

**Word of welcome by Mr. Fred de Graaf, President of the Senate of the Netherlands at the occasion of the visit of the President of Turkey, H.E. Mr. Abdullah Gül
18 April 2012, 11.55 hrs in the Minutes Room (Handelingen Kamer)**

Welcome.

Your Excellency, it is a great honour to receive you here in our democratic House, *the States-General of the Netherlands*. As President of the Senate of the Netherlands, I warmly welcome you, also on behalf of my colleague, the President of the House of Representatives, Mrs Verbeet. And on behalf of my other colleagues present here today.

With your visit and with this meeting, we mark the celebration of our longstanding diplomatic relations. Indeed, both our countries have long histories and strong traditions and they inevitably shape the way we perceive the current day. The golden roof of our 17th century Plenary Hall which I hope to show you later, bears witness of the early start of our trade relations. Tulips from Turkey being early expressions of wealth and prosperity in the provinces of Holland.

Throughout the centuries, our relations have been based on mutually beneficial commercial ties. But, Excellency, I hope you agree with me that in addition to commerce, there is an even more laudable constant in our 400 years of bilateral ties. That is the almost immaculate record and absence of political tensions in our relations. Nowadays we are linked together through many important treaties, conventions and practices. These include NATO, the institutions in Brussels as well as the European Convention on Human Rights. Maybe even more than with commercial flows, this is the realm where our political establishments have the greatest influence. It is our task to convince our constituencies of the value and necessity of these frameworks of international cooperation. The significance of such frameworks cannot be underestimated. They encourage loyalty and mutual understanding. And to a certain extent they create safety nets in times of distress. I am proud to see that our bilateral relations have been increasingly embedded in these multilateral organizations.

Our governments have already been dealing on a positive note with each other for four centuries. But in addition, in the past decades, people-to-people contacts have also become extremely important. In our contemporary times, the Netherlands and Turkey are countries linked through communities. Many personal, economic and cultural Turkish-

Dutch success stories have left their positive marks on both our societies.

Certainly of more recent date are the intensified contacts at the parliamentary level. Turkish and Dutch parliamentarians and staff members of both parliaments regularly meet in the margin of official meetings at European and international level and during bilateral visits. You yourself as a former parliamentarian and a distinguished member of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe have been in the midst of these contacts.

Excellency, Mr. President, like you, we recognize the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. Therefore, once more, we are extremely pleased to have you in our midst and we are honoured by your willingness to have a brief exchange of views with us here today.