



Toespraak

van de Griffier van de Eerste Kamer, mr. R. Nehmelman, ter gelegenheid van de conferentie van griffiers van EU-parlementen – inbreng bij discussie over *European Year of Youth 2022: Parliamentary Activities for Education, Engagement and Outreach (to Young People and Children)*

datum 24 januari 2022

Dear Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to represent the Senate of the Netherlands in this meeting of the Secretaries General of European Union Parliaments.

Today in this session, we reflect on what our Parliaments can bring to this year's European Year of Youth.

But I would like to stress that this is not only important this year, but for years to come as well. Especially now that recent studies show that the pandemic has had and still has great effect on our youth.

I do hope that in this European year, but also the years that follow, we will pay special attention to the fact that all those children and young people have suffered from multiple lockdowns, not going to school, no sports: not enjoying all those things that are so important when you are young. We do not yet know what will be the effect in the long run, but it is very important that we don't consider this lightly.

Let me now continue to what role parliaments can play in education, engagement and outreach.

As we are all aware, educating youth on democracy and citizenship starts at a young age.

Most primary and all secondary schools in the Netherlands have a representative body that voices the opinions of the students. By electing their representatives, and also by participating children get a feel for democracy from an early age. In addition, schools are required by law to educate their students on citizenship in one form or another.

In addition, the government has made it its goal that all Dutch students have visited the Parliament before the age of 18. To achieve this goal, the parliament and the ministry of Interior Affairs work together with an institution called ProDemos, literally For the People.

ProDemos has multiple projects and programs for primary and secondary schools that schools can use in their curriculum.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight one program that runs already for over 15 years.

It is an initiative called 'the Third Chamber', which is an educational project about the Dutch parliamentary system, aimed at 10- and 11-year-olds.

The name **Third** Chamber derives from the Senate, in the Netherlands called the **First** Chamber and the House of Representatives being the **Second** Chamber. Hence, the Third Chamber is the home of our future parliamentarians.



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Apart from being schooled on democracy, the wonderful part of the project is the interactive element. The children learn to debate on issues that are important to them. They film their classroom debates, and every fall season three schools are invited to the annual Finale Debate which is held in the Assembly Hall of the Senate.

MP's from both Chambers volunteer to coach the children debating proposals, such as 'Children are not allowed to demonstrate: they belong in school', that came from the actual discussion in society about children joining the school strikes for climate.

I truly believe that by bringing this project to children from the ages of 10, 11 and continued in secondary education, is of vital importance for the future of our democracies.

Colleagues,

What I have seen in all of these projects is that for young people real contact with parliamentarians, for instance during a visit to the Senate, or when one of our MP's visits a school to talk about their work and to engage in a debate, is the best way to bring politics to life.

Therefore, for the coming period - in 2022 but also when the European Year of Youth has ended - I aim to increase these meetings between politicians and young people.

Thank you.