



Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn, ter gelegenheid van de conferentie van Parlementsvoorzitters van de Raad van Europa in Athene – inbreng bij discussie over *The common future of all European citizens*

datum 22 oktober 2021

Dear Mister President, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to represent the Senate of the Netherlands in this European Conference of Presidents of Parliament of the Council of Europe once again, after the pandemic prevented us from meeting last year.

Two years ago, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe; this pan-European ambition to unite our countries on the principles of the rule of law, human rights and genuine democracy.

In the centre of our movement stands the idea of a Charter of Human Rights, guarded by freedom and sustained by law.

That is the foundation of our common European home, as laid by the generations before us.

Today, in this session, we look forward, of what lies ahead of us and what our common European values bring to future generations.

Colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to take you to my country, the Netherlands, and especially to our Parliament, where my colleague from the House of Representatives – who is here today as well – and I have formed an alliance with an institution called ProDemos, literally For the People.

Together, the three of us have started – more than fifteen years ago – an initiative called ‘the Third Chamber’, which is an educational project about the Dutch parliamentary system, aimed at 10- and 11-year-olds.

The name **Third** Chamber derives from the Senate, in the Netherlands called the **First** Chamber and the House of Representatives being the **Second** Chamber. Hence, the Third Chamber is the home of our future parliamentarians.

Apart from being schooled on democracy, the wonderful part of the project is the interactive element. The children learn to debate on issues that are important to them. They film their classroom debates, and every fall season three schools are invited to the annual Finale Debate which is held in the Assembly Hall of the Senate.

MP’s from both Chambers volunteer to coach the children debating proposals, such as ‘Children are not allowed to demonstrate: they belong in school’, that came from the actual discussion in society about children joining the school strikes for climate.

It is my great honour and pleasure to preside these debates. It brings so much energy and liveliness to our Assembly Hall!



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And apart from the joy, I truly believe that by bringing this project, and many others - as you in your countries undoubtedly also have similar ones - to children from the ages of 10, 11 and continued in secondary education, is of vital importance for the future of our democracies.

One more example of ways in which we reach out to involve our youth was last month, when Parliament worked together with an organization called 'ChildPress'.

We invited young aspiring journalists to report on our national Budget Day. They used our and their social media channels to report on the budgetary plans of the government and the implications of those plans for the youth.

By using social media we specifically aim to reach a younger audience than we do through more traditional media.

Educating our youth on democratic values and involving them in the decision making process as an important way to increase knowledge and skills, was also one of the recommendations of a formal State Committee in the Netherlands in 2018.

The Committee was installed at the initiative of Parliament to advise the Dutch government on the need to reform the parliamentary system.

Apart from more emphasis on developing democratic knowledge and skills, the committee also advised on new ways of involving youth and young adults in politics, and reforms of the electoral system and competencies of both Chambers.

Colleagues,

A lot of the issues I have mentioned reflect the discussion we are having here today, albeit on a national level.

As I can't imagine the Netherlands is the sole country to have these initiatives, I call upon all of you to share your local and national initiatives so that we can learn from each other.

"The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation", Nelson Mandela famously said.

Building a common European future for next generations starts by empowering our youth.

Thank you.