



Tweede Kamer

DER STATEN-GENERAAL

Visit of the European Commission, 7 January 2016

By the acting Speaker of the House of Representatives of the States General, Khadija Arib

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting each other at a special moment in time. On 16 October 2015, it was exactly 200 years ago that the States General of the Netherlands was established, an important milestone in our history. Our parliament is characterised by its great continuity – it continues 24/7. Sometimes it is good to take a moment to consider explicitly the values upon which our parliamentary democracy is based: freedom of expression, personal freedom and an independent judiciary.

However, this continuity does not mean that the Dutch democracy is a static system. On the contrary: during the last two hundred years the Dutch Parliament has developed, modernised and adapted itself time and again to reflect the spirit of its time.

The democratic involvement in Europe is an important illustration of this. For many years, European decision-making was solely a government matter, and it was almost always possible to count on parliamentary assent. But since the introduction of the Treaty of Lisbon – which came into force six years ago – members of parliament give specific instructions to our ministers in all kinds of areas, or set pre-arranged boundaries in how much leeway ministers have. In addition, the so-called yellow and orange card procedures enable national parliaments to ask you, the European Commission, to reconsider proposals.

The Dutch Parliament has made active use of these rights. For example, the Senate and the House of Representatives have submitted several subsidiarity objections to your Commission, concerning such issues as the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the Right to Strike, and Genetically Modified Organisms. We are also making increasing use of the instrument of political dialogue, for example regarding the TTIP.

We can only do this if national parliaments work together. William Shakespeare once said: “If you want to be incrementally better: be competitive. If you want to be exponentially better: be cooperative.” This also applies to Europe.

This is why the main message of the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch EU Presidency will be: ‘working together to increase parliamentary engagement in EU decision-making’. This message must be one that resounds at all of the six conferences that we as a parliament are organising here at the Inner Court, in the historic Hall of Knights. We hope to welcome you at these conferences, where we will discuss issues that play an important role in your annual Work Programme as well.

I think it is a positive thing that the European Commission underlines the position of national parliaments and the importance of good mutual cooperation – for example with the initiative of Vice-President Frans Timmermans to intensify the contact between European Commissioners and national parliaments, or the statements made by the President of the Commission. During your State of the Union address, President Juncker, you called the national parliaments the heart of democracy, and in your letter to the European Parliament and the European Council you stated that parliaments need to be able to function more strongly and effectively in the process of EU decision-making. I believe that this will bring a greater feeling of solidarity between that distant Brussels and the voters in the twenty-eight EU member states. We have made sure the collaboration between the European commission and the national parliaments is on the agenda of the next COSAC meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world is changing and is steadily shrinking. So it is good that we hold on to each other, that we remain in dialogue on subjects that do not stop at our own national borders and that touch the daily lives of millions of people. I hope for – and indeed am looking forward to – a constructive exchange of thoughts, both now and during the interparliamentary conferences.