

The Conference of the Speakers of the EU Parliaments Bratislava, 26 May 2007

RAISING NATIONAL EUROPEAN AWARENESS

**Speech by Mrs. Yvonne Timmerman-Buck,
Speaker of the Dutch Senate
(Transcript)**

Mr. President, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The topic of our current debate is raising national European awareness. The original idea was actually presented by members of both houses of the Dutch Parliament at the European Convention. They introduced a declaration that proposed to the 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 the Dutch initiative to debating the Annual Policy Strategy of the European Commission in COSAC and national parliaments.

We must admit that practice of having debates in national parliaments on the Annual Legislative and Working Programme after European Commission is not yet wide spread. Of course, it is up to every national parliament to indeed organize such a debate. And I realise that this is only possible if this is 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 this type of debate?

Then another initiative, which I think is worth mentioning. It regards the session of the last COSAC in Berlin following a proposal by 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 Programme of the European Commission. We now have two solid initiatives to strengthen the role of parliaments in the EU. Both initiatives are based on Annual Legislative and Working Programme of the European Commission, and 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, Speakers of our parliaments, not only fully endorse this new combined approach, but especially leave the coordination to COSAC. More constructive cooperation and communication, good tuning of the agendas between Speakers Conference and 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 multiparty 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 structural debate that the Dutch Senate has recently developed? As a means to help break through the silence on Europe in the Netherlands at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Treaties, we organised a conference for members of parliament and students of all 20 Dutch-speaking universities of Belgium and the Netherlands. For one whole day, over 400 students and members of both houses 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 email, 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 so much.