

Address by Mrs Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Dutch Senate, to the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia at the plenary Hall of the Assembly at Yerevan, November 16th 2017

Dear Mr. President, dear members of the National Assembly,

It is a great honour to be here today and to stand here in the plenary hall of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

I would like to thank President Babloyan wholeheartedly for giving me this privilege. As a President of Parliament, the opportunity to address the parliament of another country is an immense honour. Thank you.

Dear Mr. President, dear members of the National Assembly,

It might be based on old maps and theological records, or just on the paradisiacal beauty of the Armenian landscape. But Lord Byron, the famous English poet, was sure of it: 'If the Scriptures are rightly understood', he wrote in the year 1886, 'it was in Armenia that Paradise was placed'.

I leave the discussion on the location of the terrestrial Paradise for the theologians, but what I do know is the great and important role Armenia has played in the history of the Christian religion.

In the year 301, Armenia was the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as a state religion under King Tiridates III, better known as the Great. The Etchmiadzin Cathedral he built is considered to be the oldest cathedral in the world. I feel truly privileged to be able to visit this impressive and historical cathedral tomorrow.

But that is not all. Armenia is considered to be one of the oldest countries in the world. Early civilisations date back to 4000 BC and the world's earliest known leather shoe and the earliest known wine-producing facility were discovered in your country.

Armenia is often referred to as the 'cradle of civilization'. I truly do realise that I am standing on historic grounds.

Dear Mr. President, dear members of the National Assembly,

Now here we are, in the year 2017. We live in a complicated world in which terrorism, hybrid conflicts like desinformation and cyber warfare, and climate change dominate the newspapers. Power balances are shifting, new threats but also new opportunities appear to our countries.

Sometimes it might feel like the greater powers of this world determine the direction of the river. It might feel like we are subjected to the will of the big countries that surround us.

Although this might be true to a certain extent, we must not forget that middle-sized countries indeed can play a meaningful role. We must not forget that middle-sized countries like Armenia and The Netherlands are in a unique position. A unique position to be a bridge. A

bridge between interests, a bridge between powers, a bridge between, in the case of Armenia, the east and the west.

Armenia has the unique position, historically, geographically and politically, to function as a bridge between the European Union on the one hand and Russia and other Eurasian countries on the other. I do hope Armenia will further develop playing this role, difficult as it may be, to the benefit of the Armenians, to the benefit of us all.

Dear Mr. President, dear members of the National Assembly,

The Senate of The Kingdom of The Netherlands has a long tradition of inter-parliamentary cooperation. We are convinced of the value of dialogue between parliaments and the importance of parliamentary diplomacy.

Inter-parliamentary cooperation, like in the Council of Europe, can offer new opportunities. It can lead to improved mutual understanding. And it can truly contribute to foster good relationships between countries.

That is why I am delighted to visit Armenia. I am very much looking forward to the next couple of days in which I will meet multiple interesting and notable people and will see more of your beautiful country.

Thank you once again for this extraordinary opportunity to address you today. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be here.

Thank you.