



Interventie

van de Voorzitter van de Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, prof.dr. J.A. Bruijn, tijdens de Conferentie van Voorzitters van EU-parlementen in Brdo, Slovenië, tijdens de themasessie 'The Role of Parliaments in Emergency Politics – Building Resilience for Democratic Governance'

datum 28 maart 2022

Dear chairs,

Thank you for this wonderful welcome here in Brdo.

I was very pleased to see that you decided to address 'the role of parliaments in emergency politics' as topic of this first session. Because for the past 15 years we seem to be tumbling faster and faster from one emergency situation into the next. And now a war has arisen in Ukraine, resulting in tremendous suffering for the Ukrainian people. If there is currently a crisis anywhere that threatens democracy, it is of course this one.

Colleagues,

All crises have been different in nature. The pandemic was characterised by the fact that the measures that had to be taken had a significant impact on the lives of citizens and were by many experienced as very restrictive.

It was therefore of the utmost importance that a balance was maintained between the capability of the government to act swiftly and democratic involvement, in terms of oversight and the protection of fundamental rights by parliaments.

But also of great social importance in this particular situation has been the crucial role of parliaments to make the government public accountable for its actions and in doing so making the facts and data on the basis of which decisions were taken, as much as possible, public.

In the Netherlands the state of emergency was not declared. The government initially made use of emergency decrees that were based on a pre-existing general legislation on Public Health. These gave the government a basis to act for a limited period of time, as then many of us were reluctant to believe that the pandemic would last very long.

As the pandemic progressed and the situation became less of an emergency, a temporary law was introduced to provide a better legal basis for the restrictive measures to combat the COVID-19 epidemic.

The temporary law also gave the parliament a more suitable foundation for democratic oversight and gave parliament the possibility to assess if an extension of the temporary law was necessary.

Colleagues,

In emergency situations it is of vital importance that we as parliaments– with an understanding of the challenging situations – continue to use our parliamentary powers, and that the often difficult choices our governments make, that they are made in accordance with the law and therefor with parliament.

Thank you for giving me the floor.