



--- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY ---

**Contribution of Mr. Danny Pieters, Vice-Chairman of the Belgian Senate,  
to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments  
(Nicosia, 21 – 23 April 2013)**

A little bit over a year ago in Paris, during the meeting of the Speakers of the European Senates, I contributed to the debate on the Stability Pact and the eurozone crisis stating that:

“One ought to be critical and recognize the mistakes of the past in order not to repeat them anymore in the future.

These mistakes were made on all levels: governments knew that different countries did not obey very scrupulously the stability pact and used this as an excuse to interpret themselves the rules in a way that could be qualified as flexible; parliaments, both European and national, did not call their governments to order enough; European institutions and the Commission in particular, were quite too often not capable to speak in a single voice and forgot to remind member states of their duties, only to do so when it was too late and the horse had bolted.”

One year ago, I added:

“If the goal is to save the euro or at least try to do so, we cannot but conclude that our parliaments act too slowly: they have no real impact and can only comment on past events during some interparliamentary meeting afterwards.

If this means that certain countries are told directly by the European institutions what they have to do or not, there is a serious democratic problem.” End of the quote.

Dear colleagues, we have to realize that today, people doubt the system of representative democracy in itself. Members of parliament need police protection when they go out; a recently elected Madame Speaker was attacked when she wanted to pay her respects... examples are numerous and are unacceptable. Aren't we as members of parliament the representatives of the people? Don't we deserve the respect of those that elected us? We tend to say yes to these questions... but do we really deserve this respect?

Do we have the courage to tell our voters that there are limits to public spending? Do we have the courage to penalize those that lead us to the current situation, even when they are member of our own political family? Do we really do what we are expected to do as member of parliament: control government and make good laws? Only if we manage to perform our tasks as members of parliament in a responsible and creative manner, we will deserve the respect of our voters and safeguard democracy.

Responsibility and creativity are key if we want to engage the citizen in society and in the European construction. Responsibility means being accountable for one's deeds, taking a step back when politics from the past have failed, having a vision and a political mission that goes beyond the next elections.

Responsibility also means not putting perception before content, reject the manipulation of the decision making process by small groups through the so-called social media.

It is refusing European politics to become “sovietised” through a multiplication of institutions and procedures – even if they are disguised in citizens’ initiatives. It is fighting against a factual concentration of power in the hands of a very small group of people, often without any democratic legitimacy.

Responsibility and creativity are necessary. In most of our countries, we still work with parliamentary procedures dating back to the past centuries. It is in this respect that I strongly call upon my colleagues to examine together how to revitalize our parliaments, how to bring the real political debate back to our plenaries, and produce quality legislation while guaranteeing real control over the executive.

I call upon you all to join a reflection group we want to put in place for this purpose. It is not a matter of luxury rethinking working methods of our parliamentary assemblies, it is a matter of life or death for our democracies as such.