

Transatlantic Dialogue

Speech by Ankie Broekers-Knol
27 June 2016

Dear guests, dear colleagues,

A warm welcome in The Hague, in the building of the States-General of the Netherlands.

Last week, on Wednesday, when I thought about receiving you, members of the US Congress and European Parliamentarians, here today I thought it would be interesting to share with you some of the experiences and results of the EU Presidency of the Netherlands.

But on Thursday night, early Friday morning, I realised that life in the European Union and the life of the EU has changed. The UK voted in favour of a Brexit, contrary to what was expected. Everybody realised that it would be a close call, but at the same time everybody expected the outcome to be in favour of a Remain. It didn't turn out that way.

Are there lessons to be learned from the outcome of the referendum in the UK? It is probably too early to tell but one can't ignore first impressions.

- young versus old (older), that is 60/65
- city versus country
- employed versus unemployed
- well-off versus not very well-off
- higher education versus poor education
- Scotland and Northern Ireland versus England

We, politicians, should look at ourselves and ask ourselves "What went wrong"? I really do think that we should have realised more to the full the impact of the change in the economy, the financial crunch, the impact of immigration, the impact of free movement of people on a great part of our citizens.

Maybe we were looking too much for solutions that would be best for Europe as a whole and at the same time would be palatable for our own countries that we forgot that many of our citizens would bear the brunt: closing of factories closing of shops, difficult credit facilities, losing jobs without perspective of getting new ones, higher taxes (I refer for instance to the VAT in the Netherlands which was increased from 19 to 21%), workers from elsewhere etc. etc.

I think that Unity in Europe and Unity of Europe is of the utmost importance in today's globalised world. Together we are a force to be reckoned with.

But... as politicians we do have to concentrate on the issues that really matter, for instance unemployment, and focus less on European legislation just for the sake of it. We must realise that national identity, national customs and most important of all the wellbeing of our - national- citizens are not to be ignored. On the contrary that is what makes our identity.

In that spirit I am convinced we can realise a European Union to the benefit of us all.

Since the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 national parliaments and the EP have got more influence on European decision making. In that sense good communication and good contacts between

national parliamentarians and European parliamentarians is of the utmost importance. And it has improved over the years.

During the parliamentary dimension of the Dutch presidency we worked even harder to optimise the communication and relations between national parliaments amongst each other and with the EP. That was our goal and reflecting on the 6 interparliamentary conferences our parliament organised, I think we were successful not in the least due to making use of modern communication tools like apps etc.

I would now like to invite you to view a short filmed impression of our last interparliamentary conference, the COSAC meeting.

But before that I would like to propose a toast to our guests of today and to good relations and understanding between parliamentarians.