

Speech

Speech by Mrs Ankie Broekers-Knol, President of the Senate of the States General of the Netherlands, on the occasion of the Parliamentary Forum in the context of the G20 Leader's Summit
Session: The Future of Work
Buenos Aires, 1 November 2018

date 1 November 2018

Your Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and privilege for the Dutch Parliament and for me personally to be here today and to be invited to speak to you, in the framework of the G20, about the Future of Work.

To my colleagues from the Argentinian Parliament and Mrs Gabriela Cuevas Barron, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I say: “Muchas gracias para invitarnos a esta conferencia muy importante”.

In 2019, the International Labour Organisation - the oldest UN specialized agency - celebrates its 100th anniversary. In the run up to the anniversary, the ILO has launched seven ‘Centenary Initiatives’ to face the challenges of the future.

One of those Centenary Initiatives is about the Future of Work. I will try to outline here today what my country’s contribution is to the global debate on the Future of Work and what we believe to be important.

But let me first give some preliminary observations on the motto ‘The Future of Work’.

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The motto presupposes in my opinion that there is work. Speaking about the Future of Work means: how can we create a future with work for the majority of the population? What kind of work? Under what conditions? What challenges creates the time we live in regarding work? These are indeed important questions to which we must try to find an answer.

But one can also ask the question: why talk about work? Is work still an important issue in the world of tomorrow?

That question now can quickly be answered: work creates the possibilities to provide for your family; work creates the possibilities to acquire money to improve living conditions; work creates the possibilities to acquire money to buy goods; work creates purpose in life; work is beneficial to the economy, is beneficial to emancipation.

And when we are talking about the subject on a global perspective, we must also realize that in different parts of the world there is a different outlook on work and the future of it.

Let me explain: if you live in The Netherlands the discussion on the Future of Work is totally different from a discussion about work in other parts of the world. In The Netherlands we are talking about digitalisation, economic trends, ecological problems etc. Because there is work!

In other parts of the world the discussion is more like: is there any work? What kind of work? Will it last? Does the work pay well, does the work have untimely hours? Are the working conditions safe?

Because we all know that in many parts of the world the lack of work and if there is work, the working conditions, like work by (very) young children, monotonous work, decent work, social justice, are the first things that have to be tackled before

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we can even consider the Future of Work. And I add to this: it goes hand in hand with education.

Having said this, I will now proceed to my own country, The Netherlands, and the way we in The Netherlands try to meet the challenges of work and employment in the future.

The Dutch Social Economic Council has indicated four main trends relevant to the Future of Work:

- **economic** trends like growth, globalisation and other structural changes;
- **technological** trends, including changes in ICT, robotisation and artificial intelligence;
- **demographic** and socio-cultural trends like changes in the size and composition of the population;
- and **ecological** trends, like developments with regard to sustainability and climate.

I will briefly touch upon those four trends.

With regard to **economic trends**, we should remind our governments that our objectives should involve more than the promotion of economic growth alone; they should also comprise social progress and a good-quality living environment.

An issue that is high on the agenda in the Netherlands is the debate on how to deal with the increased flexibility of the labour market. We have seen the number of people who are self-employed or working on a temporary contract grow rapidly. This flexibility provides opportunities, but also forces us to think about ways to offer these workers adequate protection by way of social security and pensions that fits the flexible nature of their contracts.

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With regard to the **technological trends**, some say that we are on the brink of the 'fourth industrial revolution', in which digitalisation and robotisation will change the nature of work and production in the coming decades.

Looking at the past, we can be positive: the innovations of the first, second and third industrial revolutions brought great progress to our societies. But this gives us no guarantees: we should make sure that our societies adapt to technological developments. Also, positive effects in general tell us nothing about negative effects for individuals, for small groups, for the effect it has on 'work as we know it'. We should care also for those who are left behind and make sure that negative effects, for example in the field of employment, are limited for everyone. We must come up with new perspectives.

When it comes to the **demographic and socio-cultural trends**, industrialised countries should strive for an inclusive labour market and a robust social dialogue, that involves all relevant parties. In The Netherlands, we have organised our social dialogue in what is known as 'The Polder Model'. The Polder Model is characterized by tri-partite cooperation between employers' organizations, labour unions and the government. The keyword is consensus, and in The Netherlands this Polder Model has been very effective in the last decades.

It goes without saying that the Future of Work also means women's economic empowerment. And that means confronting the challenges in terms of the ability to combine work and care and the fair division of tasks between men and women.

Last but not least, we have to deal with the **ecological** trends. Global warming leads to climate change worldwide: drought, flooding and melting of the ice caps.

Important transitions are needed to deal with these climate changes, as a result of which we have to seriously consider the reserves of raw materials, food and water.

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Your Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Dutch economy and Dutch policymaking are closely interwoven with Europe and with the rest of the world. This is a direct effect of our century-long open and trade-dependent economy. Many Dutch businesses operate internationally. Multinationals are responsible for a large proportion of our employment. Hubs such as the port of Rotterdam and the airport of Schiphol are major access ports to Europe for the rest of the world. And the same goes for many other countries, the world as a whole is interconnected. I therefore say: the Future of Work does require global governance.

And yes, let us not forget that in large parts of the world there is still a lot to be done to create work, to create decent working conditions, before we can even speak of the Future of Work in these areas. But at the same time, ideas and developments about the future of work have their impact on creating work, wherever in the world.

That is why the framework of the G20 is so important. Thank you for your attention.