

## **Welkomstwoord van de vice-president van de Raad van State op de receptie van het FIDE-congres, in de Ridderzaal op 3 november 2021**

Madam president of FIDE, Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all. First of all to The Hague, the city of international law, and secondly to the Hall of Knights, which was part of the ancient castle of the Counts of Holland. The relation between those two, international law and the Hall of Knights, is a bit questionable, I have to admit. Especially bearing in mind that it was here in this very hall that Hugo Grotius was trialed and convicted. However he later did luckily manage to escape from his cell. It perhaps isn't the most charming chapter in our national history. Nonetheless I can reassure you: things have changed a little in over four hundred years.

You are gathered here for the welcome reception in advance of the FIDE congress 2020/2021 happily it is finally taken place. Back to today. I would like to welcome two distinguished guests in particular: Koen Lenaerts, President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and Mark van der Woude, President of the General Court, you have taken the time to be here despite your busy schedules. Everyone is looking forward to your contributions tomorrow. I think I can say that everyone is looking forward to all interesting contributions. Especially in this time when the various links in the European chain may sometimes grind against each other.

I am also particularly pleased to see such a diverse audience. Representatives from all corners of Europe, all with different nationalities and cultures. In a way, of course, this is symptomatic for the EU, essential perhaps: unity in diversity. But Europe is much more than simply having diverse nationalities. It is a community of values beside being a economical and political instrument. When I look around, and see the various participants today, I can't help but notice that not only different nationalities and cultures are being connected, but also different professions, convictions, and different generations. Look for example at my dear friend Laurens Jan Brinkhorst, who attended the first FIDE congress in 1962, visited the congress in 1984 in The Hague, and who is present here again

today, amidst many young and ambitious participants as well. This cross-generational scope of the EU is sometimes underexposed, but its effects and importance are not to be underestimated. Think of the great humanist Erasmus, born barely 20 kilometers away from here, think of the program which bears his name and of all of the students who fly off every year to study abroad in his spirit. We can all see the direct effects of European cooperation in our own circles, and we all know its effects are not limited to the academic field alone.

Unfortunately, the existence of such extensive cooperation let aside integration is as vulnerable as it is valuable, and its defense is not easy, especially in turbulent times as these. Think of Brexit, the COVID crisis, but also broader geopolitical developments and the persisting populism in many member states, nibbling the foundation of our trust. At the same time, it are also these problems that demonstrate and stipulate the *raison d'être* of the European project. The reality of many problems is complex, but reality itself can be quite straight forward as well: even if we wanted to solve the cross-border problems all on our own, we frankly can't. If we would want to act as sovereign nation states on our own in migration policy climate challenges of the digital revolution we frankly can't do that on our won.

The erosion of core constitutional values in some EU member states worries me the most, and I share this concern with you. Therefore it is crucial that this congress addresses this topic. Especially interesting is the question how national judges can ensure how can national judges ensure the enforcement of EU regulations and our common values? Such discussions are valuable.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have been keeping you from discussing these, and other matters with each other for too long already and I kept you from your drinks. Let me only stress that maintenance on the rule of law is throughout the EU, is and remains essential. That applies to the member state individually, but it also does to the Union as a whole. The European Union is a full menu not à la carte restaurant.

I wish you all a very pleasant interesting and worthwhile congress.

Thank you very much.