

Welcoming address of the President of the Senate of the States General, Mrs. Ankie Broekers-Knol, on the occasion of the visit of Her Excellency Mrs. Halimah Yacob, President of the Republic of Singapore on Thursday 22 November 2018

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the States General of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, I am honoured to welcome you here in the Senate of The Netherlands. It is a great privilege to receive you here today.

I assume you must feel at home in this parliamentary environment, since you were a member of parliament yourself and also Speaker of the National Parliament of Singapore for four years. This makes it an even greater pleasure to welcome you here today as a former colleague.

Your Excellency,

The relationship between our two countries is excellent: our countries have intensive interaction and cooperation on the field of trade, innovation, sustainability, science and education and, last but not least, on the field of water management. In 1965, The Netherlands was one of the first European countries to officially recognize the Republic of Singapore. Almost immediately thereafter, our countries established diplomatic relations.

This relationship developed in a very successful and fruitful partnership, with Singapore now being by far the most important trading partner for The Netherlands in South East Asia, and our country being the most important trading partner for Singapore within the European Union.

Your Excellency,

May I be so bold as to say that perhaps we thank the excellent relationship between our countries to the similarity that exists between our two nations? Both Singapore and the Netherlands are smallish, middle-sized countries, that rely on export and international trade. We have open and innovative economies, we have multicultural societies and we fare well by the principles of geopolitical stability, multilateralism and a rules-based global order.

As active members of the United Nations and other international organizations, we both promote these principles and try to contribute to progress on the global stage. Only several months ago, on 12 June 2018, Singapore showed its commitment to regional and global stability by hosting the historical summit between the leaders of the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

We also share the same commitment to water management. Both our countries are famous for their efforts to reclaim land and for their continuous confrontation with and keeping in check of the water that surrounds us.

Your Excellency,

As President of the Republic of Singapore, you can be very proud of the incredible achievements of your country in the field of economy, technology and innovation.

Based on the GDP per capita your country ranks third in the world. An outstanding achievement, taking into account the lack of natural resources of Singapore and the fact that only half a century ago your country became independent.

Your Excellency,

In this light, I regard it as a very positive development that the relationship between Singapore and the European Union is becoming even stronger with the signing of the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement last month.

As the principles of multilateralism, free and fair trade and a rules based global order are increasingly under pressure, it is of the utmost importance that Singapore and the countries of the European Union intensify their relationship. Therefore, this trade agreement also has symbolic value: amidst trade wars and a global atmosphere of protectionism, it shows that in the long run progress is only possible through international cooperation.

Your Excellency,

I hope and believe that our countries maintain and extend our excellent partnership and I am certain that your visit to the Netherlands will undoubtedly contribute to this end.

It has been a great honour to welcome you here today. Allow me to give you the floor.

Thank you.