

Speech by the President of the Senate of the Netherlands, H.E. Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol, on the occasion of the Meeting of the Association of European Senates in Bern, 20 October 2016

"Combating terrorism in Europe"

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last ten years, Europe has been confronted by numerous **acts of terror**. Some cities barely got the chance to recover, before being attacked once again. And even though we have yet to identify the perpetrators of all these attacks, their goal is crystal clear: the spread of fear.

Using the only method they seem to master - violence - terrorists (whether they are groups or individuals) hope to **disrupt and dismantle** our free democratic societies.

In our meeting here today we discuss what role senates can play in combating terrorism in Europe. In my view, the most important thing senates can do is to stand firm in upholding the rule of law and respecting human rights.

I spoke about this subject during the Conference of Presidents in Strasbourg last month as well. Upholding the rule of law is a principle

we as parliamentarians must all stand for. Even - or especially - when it is easier to look the other way and allow legislation to pass that undermines it.

In the past two years there has been a risk of this happening with a number of **anti-terrorism laws**. The fear for terror has led to an ever louder call to take measures that infringe basic human rights such as the right to privacy, freedom of religion and non-discrimination. Often, the measures neglect basic legal principles such as non-retroactive penalisation and *habeas corpus*.

Although the need for safety and control of the situation is understandable, I must stress that it is in our **common interest** that we uphold the rule of law and human rights. If we fail to do so, we will lose the very thing we are trying to protect.

Upper houses provide an invaluable **platform for debate** about anti-terrorism laws and international safety; in the context of checks and balances. In many cases, upper houses even play a role in the decision to deploy armed forces.

In the Senate of the Netherlands we have started a new tradition of a **yearly policy debate** on international safety. In addition to terrorist attacks, subjects such as the struggles and instability in the Middle East and Africa and the influx of refugees were addressed. Debates like these are highly important to exchange the knowledge senators have of these often **complex issues**.

Although it is evident that there is a joint responsibility to ensure **peace and stability**, what is it that we as parliamentarians can do to contribute to that?

I believe the key word is **cooperation**. One of the most important steps we as parliamentarians can take to contribute to peace and stability is to optimise and intensify our cooperation.

Speaking about this subject here today and hearing how other senates deal with this issue is valuable. European upper (and lower) houses should do everything they can to cooperate. Already, many governments are working together more and more closely in the areas of foreign affairs, security and defence. So it is very important that we improve parliamentary cooperation in these fields.

It is the only way we can **protect our free, democratic societies**.