

## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Freedom in Poland

*Statement by Ms Anouchka van Miltenburg,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives, The Netherlands.*

- *check against delivery* -

Dear Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

Dear Members of Parliament, dear Colleagues,

- Today we celebrate 25 years of free elections in Poland. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1989, the first general elections behind the Iron Curtain took place. The Polish people went to vote, and chose Solidarność with an overwhelming majority. One year later its leader and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mr Lech Wałęsa was voted for president during the direct presidential elections. After setting this example for democracy, many other countries in Eastern Europe followed.
- In the Netherlands, we followed these events at that time with great interest. Europe was at the brink of a huge political turnover and it started in Poland.

- Geert Mak, one of the most important Dutch historical authors, mentioned when his novel 'In Europe' was published in Polish in 2006 that 'Europe has incredibly much to thank Poland for'. Not only in the 1980s with the revolution started by Solidarność but also during the Second World War. In fact the Dutch people partly thank the freedom in the Netherlands to Polish soldiers in the 1st Polish Armoured Division and many Polish have offered their lives during fights in Western Europe at that time.
- Today, Poland developed into a country with political freedom, flourishing entrepreneurship and high standards of health and education. The gross national income of Poland almost doubled overtime. And especially since the accession of 10 Eastern European countries to the EU, Poland plays a very important role on the international stage.

- It is important that we take time to remember the importance of democracy. We as Speakers and Members of Parliament work in democracies day in day out, and tend to take its existence for granted. And we should not. The recent events in Ukraine show that democracy can be fragile. After people protested for European values at the Maidan square and caused a political revolution, Ukraine lost part of its territory and is now a landscape of fighting and a country where disunity is rife. And many other countries in the world suffer under dictatorships and lack of democracy.
- Madam Speaker, let me finish by expressing my sincere hope that democracy will flourish, not only in Poland, not only in Europe but in the entire world. And may we never forget how fortunate we are to be living in democratic countries.