

Speech by the President of the Senate of Parliament,

Mrs. Y.E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck

Barroso visit to Dutch States General

8 February 2007

Dear President, Mr Barroso,

Dear Colleagues and Guests,

What else can I say after such an interesting debate but: “When will we meet again?”

I would like to thank you, Mr Barroso, for giving us a rich spectrum of the challenges facing Europe in the nearby future. You have demonstrated that there is ambition and strong motivation within your European Commission. Given the confidence your Commission has built up over the past few years, promising results can be expected in the second half of your term of office.

For the first time in fifty years a President of the European Commission addressed our national parliament, the States-General of the Netherlands. Your visit here in a way symbolizes a change in the relationship between national parliaments of Member-States and the European Commission in the last few years, as we perceive it.

It occurs to me that in our country a silent revolution has taken place in the last few years concerning the focus of our parliament on European policy and European legislative initiatives. Indeed, in the past we, like parliaments of some other countries, took the European lawmaking process often too much for granted. We were confronted with the final results and had the duty to implement European law into national law. We sometimes were dissatisfied

with outcomes, but had shown too little interest in the rationale behind pieces of European legislation in the phase of conceptualization. We were complaining when the dices had been thrown.

That has all changed. Within our parliament we nowadays take a close look at programs and proposals of the European Commission right from the beginning. We have improved our scrutiny procedures. The good practice has been developed that the Commission replies to comments of the States-General regarding possible breaches of subsidiarity and proportionality in specific proposals. Of course we really appreciate that, but we do not necessarily agree with the content of these. There is far more communication and dialogue between our parliament and the Commission than there used to be, and certainly as important, among the national parliaments of Member-States. Of course, we are very much aware that we are just one Member-State in a field of twenty-seven, and that good tuning and cooperation among national parliaments is paramount to gain support for opinions and possible proposals for change.

It can be seen as a positive side-effect of the NO-vote in the Dutch referendum that it has only fuelled the tendency of our parliament to methodically follow and scrutinize European policy proposals, and the desire to promote European action in preferred directions from bottom up. More involvement of our parliament, better explanation of what parliament is doing vis-à-vis European challenges can help eliminate the perceived gap between the European institutions and the citizens. Was not this, ironically enough, one of the objectives of the constitutional treaty?

Mr. President, I think that in public statements you rightly stressed the responsibility of the Dutch to indicate themselves how they want to proceed in reaching a new agreement after the rejection of the constitutional treaty. The

new government that is about to take office, has an excellent opportunity to help re-floating the search for consensus on a renewed treaty framework for the European Union. I think that it is legitimate that you expect the constructive attitude that has characterized the Dutch engagement with the European cause for fifty years, in helping to reach a break-through. And above this: if Dutch voters confidence in the EU and its institutions to some extent has to be restored, we as the national parliament, have an important role to play both in the European debate and in our communication with the citizens of this country. We are fully aware of our responsibility in this matter.

Mr President, dear Colleagues,

The year two thousand seven means half a century of European communication, cooperation and construction. A true moment to commemorate. The European Union was created for the benefit of the citizens. Our institutions at national and European level are there to serve the citizens and not the other way around. Let us keep this in mind when we, in our different responsibilities, move on to make an even more flourishing, safe and democratic Europe.