

Speech by the President of the Dutch Senate, Ms Yvonne Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the state visit of the President of Ukraine on 7 June 2006

Mr President, it is a great pleasure for the President of the Dutch House of Representatives, Mr Weisglas, and myself to welcome you to the Upper House of the Dutch Parliament, the Senate of the States-General. We are highly honoured that you have decided to spend part of your brief visit to the Netherlands meeting with members of parliament. I am pleased to welcome you in the midst of our parliamentary experts on foreign affairs and EU relations.

Mr President, I can imagine that your visit to the Netherlands perhaps brings about mixed feelings, since we - the Dutch - just won the under twenty-one European Championship football final from the Ukraine last Sunday. In all fairness, I do have to admit that the first match between the teams was won by the Ukraine. A quick look at the competition format of the World Cup shows that our countries can only play each other in the semi finals. Let's hope this will be the case, but then, please leave Shevchenko at home!

Mr President, the Dutch orange football fever may well take you back to the autumn of 2004. This was the time of the Orange Revolution, when the population of Ukraine expressed its will through a series of non-violent, pro-democracy rallies. The Ukrainian people won their right to democracy under the worried, but watchful gaze of the international community. After all, the right to free elections is a fundamental right codified in the first protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. Moreover, a democracy can be effective only if it is backed by an efficient system of checks and balances. And with the outcome of the general elections last March, we do sincerely hope that the current coalition negotiations will soon lead to the formation of a stable new government in your country.

The transformation in your country over the last years is very commendable on both the international and national level.

I truly believe it shows both courage and wisdom to strive at finding a balanced position for the Ukraine in the political landscape on the European continent: between Russia and the EU and at the same time on a good footing with both Russia and the EU.

On the national level, the Ukraine continuously faces the challenge of making the necessary political and economic changes by democratic means. Please rest assured, Mr President, that the Netherlands will continue to support your country on its future road to prosperity and democracy for the benefit of the Ukrainian people.

Thank you.

7 June 2006