



Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, prof. dr. J. A. Bruijn, tijdens de IPU-bijeenkomst van parlementsvoorzitters (panel discussion 'Mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy')

7 september 2021

Dear colleagues,

It is a great privilege for the Dutch Parliament and for me personally to participate in this meeting and to speak to you about the important topic of 'Mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy'.

We are grateful to the IPU Secretariat for organizing this meeting in Vienna, after we met online in August last year.

Dear colleagues,

A year on, we are still experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide, better put we are still in the middle of it. We know that the future is uncertain, and that this virus will be among us for some time.

During the pandemic the Dutch Parliament has continued its work, both online and offline. We have found ways to meet and keep on debating, both on COVID-related issues as on other topics. To mitigate the effects of the measures, the Senate organized digital committee and group meetings, found a way for members to sign the attendance list digitally and we held - and still hold - plenary sessions in a larger hall, a stone's throw away from the Senate building.

In the Netherlands we saw that in the beginning of the pandemic the sense of urgency meant that all parties – we have 15 groups in the Senate – were focused on combating the virus and supported our government's policy.

After some time, political and ideological differences between the groups re-emerged in COVID-related debates. Parliamentary democracy 'normalized', so to say. Discussions from the streets found their way to the Senate floor.

Also, people found Parliament again. Speaking for the Senate: online views of our plenary meetings surged to numbers we had not experienced before. Technical possibilities have made it easier for our citizens to follow the debates in Parliament. This is a positive development.

Tensions rose when government introduced a nationwide curfew in name of public health. It was considered by many inside and outside of Parliament as a major breach of individual freedoms.

It led to tough debates in both Houses of Parliament, which resulted in some adjustments to the proposed measures and to the democratic involvement of Parliament. This last topic has been the focus of the Senate in many COVID-debates and will be important in future ones.

Dear colleagues,

Thank you for your attention and I look forward to the rest of our discussions.