

Welcoming address of the President of the Senate of the States General, Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol, on the occasion of the visit of the President of the Federal Republic of Austria, Mr. Alexander van der Bellen, on 14 November 2018

Sehr geehrter Herr Bundespräsident,

Herzlich willkommen in den Generalstaaten, dem Parlament des Königreichs der Niederlande. Ich freue mich, Sie im Gebäude der Ersten Kammer, dem Senat, begrüßen zu dürfen.

Please allow me to continue in English.

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

It is a great honour to welcome you here today. You have been a member of parliament yourself for many years, so I assume that you feel familiar in this parliamentary environment.

This building, in which the Dutch Senate is housed on the Binnenhof in The Hague, is rich in history. Most of the structures date back to the mid fifteenth century. It was also in this fifteenth century when the relationship between our countries was first established. In year 1477, with the marriage of Maximilian I of Austria and Mary of Burgundy, the Habsburg Empire and the Burgundian Kingdom became connected. An important development in the fifteenth century Europe, and the start of the shared history of our two countries.

And now here we are, in the 21st century. In the year 2018, in which your country commemorates the founding of the First Republic of Austria 100 years ago. It is undeniable that we live in turbulent times, with instability and violence surrounding the borders of the European Union.

Refugee flows will continue to head towards our borders in the coming decades. Tensions with important neighbours like Russia and Turkey have become increasingly complicated. The election of President Trump changed the transatlantic relationship. And the Brexit offers an unprecedented challenge to the European Union.

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

It is in this context of turmoil and shifting balances that I am convinced of the importance of the close relationship between our countries. Of the importance of good cooperation to face all these challenges of the 21st century. Because we can only face those challenges together.

I think both our countries share this opinion. As active members of the European Union and as host countries of several important international organizations, both our countries value the concept of multilateralism and international cooperation. A concept that is increasingly under pressure and therefore increasingly requires support and protection.

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

It seems to me that the Republic of Austria could play an important role in the coming years, especially when it comes to the future of the European Union. As a truly Central-European country. As a neutral country. As a country with a long and historic relationship with the east and with the west.

That is one of the reasons we highly value our partnership with your country, and that is why we feel privileged to welcome you here today, only several weeks after your Prime-Minister visited our country as well.

You yourself, Mr. President, could be regarded as a personification of the position of Austria between East and West, with your family having Dutch and Russian ancestors. Looking at your own family's history, you undoubtedly must be aware of the unique position of Austria, historically, geographically and politically.

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

I myself had the pleasure to visit the beautiful city of Vienna in May of this year, on the invitation of the President of the Austrian Bundesrat. I remember a very fruitful visit with interesting and informative discussions on many important issues.

Especially of course with regard to the current EU-presidency of Austria, during which your country has contributed to progress on many important fields. For example, we see a renewed focus on the EU-perspective of the Western Balkans, an issue that is very important to me and I truly appreciate the efforts of your country on that matter.

Your Excellency, Herr Bundespräsident,

Es ist eine grosse Ehre, Sie im niederländischen Parlament empfangen zu dürfen. Ich möchte Sie gerne einladen das Wort zu nehmen. Herzlichen Dank.