

Speech to be given by the President of the Senate, Mrs Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the state visit of H.R.H. the Grand Duke and H.R.H. the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg on Monday 24 April 2006

Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me, speaking also on behalf of my colleague Mr Weisglas, the President of the House of Representatives, to welcome you, Your Royal Highnesses, here to the Senate.

The close bonds between our two countries and the countless ties that presently exist between our nations and peoples have deep roots in history. One of these roots, in which these close bonds are symbolised today, is formed by the old family relations between the Grand Ducal House of Nassau and the Royal House of Orange. It follows that for you this state visit is really also something of a family visit. We therefore trust that you will feel at home in the Netherlands during this state visit.

Our two countries have much in common. For example, we are both relatively small, but we are brimming over with human potential and initiative and we are constantly looking outwards. Our two countries stood at the cradle of the first European community arrangements in the form of the EEC and the ECSC. It is notable that although your country was until recently the smallest member of the European Union it has always played a very important role in the process of decision-making on the path towards the further enlargement and integration of Europe. Your country has produced many committed Europeans.

One European Luxembourger whom I should like to mention in particular is the present Prime Minister of your country, Dr Juncker, to whom the Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen will shortly be presented. Today I should like to compliment you, as the highest representative of your country, and Mr Juncker on this very honourable award.

Looking back at the period of almost 50 years since the Benelux was established, we can see that it has on numerous occasions acted as the motor and lubricant of the European integration process. Our governments and our parliaments will evaluate the Benelux treaty against the background of a European Union that has long ceased to be focused solely on economic cooperation and is still very much evolving. It will therefore be important in this connection to define the value-added of the Benelux in this new era.

Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies,

The Dutch referendum on the EU constitutional treaty, which produced a clear 'No', was followed by a positive result in your country. Many politicians in our country were very disappointed about the verdict pronounced by the Dutch people and were also a little jealous of the verdict of the people of Luxembourg. Now we are together looking to the future, and we must make adequate use of the period of reflection to achieve a more effective and transparent Europe which is closer to its citizens. In view of the past, I not only hope but also trust that in this regard our countries will stand shoulder to shoulder.

Your Royal Highness, I am now honoured to invite you to address us.

H.R.H. the Grand Duke addresses those present

Your Royal Highness,

Thank you very much for these words. I am now pleased to invite the chairman of the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, Mr Van Aartsen, to preside over the discussion.

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