

Spoken word counts.

Welcoming Address of the President of the Senate,
Mr. Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck at
the Symposium on the (future of the) relation EU – Rus-
sia,
Monday 27 October 2008, the Senate, The Hague

Dear Guests,

As President of the Dutch Senate it is with great pleasure that I welcome you in the plenary hall of the Senate for the symposium on the relations between the European Union and Russia. A symposium co-organised by the Senate and the Advisory Council on International Affairs of the Netherlands. I would like to especially welcome the President of the Advisory Council, Mr. Korthals Altes.

I would also like to give a special welcome to our four keynote speakers. Mr. Kosachev, chairman of the committee on Foreign Affairs of the Russian Doema, Mr. Brok, member and former chair of the committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, Mr. Verberg, former president of the International Gas Union and currently president of the Energy Delta institute and Mr. Van Koningsbrugge, extraordinary professor at the Moscow State University and president of the Centre on relations between the Netherlands and Russia.

It is a strong conviction of the Dutch Senate that Europe goes beyond the borders of the European Union. We have a very active delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and we integrate our cross border work into our national activities. In November I will participate in a conference of the Association of European Senates about European Cooperation in St. Petersburg.

Your gathering today to discuss the relationship of the European Union with Russia not only underlines the conviction of the Senate but also carries it into effect. Therefore, I am pleased to see that representatives from so many different organisations and institutions are participating today.

The initiative for this symposium originated at the beginning of this year, when the standing committee on European Affairs of the Senate and the standing committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy of the Senate decided to ask the Advisory Council on International Affairs on a report concerning the EU and Russia. The content of this report and the importance of the relation itself made the committees decide to invite you for a discussion.

Since that rather uncomplicated decision, new unexpected developments occurred in Europe, leading towards a complicated situation in summer. The geopolitical balance as we knew it at the eastern borders of the EU was altered. The range of events stressed the need for today's constructive dialogue even further.

The subtitle of the report of the Advisory Council on International Affairs, "a matter of mutual interest" immediately puts into perspective the central notion of the report and therefore of today's symposium. Stating that cooperation is a matter of mutual interest seems obvious. And yet, in the past decades the relationship between the EU and Russia has not always been one of convinced mutual consent. The EU and Russia have both changed. This obviously has affected their relationship, and both sides are challenged to further shape and develop this relationship. The report gives us an excellent analysis of the many changes that took place, and offers a range of recommendations for the future. There are many differences which we should not only be aware of, but which we must also take

into consideration. And yet there is an abundance of fields of common interest.

Our common future is to be found on the European continent. There is mutual dependence and there are international challenges facing us. The future of Russia, of the EU and of the Netherlands can not and should not be looked upon separately nor in an isolated manner. Hopefully today's symposium will further encourage you to investigate what you and your organisation can do to contribute.

Dear guests, before the discussions can start, I would like to inform you that on a cultural note, the Dutch men's choral society Donkozakken conducted by Mr. Serge Latychev from Russia, has offered to add lustre to our symposium by giving a short performance. We will welcome them at the end of our symposium.

It is a great pleasure for me to now introduce your moderator for today, Mr. Ben Knapen. He is – to be brief – an author, he is a journalist, he was general editor of a widely known newspaper in this country, an extraordinary professor in "media and quality" and he is a member of the scientific council for government policy. In conclusion, he's a man of many talents and therefore I can with great confidence leave you in his very capable hands.

I would like to wish you an interesting and inspiring symposium.

Thank you!