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20 June 2006

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF  
THE STATES-GENERAL WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER, F.  
FRATTINI  
BY YVONNE E.M.A TIMMERMAN-BUCK, PRESIDENT OF THE  
SENATE**

Signor Frattini, benvenuto dal Senato di Olanda!

Dear Commissioner,  
Dear Colleagues,

Over a year ago, we had the privilege to welcome your colleague, Commissioner Wallström in the Dutch Senate. In my opening words I stated that we needed to step up our efforts to communicate Europe to our citizens. A year later, today, that message is even more up to date. Not just for the Netherlands, but for the EU in general. From that perspective, an open debate with the Vice President of the European Commission is very important and therefore I would like to thank you, Mr Frattini on behalf of both chambers of the States-General.

As members of the national parliament we share ownership of the European Union with our colleagues of the EU-member states, the governments and the European institutions. We must however not forget that most of us were given this shared ownership by our citizens - through the mandate granted us by elections. We therefore owe it to our citizens, but also to the history of the European Union to strengthen our involvement in the EU as well as our commitment to the EU, especially on the national level. Unfortunately, I share the view of Mr Barroso, the President of the Commission, on the EU being too often used as a 'scapegoat' and too little used as the solution for our problems.

As the President of the Dutch Senate I am very proud that so many members of the Senate have a profound interest in European affairs, both critical and confident. We have won some spurs on the European continent and do not rest on our laurels. Let me give you some examples. Firstly: the initiative – implemented Europe-wide last year for the first time - to debate annually in the national parliaments the annual legislative and working program of the European Commission was a Dutch initiative – originated in the Dutch Senate. And I would like to use today's opportunity to extend an invitation to the European Commission for the Senate's debate on the European Commission's program of 2007. Secondly: as you probably are aware, the Dutch Senate did not keep quiet when the European proposal to establish a Fundamental Rights Agency was debated. We efficiently used the instrument of parliamentary diplomacy on the national and European level and with that stirred a constructive debate. The Dutch Senate also took the initiative to join forces with national parliaments and urged for more transparency and openness in the European Councils. I hope you, Mr Frattini, will support this initiative on the European level. I could mention more of these examples in which the Dutch Senate makes successful use of its instruments and arguments to scrutinize European policy, proposals and to influence the national European policy and the European national policies, but rest

assured Mr Frattini, that we will do our utmost to continue with our European activities.

The European Commission has over the last year proven to be a partner for the national parliaments on our joint road towards a better communication with the citizens. Initiatives of the Commission, like "Plan D" and the decision to send new European proposals directly to the national parliaments, help us to improve our ways and politicize the EU nationally. This last point is absolutely necessary. Within this context, we are very pleased with the conclusions of the European Council of last week suggesting the European Commission should indeed take into account the objections put forward by the national parliaments. When we – from the national parliaments' point of view - apply the principle of subsidiarity to the initiatives I just mentioned, we fortunately can conclude that they are in conformity. The handles offered by the Commission need however be better used at the national level. The Dutch Senate will continue to do her utmost in this respect and continue on the successful road we already took some years ago.

At the same time however we can not ignore the signal that was given by our citizens in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty on the first of June last year. The concerns of our citizens hold a prominent place and as representatives of our citizens, we of course have to take these concerns into account. Recent European and national polls show that the Dutch are not against the EU, but a more conscious approach is indispensable. On the other hand, we do also know that for example the Dutch citizens foresee a vital role for the EU in the fight against terrorism.

From this perspective, Mr Frattini, we are very honored that you agreed to meet with us today. Especially since your portfolio in the European Commission: Justice, Safety and Freedom goes to the heart of the Dutch citizen's concerns. The other topics that will be debated today also have much in common with the citizen's and our worries. The continuously setting up of new European agencies confirms the picture of the EU as a bureaucratic, less democratic organization. The Dutch Senate has from this point of view asked the Dutch Council of State to draft a report on the democratic and institutional aspects of European agencies. We just recently received this report and we will make sure when available in english, that you will also receive a copy.

Dear Commissioner, I have no doubt that you will have a very fruitful discussion today with members of the States-General and I hope that it will foster new ideas on both sides. After all, we do share the ownership of a historically thriving and unique concept: the idea of working together for the benefit of our citizens between and across our national and joint borders. Let us not stall for time, but together reap the benefits of Europe!

Grazie.