



Eerste Kamer *der Staten-Generaal*

Welkomstwoord ontvangst van de Voorzitter van het Parlement van Kroatië, de heer Josip Leko, maandag 10 maart 2014

Your Excellency,

I wish you a warm welcome also on behalf of my colleague of the House of Representatives, Mrs Van Miltenburg. We are honoured to receive you and your delegation in our democratic midst, the States General of the Netherlands. Your presence here underlines the good relations between our two countries. And of course, the good relations between our two parliaments.

For over twenty years our countries have maintained friendly relations based on solidarity and cooperation. For that reason, it is a great pleasure to speak with you today about issues that touch us all. With this I mean democracy, economic development, chances for new generations and regional safety and stability.

Needless to say, the dialogue between the Netherlands and Croatia in the past few years has been intensive. Numerous visits back and forth from delegations on the parliamentary level as well as on the executive level have taken place. The fairly recent visit of your President, Mr Josipović, springs to mind. But also the visits of two of my predecessors, Mr Van der Linden and Mr De Graaf.

During these visits views were exchanged on the bilateral economic, political and cultural ties between Croatia and the Netherlands. But very importantly - and I daresay mainly - the accession of Croatia to the European Union was discussed. Throughout the whole process, the Dutch were critical but have always strived to maintain a strict and fair approach. We have always greatly appreciated your openness and your willingness to take on suggestions. And we are so very pleased that the intensive dialogue has lead us to what we are now: fellow EU members and partners.

The ratifying of *the Treaty Concerning the Accession of the Republic of Croatia* - in the presence of Her Excellency Mrs Vesela Mrden Korac - was a milestone of great importance to Dutch-Croatian relations.



Forming part of the European Union does not only mean sharing common interests, but also common values. We applaud your achievements in promoting sustainable economic growth, securing an independent and transparent legal system and monitoring reform. We also support your efforts towards the protection of minorities and battling corruption. We are impressed by the way Croatia has made the fulfilment of the requirements for a democratic society under the rule of law not only 'a matter of the head' but also 'a matter of the heart'. Croatia has proven that meeting the conditions for accession was not merely a technical matter, but an important process to the benefit of Croatian society.

Although many important steps have been taken, it remains a continuing process. In this you have our full support. We believe that your efforts do not only benefit Croatian society, but also set an example for neighbouring countries. In this regard I specifically mention the Centre of Excellence, which attributes a great deal to the sharing of knowledge and expertise on the European integration and accession process with transition countries in the region.

Well-functioning democratic institutions are key elements of a state rooted in security and justice. This is something that *all* member states (new ones as well as old ones) should constantly monitor and maintain. From my perspective as a parliamentarian, I am therefore very interested in exchanging best practices and to hear from you what your experiences are regarding the relationship between government and parliament. Specifically, I would very much like to hear more about *the Act on the Co-operation between the Croatian Parliament and Government in European Affairs*.

Another issue I hope we can address today is the Speakers Conference in Vilnius that is coming up in April. I have always been a firm believer that active involvement of parliamentarians in international forums and activities helps to place national developments in context. I would very much like to hear what your expectations are of this conference.



To conclude, Your Excellency, I thank you again for coming to the Netherlands. Your visit here marks the end of an intensive and successful chapter in the relations between our two countries. I am confident that our partnership will continue to be pleasant and productive in the future. Now, I would like to offer the floor to you.

Thank you.