

**Remarks by President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic
Mr. Premysl Sobotka
at the 11th Conference of the Association of European Senates**

The Hague, Kingdom of the Netherlands, 16 - 17 April 2009

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues from European Senates,

let me cordially greet you on the occasion of XI. Conference of the Association of European Senates. I am delighted to be in your company. The main topic of our today's meeting is mainly the debate about the role of Senates in Europe. I am a great supporter of parliamentary diplomacy and I have very good experience with this type of diplomacy just like with the bicameral system, which acts as the real safety catch of democracy in our countries. I would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the idea of founding the European Senate again.

But first the role of national parliaments: We do have different powers in various countries though, but I am convinced that none of the countries is experiencing growing tendencies aimed at abolition of upper chambers. At the time being, we closely co-operate with the government as well as with the European Union to resolve the impact of financial and economic crisis. Therefore I believe we will reach an agreement on joint advancement since we all know that protectionism is the worst possible path to follow. The EU economies are interconnected and that is why we need to compliment the actions taken in the course of the Czech Presidency of the EU. It has been proven again that there are no large, medium or small countries – we know there are only reasonable and less reasonable countries, with the minimum number of the latter ones. The crisis rather indicated which countries considered the possibility of worst times and which countries have not done so in the course of their economic boom. I firmly believe we will succeed in resolving this issue in a close co-operation with the other economies.

However, let me now go back to the idea of founding the European Senate. At this year's Conference of Presidents of Parliaments of EU Member Countries, which

took place in February in Paris, I said: “Let us speak about the possibility of establishing two houses of the European Parliament; let us approach it as an idea that would help create genuine democratic balance in European space. Let us start speaking specifically about the role such a European Upper House could play, about its structure and powers. Let us not shy away from a tough debate about the risks faced by European democracy. Instead of catching the attention of the media by booing, let us get to work and think these issues through. If there were a European Senate, then it would certainly help to have EU member states represented equally. That would guarantee equality of all countries and enhance democracy in Europe, while eliminating feelings of being discriminated.”

I am convinced this would reinforce the fundamental role of national parliaments that are always much closer to the issues of individual European countries and that defend their citizens from bureaucratic erosion of basic ideas and ideals of European integration. If things go the other way round we will soon face a risk of Europe being grey, boring, economically weak and hardly coping with the tasks the new times will bring. The ideas of subsidiarity and proportionality are a part of the valuable instigations of European way and it would be fatal to get rid of them.

The European Senate founded on the principle of equal representation of member countries would be a great impetus for democratization of the European integration process and a real test of genuine relationships between the large and small and the old and new member states. I am an optimist and I believe we would be able to reach an agreement on purely technical and complicated election issues, competencies or even on the fact the European Senate could not be dissolved, just like it is the case in the Czech Republic. Let's discuss about this and give our direction and work a new charge.

To conclude, let me thank our Dutch hosts for organising this conference.

Thank you for your attention...