



Interventie

van 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

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Theme 3: Women in politics and in the public discourse

What role can national Parliaments play in combatting the increasing level of harassment en hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians

Dear colleagues,

I would once again like to emphasize that it is a great pleasure for me to be here. As I have been President of the Senate of the Netherlands for almost four months now, this meeting in Strasbourg marks my first participation in an European Conference of Presidents of Parliament.

It has been a wonderful and inspiring experience to meet so many of my colleagues from all over Europe. Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to our hosts at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to the secretariat for organizing this conference in such an excellent way.

With regard to this morning's topic, I must say that after reading the Issues Brief about the study done by IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe I was shocked by the results. The fact that female colleagues and female staff members have experienced sexual harrassment in one form or another in such great numbers, is horrendous and unacceptable.

Let me first state that I am perfectly aware that equality between women and men, both inside and outside parliament, is something that is still not achieved.



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That women are facing far more than just a historical backstep to men, is something a growing number of people is becoming aware of, including myself.

But that women in politics across 45 European countries are experiencing harassment on such a wide scale is something that – I must confess – I didn't realise until I read the study.

Colleagues,

In the Senate we strive to make our organisation a safe and secure place to work. Therefore, a study into the well-being of our staff has recently been conducted. The survey – based on anonymity – concerned all staff members, and focused on vitality, stress, life-work balance, discrimination and also on sexual harassment. The results are used to better our policies so that we are able to provide the best working environment possible.

Everyone working in the Senate - politicians, staff and visitors alike - should feel safe on our premises, both physically and psychologically. We try to ensure this by providing an open and transparent organisation where everyone should feel free and safe to speak their mind in case of harassment. First of all, by contacting colleagues and/or seniors. In case they do not feel safe enough inside the organisation, we provide an external confidant who is available at all times.



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Colleagues,

As a male politician, I am personally motivated by the efforts of the White Ribbon Campaign, that Mr Kaufman has so passionately spoken about today. The Dutch White Ribbon Campaign was launched in 2017 with the support of the government, specifically the Ministry of Education.

Being a good role model is something I, as a private person as well as a public person, strongly believe in. I will take the suggestions and ideas presented today, home with me. Where possible, we will look into ways to implement them to better our organisation.

In 2020 the Dutch Senate marks the 100th anniversary of the first female Senator, Mrs Carry Pothuis-Smit. She too was – at first – subject to sexist remarks and actions. Later on, her expertise was respected, although she did mention that over the course of her 17-year long membership of the Senate, one male senator kept refusing to shake her hand.

Today, almost 100 years later we can laugh this off as something that is from another day and age. But today's session proves that it is not, and that it is important to keep speaking out and challenge this kind of behaviour.

Thank you.