

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Today you have taken part in the last conference organised by the States General in the context of the Dutch presidency. We know by now from experience that you are ready for a little relaxation after a long day of discussions. And, to use the terminology of your conference, it would also not be socially responsible to tire you any longer with many words.

The main purpose of the conference in which you took part today was to exchange knowledge, information and ideas about a future European animal disease policy which is considered socially acceptable in the countries of the new European Union and can count on a broad base of social support. I understand from the presidency that the conference has in this respect certainly achieved its objective, since many of you have participated actively. It has been a great success. I sincerely hope that as a result of the conference our parliaments will continue in the near future

to exchange information and ideas on a new policy on animal diseases in the countries of the European Union.

A large number of you will take part tomorrow in a working visit to two horticultural businesses. Like livestock farming, horticulture in what we call our 'glass cities' is a very important mainstay of our economy. I very much hope that during your visit you will get a good impression of this sector of our agricultural industry, which is so characteristic of the western part of our country.

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During the dinner, which I will shortly open by inviting you to drink a toast, music will be provided by three young and talented musicians who

together form the Rodin Piano Trio. They have been a great success too during our presidency. I am pleased to introduce them to you:

on the piano Anna van Nieuwkerken

on the violin Josine van den Akker

and on the cello Astrid Schijns

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. Let me thank you once again for taking part in today's conference! I now invite you to drink a toast to your presence here and to a successful follow-up to the conference in which you have taken part today.

Bon appétit.