

**Welcoming address by the President of the Senate, Mr. René van der Linden, at the occasion of the visit to the States-General of H.E. Mrs. Mary McAlees, President of Ireland, May 3, 2011**

Madam President.

Also on behalf of the President of the House of Representatives, Mrs. Verbeet, I warmly welcome you to the States General of the Netherlands. It is a real honour and pleasure to receive you in the parliamentary heart of the Netherlands.

As I understood you have started your visit to the Netherlands in an international setting, with visits to the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, very important bodies indeed in the international city of Peace and Justice, the Hague.

You have been in office as the democratically elected President of Ireland now for nearly twelve years. Internationally your presidency has been labelled as outstanding and exemplary. May I particularly complement you on the very important contribution you made to bringing a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Your personal efforts to reconcile groups that have been hostile towards each others, have been remarkable. Your work has been of great significance to establishing human rights. In the Senate of the Netherlands we never stop promoting the values of the international community: democracy, human rights, rule of law, which are the core business of the Council of Europe of which our countries both have been longstanding members. So we highly appreciate what you have done in this respect.

As we both know as long term members of the European Union, the European integration has proven to be an extremely successful concept which has maintained peace within the Union and also brought prosperity to many European countries. In recent years we have once again seen that a strong European Union also functions as a safety net, as you in Ireland have experienced yourselves in relation to the economic crisis that has hit your country so hard.

I want to express my appreciation for the commitment and perseverance of the Irish government to overcome the large crisis your country has been confronted with and applaud your cooperation with the European Union and the European Central Bank to take all the steps necessary to turn this situation around. Your country has gone through and still is going through a very difficult period of time. You have expressed confidence that Ireland will overcome this crisis. Europe has faced crises before and the current crisis, difficult as it may be, may help the EU to come out stronger and better equipped to overcome economic and financial setbacks.

Apart from the challenges we are faced with nationally, and within the European Union, we need to be constantly aware of what is happening in the world as well. Recent events in the Middle East en North Africa haven shown us once again that we need to cherish good relationships with our neighbours. I think it is very important that the Union helps to give the Arabic countries a better perspective on democracy, economic growth and prosperity.

On a global scale we are confronted with new challenges: climate change, energy crisis, terrorism and security risks, poverty and exclusion, budgetary deficits. As we see powers shifting to new geopolitical regions, Europe has to be aware of the crucial role it can play in solving these issues. To meet the global challenges we have to invest in education, research and innovation and need to pay attention to well balanced policies and a healthy budget.

The connecting thread of your presidency has been "building bridges" and it is just that what we as European member states among ourselves, but also in relation to our neighbours and partners around the world must continuously do. For all this we need public support and it is for politicians a great challenge to convince people of the necessity of a strong and better cooperation. In this respect I highly value our meeting today and look forward to continuing the mutual understanding and cooperation between our countries.

I would like to welcome you once more to the States General and give you the floor.