

21 april 2005

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE STATES-
GENERAL WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER, M. WALLSTRÖM,
BY YVONNE E.M.A TIMMERMAN-BUCK, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

Dear Commissioner, Mrs Wallström,

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of both chambers of the States-General I'd like to welcome you to the Hague. What a felicitous moment you have chosen to visit the parliamentary heart of the Netherlands. A moment which once more commemorates the thin line of demarcation between the past and the future within the European Union integration process.

Looking back, a joint meeting with members of the Senate and the House of Representatives brings back the good memories many of us - here present - have of our Dutch EU presidency. But the future may hopefully bring us more of these meetings in which we are able to exchange views with representatives of the European institutions.

Another example of the thin line between the European past and future: less than a year ago the European Union welcomed ten new member states. The nearby future might bring a European Constitution to the citizens of all these countries.

But from a Dutch parliament's perspective, this thin line may be best endorsed by pointing out two things: first of course the referendum on the European Constitution. It is the first time in Dutch history that a national referendum is held, initiated by members of the House of Representatives. Second, the cooperation between the Senate and the House of

Representatives in anticipation of the European Constitution. A joint committee on the application of the subsidiarity test has been set up. This is unique too, because it is the first time in history that a joint committee has been set up to face such a task, especially with the continuing growth in European legislation. An increase, which is not always looked favorably upon by our country. The referendum and the joint committee show the importance the States-General attach to the European Union.

However, and therefore we are especially pleased to welcome you today, as in many countries of the European Union, the Netherlands also need to step up the efforts to better communicate the European Union to our citizens. The referendum, a joint committee, they are indeed starting points but we still have a long road ahead of us. With the Dutch referendum on the Constitution, the first of June, right after the French referendum, we will really have to pull out all the stops. Within the context of better communicating the EU to the citizens we should strive to realize a good attendance in the referendum. Therefore the participation has to improve fast and thorough within the next weeks.

Of course as representatives of the citizens we also have to search our own hearts. But it is a positive and welcome development that the parliaments have gained an ally within the European Commission. What better way to convince citizens and civil society that we all share the ownership of the European Union than more communication and cooperation between representatives of the European citizens on the national level and the guardians of the supranational European interests, the European Commission.

The Senate and the House of Representatives have their own European staff that assists the members with information, advice and an own website. This is a successful way of communicating the EU to members of parliament, although on a small scale, and we need to enlarge this scale.

Over the past two years, the intensified cooperation between the national parliaments has definitely helped expanding the EU horizon. Especially many thanks to the technical, electronic infrastructure that will hopefully continue to develop as a valuable instrument for our common goals.

I believe with some of the short-term initiatives you present in your targets for the European Commission's relations with the national parliaments, we will definitely, as members of the national parliaments and as shareholders of the European Union, have more instruments to enlarge the scale, to increase the number of shareholders of the EU.

We do need idealism, but we can not do without pragmatism and practical suggestions, some of which we hope that you can provide us with today and some of which we hope to provide you with. Our shared interest in communicating the EU must be the motive for cooperation in order to help the EU make a smooth transition from the past to the future, over and over again

Thank you.