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Honourable Presidents, dear Colleagues, dear guests,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the eleventh Conference of the Association of the European Senates.

At the creation of the Association of European Senates in November 2000 in Paris, the well-respected founder of our Association, former President of the Senate of the French Republic, Mr. Poncelet, stated two reasons for his initiative. Firstly, his strong belief that bicameralism is of great importance. Secondly, that parliamentary assemblies have a fundamental role to play in European construction.

These principles are today still as relevant as they were almost a decade ago. Arising from these principles, we have chosen the topic of today's conference: the role of the Senates on the European Continent.

Over the last years we have seen many positive but also worrying developments in the world and on our European continent. We are faced with a financial and economic crisis. The experts are not sure about the depth of the crisis, the duration nor the remedy. We are faced with the problems of climate change, energy sufficiency and social exclusion. Many different challenges that all need our attention. On a positive note, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the European treaties of Rome. This year we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the pan-European organisation, the Council of Europe. These anniversaries illustrate to what extent Europe has become united over the last decades. In our shared European history we should look for the answers to face our joint challenges. In Europe, nation states are no longer just competitors. We have become allies.

Today we will share our views on how Senates can actually make a difference in Europe. I really hope that we all renew our friendship and go back home filled with new inspirations.

Thank you.