

Welcoming speech by Senate President Van der Linden to President Çavuşoğlu of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, October 26, 2010

Good afternoon. I warmly welcome our guest, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, to the States-General of the Netherlands. It is a real honour and pleasure to receive you in this plenary room of the Senate.

Mr Çavuşoğlu and I have a history of working together in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as many of us have. As an elected Member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly since 2002, Mr Çavuşoğlu joined the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2003 and soon after was named the head of the Turkish delegation and a vice-president of the Assembly. During the January 2010 session of the Assembly he was nominated and elected to replace outgoing President Lluís Maria De Puig of Spain.

The fact that you have been elected as a President of the PACE is a milestone in the history of the Council of Europe, as you as a Turkish citizen and a Muslim by faith, are the first non-western European parliamentarian that has been elected president of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe. Your presidency guarantees the continuing development of a more intensive dialogue between cultures and religions. This is a significant and meaningful signal in challenging times for multicultural societies in Europe.

As President of the Senate I very much value the relationship with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council. You know that we have a very active delegation. Not only is it important that parliamentarians take part in the debate on European and international issues in Strasbourg. It is also of significance that the issues of human rights, the rule of law and democracy are discussed within our national Parliament to increase support and awareness of the core values the Council of Europe represents on a more local level.

The upcoming 60th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights next week stresses the great importance of the Council of Europe. The Council and its activities are always an important element in the yearly debate we have on the State of Europe. For us Europe is much more than the European Union. May I highlight that during the last debate on European Affairs in the Senate, we have discussed the accession of the European Union to the Convention. The senators in this House very much welcome this development. The relevance of the Convention of Human Rights has not ceased during the last decade. In fact, it has continued to grow in importance. More and more European citizens seek justice and enforcement of fundamental human rights.

We are well aware of the enormous workload of the European Court of Human Rights. Members of the Senate, and especially the head of the Dutch delegation Prof. Marie-Louise Bemelmans-Videc, all the time put a lot of effort in finding solutions for the capacity and financial problems the Court is facing. We hope that the ratification of the fourteenth protocol will contribute to the improvement of the situation.

Mr. Çavuşoğlu, you are very welcome in our Dutch parliament. I now give you the floor. Afterwards senators will have the opportunity to ask questions to our honoured guest.