

**Speech by the President of the Senate of the Netherlands,
Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the European
Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, Tuesday 30th May, Tallinn, Estonia**

Subject: Bridge-building through Parliamentary Diplomacy

Mister President, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher once said: “We didn’t have to do the minutes of diplomacy. We got down to business right away”. That is exactly what we should do today: get right down to the business of parliamentary diplomacy.

I would like to point out the necessity of today’s conference. We have to embrace the rare opportunity to exchange views with all parliaments on the European continent. We must realise that, in our fast developing and changing world it is no longer sufficient to just work “side by side”. We must really work together, not just express our good intentions, but implement them.

Therefore, I would like to make a proposal to you today that can be implemented easily and - in my opinion – at the same time strengthen and improve our parliamentary diplomacy for the benefit of the European citizens and a successful future of the European continent.

We, the members of parliaments and of parliamentary assemblies, need to be more aware of our potential to influence and achieve results. We have to stop talking about rationalizing our interparliamentary cooperation – but instead indeed making it more effective and efficient. Our members are in the luxurious position having a so called double mandate plus fulfilling a key role in our democracies. Let me briefly explain.

Members of our parliaments are also members of the international parliamentary assemblies and participate in several non-national conferences. They can bring national matters to the international stage and vice versa. More important, as representatives of the citizens we have to communicate with and involve our citizens, give account for our activities. MP's, they are the true “spiders in the web” of national and international democracy. We need to step up the efforts to actually fulfil this pivotal role.

Therefore we have to integrate our national and international activities. For this I would like to make the following concrete proposal: let us improve our ways of reporting back on our cross-border work on the national level. We need to discuss and perhaps even nationally adopt the recommendations of the non-national Assemblies and Organisations. If we discuss the recommendations and reports of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for example, it will strengthen the role of that Assembly – that we all endorse but not spread enough – and the other international fora. It will be beneficial to our parliaments at the same time because it will broaden the views of all our members as well, countering the sometimes inward oriented views.

I personally believe the efforts of the Dutch Senate with regard to the European proposal to establish a Fundamental Rights Agency – whether you agree with our point of view or not – can and should be looked upon as a good example of integrating our national and international activities with the instrument of parliamentary diplomacy.

I briefly mentioned that members of our parliaments sometimes are more national oriented than we would actually like them to be. My honourable colleague, Mr de Croo stated in his report that especially in times of elections the national orientation can be a disadvantage to our cross-border parliamentary diplomacy. I agree with him. But at the same time as President of the Dutch Senate, I am proud to state that the senators in the Netherlands stay indeed European and international oriented all the time. The Senate benefits in this area from the way the Dutch bicameral system functions. One of the prime examples of this, is of course the Presidency of Mr Van der Linden of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In the Dutch senate I preside over him, but I am proud to participate in a conference where he actually presides over me.

Dear Colleagues, let me conclude by saying that more integration and inter-linking of our international and national activities will improve the instrument of parliamentary diplomacy. In the end this will support our parliaments to help our citizens to convey their expectations and ideas, their hopes and dreams. On the national and international level, for the goal of a united, peaceful and successful European continent.

Thank you for your attention.