

**European Conference of Presidents of Parliament
Strasbourg, 15-16 September 2016**

Theme 1: Migration and refugee crisis in Europe – role and responsibilities of parliaments

**Ankie Broekers-Knol
President of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**

Mr. President,

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

A lot has happened since we last saw each other for the Conference of Presidents of Parliament in Oslo in 2014. Since then, the issue of migration has risen to the top of the political agenda. The world's displaced population stands at a record of 60 million people and Europe is being confronted with the largest flow of refugees and migrants since the Second World War. This has led to disastrous situations, such as the children that are sleeping in the streets of Athens, Rome and Calais.

We are overwhelmed by this, and yet we were warned this was going to happen. For years experts have alerted us to the dangers of the instable situation in the Middle East, the insufficient protection of our external borders and the inadequacy of the European Asylum System. We were **warned**. But for too long we failed to recognize the urgency of these problems.

In an effort to reduce irregular migration and encourage a more structured approach, the **European Union and Turkey** struck a deal. A deal that was born from a harsh political and humanitarian truth. For now, it appears that the deal has made the influx of people fleeing to Europe more manageable. But it remains an immensely complex operation, which has recently been complicated even further by the attempted coup in Turkey.

A structural cooperation can only work if both parties stick to what was agreed upon and adhere to the **principles of the Council of Europe**. That entails: upholding the Rule of Law and respecting human rights. A structural solution also requires solidarity among EU member states in the resettlement of refugees. At the moment, not all countries are doing enough.

I say this with the full realisation that there are limits to what a country can contribute and I sympathise with countries in **Eastern Europe** that are trying to set up a stable, well-functioning state and that bear a great burden in protecting our external borders. Those aspects need to be taken into account. But countries that fail to do what they can, are the domino stones that knock the whole system down.

The European migrant crisis has made one thing more apparent than ever: it is a problem that none of our countries can

manage alone. We have to **work together** to achieve goals that go beyond the interests of our individual sovereign states. Of course, this not only applies to European countries, but to countries worldwide. Migration is a global problem and tackling the underlying root causes requires international cooperation.

That is why I strongly support discussing this subject in this international platform. **National parliaments** have an important role to play when it comes to migration.

Colleagues,

Together our parliaments are **uniquely placed** to offer a platform for debate and determine whether initiatives for a solution can count on broad public support. Parliamentarians can help make sure that in the future our governments recognise the urgency of migration problems. We need to **rebuild trust** in asylum and border protection policies, in policies to differentiate between refugees and economic migrants. It is the only way we can combat growing tensions and fear in our societies about the impact of migration.

But our responsibility does not stop at our borders. If we do not contribute to tackling the **root causes** of migration together, we are bound to be overwhelmed by it time and time again. It has become clear that the unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East will continue to provide a migration flow. In that

flow, the number of people arriving from African countries has skyrocketed and is not expected to decrease. In addition, experts are warning us of increased **environmentally-motivated migration**.

Europe - which is where the global refugee regime began 65 years ago with the Refugee Convention and where its limits have now been most starkly exposed - can indeed be a **catalyst for change**. But for that to happen, we need to be better prepared. An **ounce of prevention** is better than a pound of cure.

Thank you.