncheon with the President of the European Parliament, H.E. Martin Schulz, 2 December 2013

Your Excellency, Mr Schulz,
Dear Colleagues,

I would like to reiterate that it is a great honour to have you here in our midst today. Your visit underlines the importance of the relationship between the European Parliament and the States-General.

Thank you very much for your thought-provoking words. They underscore the role of Parliaments and parliamentarians in the functioning of the EU. In fact, parliamentarism has become a dimension of EU politics in its own right.

We have spoken extensively about the changing roles of national parliaments and the European Parliament. National Parliaments and the European Parliament find themselves in a process to redefine interparliamentary cooperation after the Lisbon Treaty. If you allow me, dear President, I would like to briefly reflect on this question from the perspective of the Senate.

The Lisbon Treaty has given both the European parliament and national parliaments new competences. To be more precise, it has created new opportunities for both to bolster our credibility and to help improve democratic legitimacy of the Union. Yet it has been up to us, the parliaments, to give effect to these provisions and to make the most of them.

I must say, Your Excellency, the European Parliament has done a formidable job. It has worked incredibly hard to improve legitimacy at the EU-level and I believe you deserve much credit for this. On a personal note, I was pleased to see that you as President of the European Parliament, as a parliamentarian, have stepped forward as a candidate for the office of President of the European Commission. I believe this underlines how a truly European political space is emerging where the gap between the executive and citizens is narrowing.

Let me briefly say a few words about our own work in this regard. For the European Parliament, EU affairs are of course core business. For parliamentarians in the capitals, effectively integrating 'Europe' into their work is often a challenge. I believe we



have been successful in this respect. European proposals are routinely scrutinised much like national legislation by almost all sectoral committees. A significant share of our correspondence covers European Affairs or is directed at the European executive. The EU, in other words, is business as usual in the Senate.

Perhaps it is worthwhile highlighting two elements of our approach. First, the Senate tends to take a long-term view, focusing on the fundamentals of EU policies. The European Semester is a case in point. We are, for example, working closely with the Court of Auditors to get crystal clear what precisely the new rules on budgetary discipline and macro-economic surveillance mean for public accountability at the national level. And how can we as a parliament get more grip on mounting financial guarantees and spiralling public debt? This report was published just last week.

Second, my colleague from the House of Representative has spoken about the importance of forging closer relationships between national parliaments and the European Parliament and I fully subscribe to this. In fact, interparliamentary cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy are a key element of our work. Through direct meetings such as these, but also through the participation in interparliamentary meetings, we can promote mutual understanding between parliamentarians.

All in all, dear President, dear colleagues, both the European Parliament and the States General have taken important steps towards making the Union more democratically legitimate.

Back to the relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament. Treaties and competences are of course only part of the story. We cannot ignore the wider debate about the fading lines between what is national and what is European. It involves some very principled questions as to what should be done at the level of the EU and what belongs at the national level. Take the example of Europe as a community of values. We have developed a normative framework that we as Europeans take great pride in. But there is a thin line between upholding common norms and a one-size-fits-all approach. Just two weeks ago I was on an official visit to Hungary. I had some frank discussions about democratic principles and the rule of law in that country. In my contacts with fellow parliamentarians, however, I noted that an overly critical tone from the EU can sometimes do more harm than good. There appeared to be a disconnect between what the EU institutions were doing and what the Hungarians felt they ought to do. There are legitimate concerns about the legisla-



tive process in Hungary, but European institutions must be careful not to overshoot their target in applying their instruments.

My point is that for national parliaments and the European Parliament to play truly complementary roles, a good debate on who should do what could be very beneficial indeed. This kind of subsidiarity is different from pensions or taxation. It is about a *finalité politique*, the very essence of European integration. On that note, Mr President, I wish you and the European Parliament a very exciting election campaign in the run up to 22 June.

Your Excellency, I think I speak also on behalf of my colleagues when I say that I look forward to further deepening our relationship with you and your colleagues in the European Parliament. I would like to thank you for being our guest at this luncheon and I wish you a very pleasant continuation of your stay in the Netherlands.

Thank you.