Toespraak

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer ter gelegenheid van het uitreiken van de Dutch Independance Award.

datum *26 juli 2022*

It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for your hospitality, Mr Mayor De Lange. And very good to see you again Mr Ambassador.

The Senate has been involved with the Dutch Independence Foundation since its inception in 2018. The first two editions of the Dutch Independence Day and Lecture have been held in the Senate building on het Binnenhof in The Hague.

This is no coincidence. Het Binnenhof, our premises, are the sacred ground on which the Dutch burghers reneged on their allegiance to their king, Philip of Spain, on the 26th of July 1581. By signing the Act of Abjuration the Dutch States-General rid themselves of their monarch and chose to govern themselves. The Dutch provinces became a republic seven years later, in 1588.

The Act of Abjuration may be over 440 years old, but it is still relevant. It reminds us of the social contract between the people and those who rule them. Of people's rights and the rulers' obligations towards them. Of the right to chart one's course and choose one's future in peace and liberty.

So it was in 1581, so it is still today.

I therefore applaud the efforts of the Dutch Independence Foundation to not only foster the memory of the Act of Abjuration but to also stimulate the current debate about the meaning of the concept of independence in an increasingly interconnected world. Or is it really…? Ever more interconnected…?

Mr Ambassador, it is an honor to present you and your president, Mr Zelensky, with the Dutch Independence Award.

I think it is well deserved. The jury rightly mentions Ukraine's gargantuan and highly effective efforts at public diplomacy. I have had the privilege of observing those efforts firsthand.

For example on the 31st of March when President Zelensky addressed both Houses of Dutch Parliament. I was impressed and it was hard not to be moved by his magnificent speech. Mr Zelensky explicitly referred to the Dutch struggle for independence some 440 plus years ago. He rhetorically asked 'what was the goal of the founders of the Netherlands?' What motivated the signatories of the Act of Abjuration and their contemporaries?

The answer to him was clear: freedom, democracy, human dignity and cultural and religious diversity. In short, the very values we espouse in modern day Europe. Values which we took for granted for so long, and which we now find under attack.

Values which connect us. With our political ancestors back in 1581. But also with our present day European neighbors.

Values which Zelensky so eloquently used to form a bridge between Ukraine and the Netherlands. Between our freedom and theirs.

The Dutch Independence Award goes to Mr Zelensky, but of course he is not alone in waging public diplomacy on behalf of his embattled nation.

A couple of weeks ago I had the honor of meeting the speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's Parliament, Mr Ruslan Stefanchuk, on his visit to the Netherlands.

I was struck by his strong, emotional appeal on Dutch politicians to grant Ukraine a place at the round table of European democracies. His message was clear, his appeal forceful. Again,

I was impressed. Just as I had been very impressed by the Speakers' successful efforts to maintain the Verkhovna Rada's operations in the face of extremely unfavorable circumstances.

So it is a great honor to present you, Mr Ambassador, with the first Dutch Independence Award. It is well deserved.