

*Speech by the President of the Senate, Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck,
on the occasion of the Conference of Speakers/Presidents of EU Parliaments
Bratislava, 24 May – 27 May 2007
“Raising national European awareness”*

Mr. President,

Let me first take this opportunity to thank the Slovak presidency for the outstanding evening we had yesterday.

Dear Colleagues, the topic of our current debate is “raising national European awareness”. The original idea was actually presented by members of the Dutch parliament at the European Convention. They introduced the declaration that proposed to debate the annual legislative and working programme of the European Commission in the national parliaments. As President of the Dutch Senate I therefore welcome the follow-up that has been given by broadening this Dutch initiative to debating the Annual Policy Strategy of the European Commission in COSAC and national parliaments.

We must admit that the practice of having debates in national parliaments on the annual legislative and working program of the European Commission, is not yet wide spread. Of course it is up to every national parliament to indeed organise such a debate. I realize that this is only possible if permitted by the national constitutional order. Yet, a more regular implementation of the declaration in as many parliaments as possible would be of help to further raising national European awareness. May I make an appeal to you to further advance this type of debate.

Then another initiative which I think is worth mentioning. It regards the decision of the last COSAC in Berlin, following a proposal of the Dutch Parliament and the Czech Senate, to continue with joint subsidiarity and proportionality checks on the same European proposals. The selection of these proposals will again be based on the legislative and working program of the Commission.

We now have two solid initiatives to strengthen the role of parliaments in the EU. Both initiatives are based on the annual legislative and working program of the European Commission. We should regard the combination of these two initiatives as one new European parliamentary procedure. For the quality, content and follow-up of that procedure, I think it is important that we as Speakers of our Parliaments not only fully endorse this new combined approach, but specifically leave the coordination to COSAC.

More constructive cooperation and communication – good tuning of agenda's - between our Speakers conference and the COSAC is desirable and necessary. We must be aware that COSAC is a better platform to debate political issues of different nature. Speakers in many cases represent their institutions, and certainly Speakers of multi-party parliaments can only speak on behalf of their parliaments, when there is a broad consensus on the issue.

May I finally take the opportunity to attract your attention to a model for a structured debate that the Dutch Senate recently developed. As a means to help breakthrough the silence on Europe in the Netherlands, at the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the European Treaties we organized a conference for members of parliament and students of all twenty Dutch speaking universities of Belgium and the Netherlands. For one whole day, over four hundred students and members of both Houses of Parliament debated the future of Europe. It was wonderful experiencing so much enthusiasm and devotion among young people.

Given the very positive feedback we received we decided to make the conference model we developed available for every institution and, of course, every parliament

interested. All of you have received this model by e-mail and it is made available at the documents table. Perhaps the model will help others to organize similar conferences on Europe. It may be a modest instrument which contributes to further raising national European awareness.

Thank you.