

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe

Meeting in The Hague on Wednesday 11 and Thursday 12 March 2015 in the Plenary Hall of the Dutch Senate (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal)

Welcome by Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Dutch Senate.

It is a great pleasure and honor to welcome you, the members of the Standing Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, in the House of the Senate, here in the city of the Hague.

Chères collègues, soyez le bienvenue ici à la Haye, au Sénat.

My colleague Hans Franken, who is Vice-President of the Senate and leader of the Dutch delegation to the PACE, took the initiative to invite you to the Hague and I know that you have a very full agenda for the two coming days. Of course I am quite proud that Hans is the rapporteur of a report on cyberterrorism and large scale attacks on the internet, that you are going to discuss.

As culture is one of the main areas of interest of your committee - and I may add the committee I was also a member of when I was a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe - I may underline that you find yourself in a parliamentary complex that not only is of political importance, but also has substantial historical and cultural significance.

In fact, our plenary hall where you are now, is the oldest parliamentary meeting hall in the world that is still in use. This hall was built in 1655, during the golden age of the then Republic of the Seven United Provinces of the

Netherlands. It was commissioned by the States of Holland, the assemblee of the representatives of the cities of the Province of Holland. And ever since it has remained a parliamentary meeting hall. When you look at the ceiling you can see that Holland at that time already was very internationally oriented. Dutch trades- and salesmen sailed the world seas and met foreign people all over the world: Italians, Germans, French, British, Turks, Chinese, Indians, Arabs. In the middle you see young people, children, the hope of the future, on whose well being all political activity must be aimed. Your discussions here will be critically watched by them as well.

I have noticed that you have been very active in the past few months. The terrible attacks in Paris against Charlie Hebdo required a response. You rightly spoke up for the freedom in the media, which comprises the right to express political opinions and to criticise the public authorities and groups in civil society. The culture of critical debate is a necessary component - one cab say almost a prerequisite - of democratic societies.

Last december your committee recommended developing international guidelines for the protection and reconstruction of damaged or destroyed cultural heritage in order to preserve cultural identity and diversity in crisis and post-crisis situations. How very lamentable it is that the recommendations this spring proved to be more opportune and necessary than ever. I am personally appalled by the acts of destruction in northern Iraq and Syria that we have witnessed in the past weeks. Not only human beings are suffering immensely in those regions, but millenia old cultural heritage is savagely destroyed. All things of value are defenseless against barbarism.

I want to wish you fruitful discussions and good luck on your proceedings in the next two days. I know that you are going to visit later today a source of cultural pride in our country, the recently restored Mauritshuis, which is next to our parliamentary complex. I have no doubt whatsoever that you are going to enjoy this visit. Thank you for coming to The Hague. I wish you well.