

Speech Voorzittersconferentie

TTIP

21 april 2015

Introduction

- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about the national parliamentary dimension of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, also known as TTIP. After the interesting presentation of President Schulz, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight an example of the way in which the combined efforts of national parliaments to influence European policy making can be successful. This happened in the case of the trade negotiations between the EU and the United States.

TTIP

- A few weeks ago, a surprising press release circulated on facebook, according to which Commission President Juncker announced that all TTIP negotiations would be cancelled immediately, due to the great public opposition on this subject.
- Although this turned out to be a – well executed!- *April fools'* hoax, it shows how much the EU-US trade

talks are subject to public debate these days in many European countries.

- In the Netherlands, being a trading nation, TTIP has been under close scrutiny in the Tweede Kamer since the start of the negotiations in July 2013.

Letter to Commissioner De Gucht

- Particularly the role of national parliaments in the ratification procedure remains unclear. This does not contribute to the public support of such an important deal that affects so many sectors. It is important to involve national parliaments in this discussion. After all, if national politicians partake in these debates in their own capitals, and with them the national media, it is more clear to the public that these deals are not made in the dark corners of Brussels policy making, but open to everyone who wants to have a say.
- Therefore, regarding the scope and major importance of TTIP, The Tweede Kamer considers this to be a so-called 'mixed agreement' which means that all member states, and not just European Parliament and Council, should ratify the agreement. This secures an explicit role for national parliaments to assess the outcome of the negotiations, and

therefore also provides a better information position during these trade talks.

- In the current framework however, the question of whether a trade agreement is mixed or not, is not decided until after the deal has been concluded.
- That is why the Tweede Kamer decided to draw up a letter to the Trade Commissioner, Karel de Gucht at the time, asking him to consider comprehensive trade agreements such as TTIP as mixed agreements, at the start of the negotiations.
- This letter was co-signed by 21 other chambers of national parliaments in a constructive process, for which we made use both of the parliamentary representations in Brussels and the COSAC-meeting last June in Athens to gather support.
- Mr De Gucht responded in October last year. He stated that while he was confident that TTIP would be a mixed agreement, given its comprehensive nature, this could only be concluded afterwards.

Opinion Court of Justice

- Two weeks after sending this letter in October 2014, the European Commission decided to request an opinion of the EU Court of Justice on this matter. Taking the trade agreement with Singapore as an

example, the Court is asked to bring clarity which provisions of this Free Trade Agreement fall *within* the EU's exclusive or shared competence, and which remain in the Member States' remit.

- Although it will take quite a while before the Court will present its opinion, I think it is safe to conclude that 'our' letter to Mr. De Gucht has contributed to his request to the Court of Justice to solve this ongoing difference of opinion between the Commission and the Council and national Parliaments on the interpretation of the Lisbon Treaty.

Political dialogue

- What can we learn from this example? Firstly, that the political dialogue, as introduced by President Barroso in 2006 to reinforce the European policy making process – and which we will talk about in the next session – can take on several forms and procedures. It is up to us as national parliaments to help shape this instrument to ensure an efficient and effective way of communication with the European Commission.
- Secondly, vital to this success story is that national parliaments found each other quickly, both on the

level of the parliamentary representations in Brussels as informally during COSAC-meetings.

- Thirdly and finally, I believe that we need this kind of concrete cases to sharpen the debate on the role national parliaments can play in European decision making. If we only discuss this theme at an abstract level, we risk writing beautiful reports and statements about the way things should be, without actually moving forward.
- I firmly believe that the ball is in our court: we ourselves are the ones that can make interparliamentary co-operation work. Several ideas and initiatives are being developed recently, and we hope to enhance this interparliamentary co-operation during our upcoming EU-presidency the first half of 2016. By way of start, we yesterday signed a Trio Declaration of upcoming EU-presidencies together with our colleagues from Slovakia and Malta. In that declaration, we stress the pivotal role of national parliaments to ensure democratic legitimacy of the functioning of the EU and to bridge the gap between EU decision making and citizens in Europe. We also pledge to strengthen the effective cooperation between our national parliaments.

Conclusion

- Trade agreements can have a great impact on the everyday life of European citizens. I am pleased that the TTIP-negotiations have given rise to much debate in many member states: it shows that people know what is going on and care about the outcome. National parliaments have an important role to play in this debate. We have taken the first steps in this political dialogue with the European Commission, but I am confident that this dialogue will continue; not only regarding TTIP but on trade agreements in general. Let's work together to ensure that our dialogue with the Commission is both constructive and effective.