



Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, de heer prof. dr. J.A. Bruijn,
ter gelegenheid van de opening van het Western European Model European Parliament Nederland 2023

datum 20 januari 2023

Mr Chairman,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome in the Senate of the Netherlands for the official opening of the 5th Western European Model European Parliament.

Dear delegates,

It is with a reason that I just called you 'colleagues'. Because that is what you are: just like me you are member of parliament, in your case the Western European Model European Parliament.

Almost 35 years ago, in 1989, the Model European Parliament started with twelve schools in the Netherlands. And today, in 2023, tens of thousands of students in all member states of the European Union are participating. And not only on the European level, also in regional conferences, like this one, the coming days in The Hague.

That is wonderful!

It is a privilege to receive you all here today in the plenary hall of the Senate.

As president of the Senate I chair the plenary sessions of the Senate in this very room.

Debates that bring forward political differences, but in which the members often also seek common ground on which they can build.

That is not always easy, as you will undoubtedly experience the coming days as well.



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Let me therefore give you some advice that may be of use to you.

My first piece of advice relates to this very room.

Behind me you can see a very colourful work of art.

It is by Dutch artist Navid Nuur.

Your position in the room determines your perception of the work.

In other words: from every angle you get a different view.

As soon as you start to move, you will see something different.

Do try it later on!

For me this work of art symbolizes politics: we all look at the same artwork, but each of us sees something different. Our political opinions, our walks of life and also our age determine the way we perceive a political issue.

The artist calls upon us to put ourselves in the other one's shoes.

Put differently: imagine and incorporate the opinion of your opponent.

That is my first advise.

Maybe you will not change your own opinion, but you will have a better understanding of each other's differences.

My second advice to you is: preparation is everything!

Be knowledgeable on the topic at hand.

This means: read, read, read.

Good preparation will give you a head start, and lets you fully absorb the issue.

Good and fruitful debates are held in an atmosphere of respect and safety.



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That brings me to my third advise: always have a debate based on respect.

In that way you create a safe environment.

The other is not always the opponent, but also someone with whom you are trying to find common ground, trying to find a solution.

And finally my fourth advise: use some humor whenever it is suitable.

Humor can create sympathy and be an effective weapon in the debate.

But beware: less is more, don't overdo it.

To summarize my four advices:

1. change perspective to better understand your opponent
2. preparation is everything
3. respect one another
4. use some humor

To conclude, a final thought:

Politics means compromise.

In an ideal world every politician – including me – would like to create a world that is completely to his or her liking.

But that is not possible in a democracy.

In the end a decision needs to be made whether red means 'stop' and green means 'proceed'.

It is a true art form to make a compromise and still be able to explain the outcome to your voters, your supporters.

Therefore, you need to know what you want yourself, and you need to stick to a number of key principles.

In that way you will not lose your credibility.



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Colleagues,

I wish you all the best in the coming days.
And when you find that the debate is polarized and it is difficult to find common ground... think of this work of art and place yourself in the other one's shoes.

Good luck and above all: have fun!