

*Speech by the President of the Senate, Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck,
on the occasion of the Conference of Speakers/Presidents of EU Parliaments
Bratislava, 24 May – 27 May 2007
“Future of Europe”*

Mr. President,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is delightful to be in Bratislava especially right in the week that our head of state, Queen Beatrix, was so generously received by our host country on her state visit. My Dutch colleague and I have been invited to speak today, together with our French colleague, on the topic of “the Future of Europe”. This combination may seem logical, but to my opinion, all other colleagues could have been put on the short list to open this debate as well. Why? Because we all share the same ideals. We all want a prosperous and safe Europe. We are all part of a Union that embodies “no more war” and “no new dividing lines” on the European continent. Ideals, principles and passions that have to be just as vivid and important today as they were decades ago. Perhaps even more so.

Dear Colleagues, these shared ideals and common history make the case for Europe.

The French and Dutch referenda have been. They are in the past, period. We now – and so we should – look at the future. The European future - our future. We might endanger that future if we do not come up with new rules. We need

renewed, future-oriented rules. This is also the firm conviction of the Dutch Senate.

The Netherlands is one of the six founding Member States of the European Communities and with great pride will always remain one of the six founding Member States. The Netherlands was and still is a pro-European country. The welfare of my country, our economic growth within such an open economy is largely due to the EU. The Netherlands truly gains by cooperation and European teamwork. The Dutch vote in the referendum did not change any of this.

The current challenge of a new European Treaty is not a challenge only facing France and the Netherlands. It is a challenge we all are facing. 27 Member states need to find a common solution that is acceptable to all 27. This means that every country needs to show willingness to change its position, including the Netherlands. It is not in the benefit of our citizens nor the EU herself if countries remain deadlocked in their views.

Suggestions have been raised to develop a Europe of multiple speed. To my opinion this definitely is not the answer we should be searching for today. We all must stay on board of the riding European train, because it is in the interest of our citizens. It is furthermore for all of us the only rightful way if you want to influence the course of this riding train.

As I said, the Netherlands is pro-European. Recent polls have overwhelmingly confirmed that a very large majority of the Dutch citizens fully support EU-membership. Europe is for, by and of our citizens. As representatives of these citizens it is our task to create, gain and uphold their support. In the Netherlands, it sometimes almost seems as if our politicians fear their own electorate. As a representative, it is not just your task to listen to the citizens. People also expect

leadership and responsibility from the representatives they voted for. I realize that now it is time to show it.

Today we are gathered as Speakers of parliaments of the Member States that will negotiate a new treaty. We – our parliaments – are not at this negotiating table. We however have our own procedures and means to fulfil an important role in that process. Parliaments are the institutions to control and influence the position and views of our governments. The Dutch Senate uses its instruments to the fullest of its potential in the current debate on the European future. We had a debate with our Prime Minister only one week before the European Declaration of Berlin and we have scheduled another meeting just three days before the June summit.

The Dutch Senate is on top of the debate, the position of our government and the European views. We seek as much openness and transparency as possible, because this is the only way to a broadly based solution.

As the President of the Senate I can testify to you that the Dutch Senators all look in the same direction. That is to say, the European direction. There really is much common ground, although we have no less than ten political parties in our House. We have the unanimous position that the EU should accede to the European Convention of Human Rights. Therefore, the EU needs a legal personality. We are unanimous in our conviction that the role of national parliaments should be strengthened, complementary to the role of the European Parliament. We are also unanimously of the opinion that the European Commission should become smaller. A Commissioner for every EU-member state is redundant. And finally, a large majority believe that more qualified majority voting is absolutely necessary for the decisiveness of the EU. As you

see, the Dutch Senate is very much committed, involved and communicates its beliefs to both government and citizens.

Esteemed Colleagues, the European drive and passion are the same in almost every country. The European foundations, ideals and principles embedded in ourselves and our citizens. The importance of which will always and everywhere prevail over any obstacles on our common road. Shared ideals have guided our history and will guide our future. I have confidence in Europe, in the European citizens and certainly as well in the Netherlands as a committed partner within Europe. As Goethe once said: “ Who is sure of his own motives can in confidence advance or retreat.” We want to advance, together with you.

Thank you.