



Intervention

By the President of the Senate of the Netherlands, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn, during the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament in Strasbourg, France

Theme 1: Safeguarding democracy

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Dear Chair, dear Colleagues,

As always, it is good that we meet as Presidents of the parliaments of the Member States of the Council of Europe.

And it is also very good to have been able to listen to our esteemed colleague Mr Stefanchuk, here in person.

Dear colleagues,

Although external threats to our democracies are on top of our heads these days, I believe we need to keep an eye on the internal threats at the same time.

Therefore, in my contribution I would like to focus on internal threats to democracy and the rule of law and building trust among our citizens, specifically.

As one cannot exist without the other two.

Let me start with building, or even regaining trust.

I would therefore like to draw your attention to a longstanding Dutch tradition:

'doorrekenen', as it is called.

This literally translates to 'calculate through'.

It happens when party manifestos are screened by independent planning offices.

The planning offices screen the manifestos and the financial paragraphs for inconsistencies and their consequences.

Is a political party capable of delivering what they are promising?

Is the financial paragraph lacking means?

What are the effects of the proposed policies on nature, environment and spatial planning?

Is it clear and to the point?

This practice is not mandatory, but during the past decades it has become a tradition that most Dutch political parties adhere to.

In the Netherlands we now also hear pleas to have election manifesto tested for their rule of law and admissibility in the light of the Constitution and international treaties, such as the European Convention on Human Rights.

Along those lines, I have previously argued, and I would like to repeat that plea here today, for the foundation of an independent scientific Planning Office for the Rule of Law.

Such a service can be offered to political parties and during the formation of coalition government.

With the aim of contributing to trust in government and politics.

As you and I are all aware, trust is the foundation of our democratic legal order, of peace, security, and prosperity.

It is an essential counterpoint in today's world, where humans increasingly struggle to get along with their peers.

Where trust is eroding.

Where frustration and shame lead to aggression, violence and terrorism.

Where government and citizens drift away from each other.

Where powerful but not unbreakable democracy is threatened, from outside and within.

In the carelessness of freedom and security lies the danger of its neglect and loss.

And that touches on geopolitical security.

To war and peace.

Liberal freedoms are under threat.

Indifference and open hatred are rearing their heads.

In the Netherlands too.



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The rule of law is based on principles such as freedom, equality, and autonomy. In the rule of law justice prevails, and citizens and minorities are protected, from the improper use of government power, and from also from improper influences of other organizations.

In the Netherlands, the foundation of an independent Planning Office for the Rule of Law could contribute to the strengthening of the rule of law and safeguarding democracy.

What are your experiences?

What are your ideas on safeguarding democracy, the rule of law and trust?

I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Thank you for giving me the floor.