

**Dankwoord Voorzitter Eerste Kamer na ontvangst onderscheiding “Cavaliere di Gran Croce dell’Ordine della Stella d’Italia”  
Italiaanse ambassade d.d. 23 november 2017.**

*Eccellenza, Caro Ambasciatore,*

*É un grande piacere per mio marito e me essere vostro ospite a questa cena festiva.*

*Inoltre, oggi festeggio anche il mio compleanno.*

*Che cosa è più bello che in un giorno scuro nel mese di novembre stare in suolo italiano e di godere di tante cose meravigliose che il vostro paese ha da offrire: cultura, musica, letteratura e ultimo ma non meno importante il cibo è eccellente e il vino meraviglioso.*

*Mio marito ed io vi ringraziamo con tutto il cuore.  
E adesso continuo in inglese.*

It is a great honour to be here today.

Today is a very special day. It is a special day because it is an immense honour to have the Knighthood of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Italy conferred upon me, or, in my best Italian, to become '*Cavaliere di Gran Croce dell’Ordine della Stella d’Italia*'.

I feel deeply grateful and humbled to receive this very important and honourable distinction from the President of the Italian Republic and I feel truly privileged to be here with you all tonight.

And it also happens to be my birthday today. So there is much to celebrate. I can honestly tell you that being awarded with the Knighthood of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Italy is one of most special birthday gifts I can imagine.

Italy and the Netherlands have a special relationship. We share the two year mandate as non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand Amsterdam and Milan were in a breath taking competition on the seat of European Medicines Agency the last few days. The outcome gave Amsterdam reason to celebrate. But Italy and the Netherlands find themselves in the same position as far as the World Championship Football is concerned. We are not going to Russia, we can console each other.

Your Excellency,

The first words of the Italian national anthem are '*Fratelli d’Italia*', or, in English, 'Brothers of Italy'.

The anthem of course refers to the brotherhood amongst the people of Italy, but we could also apply these words to the relationship between the Italian Republic and the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

The brotherhood between our countries goes back for centuries. We thank Italy for its huge influence on the European culture, from the old Roman Empire to the Renaissance, which laid down the foundations of the modern Europe. In the field of art, in the field of science, in the field of political culture and in many other aspects of our European societies, we see the marks of the Italian history.

In more recent times, our two countries were both founding fathers of the European Union. The Treaty of Rome, signed 60 years ago in your beautiful capital, still is one of the most important international treaties ever signed. It formally established the European Economic Community and marked a major step towards the united Europe with (still) 28 Member-States we live in today. "Europa unita per il progresso e per la pace", resounded in Rome, when we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome on March 17 this spring.

Your Excellency,

I repeat "Europa unita", because we are united by the European Union and we work closely together in many areas. But on the other hand, in recent years we have seen that European Member States proved unable to cope unitedly with a number of important challenges of our time.

Most importantly, the migration crisis, which has put incredible pressure on southern European member states like Italy. I really feel that the people of Italy have done a great job in dealing with this difficult situation.

We live in a rapidly changing world in which flows of refugees, terrorism and hybrid conflicts dominate the newspapers. The Brexit, a new American President and instability at the borders of our continent make that the future is unpredictable. Power balances are shifting, new opportunities and new threats appear to our countries.

Your Excellency,

Common problems need common solutions. And common opportunities require common action. We need close friends and close cooperation to face the challenges of the future. We need our *'fratelli d'Italia'*, our Italian brothers and sisters, as important European partners to stand strong at the world stage.

As I already mentioned, Italy was one of the non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. As you know, our two countries

decided to share the two-year mandate after several rounds of voting did not bring a final decision.

By doing that, our two countries chose for cooperation instead of competition. Our two countries chose to work together for a better and safer world.

On top of that, our countries even determined common priorities for the membership of the UN Security Council: conflict prevention, peacekeeping, protection of civilians and the Rule of Law. This sends out a very positive message and we can be proud of that.

In 2018, The Netherlands will take over the seat in the UN Security Council and I am certain that the good cooperation between our countries will continue next year.

Your Excellency,

The Italian Republic and the Kingdom of The Netherlands are partners in the United Nations, partners in the European Union, partners in NATO and in many other international organizations. Our economic ties are very strong, and so is the historical connection between our countries.

Through you I want to thank President Mattarella for having awarded me the Knighthood of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Italy Mattarella and I would like to thank you for this great ceremony and this wonderful evening in your residence. It is a great honour for me.

Thank you.