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**ASGP Geneva, October 7, 2013**

**The King in Parliament,**  
**the inauguration of King Willem-Alexander of the**  
**Netherlands in Amsterdam on April 30, 2013**

Dear colleagues,

The Kingdom of the Netherlands had a very special day on April 30 of this year. On that day her Majesty Queen Beatrix who had been our Queen since 1980, abdicated from the throne and was succeeded by her eldest son, the Prince of Orange, who has become His Majesty King Willem-Alexander.

Changes of the throne are rare in our country. So there was a lot of excitement about the change that took place. Looking back we can say that the day of the inauguration of our new King was a very festive day, without doubt the most festive national holiday our country has seen in modern history. It renewed the sense of unity of the country, and the awareness that indeed the Netherlands, although embedded in international organisations, still is a nation-state.

What we want to demonstrate is the important role our parliament played in achieving the inauguration of our new King. Thus we want to underline that a monarchy can be functional , acceptable and accepted within a parliamentary democracy.

The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy, meaning that the position of the monarch is laid down in the Constitution. The Constitution stipulates that the monarch and the ministers together constitute the government. Modern monarchy goes back to 1813, when after the Napoleonic era some Dutch notables invited the Prince of Orange, heir of the Orange family that had ties with the Netherlands since the 16th century, to become the sovereign of the Netherlands.

Let us quickly look at those old ties between the Oranges and the Netherlands and to the foundation of the Netherlands as an independent State. The Netherlands is one of the very few examples in the world of a country that after gaining its independence first started as republic and later by its own will turned into a monarchy.

## **The Netherlands an independent Republic since 1579, ruled by the States-General and by Stadtholders**

The Dutch territories in the middle ages belonged to the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The first great emperor was Charlemagne in the ninth century. In the sixteenth century the Emperor was Charles V of the Habsburg House. After he abdicated the Netherlands came under Spanish rule, as Charles' son Philip became King of Spain. He also inherited the duchy of Burgundy which included the seventeen separate provinces known collectively as the Netherlands. The representative of the King in some of these provinces, particularly the part known as Holland, was Stadtholder, literally place holder or lieutenant. As from 1559 the Stadtholder was Prince William I from the House of Orange Nassau. Although initially very loyal to the King, the Prince was forced to take the leadership of a revolt of the northern Dutch provinces against the King. The Dutch rebelled for various reasons. There was discontent in the Netherlands about Philip's taxation demands. There was dissatisfaction among the people about the intolerant attitude of the catholic King towards protestant religious movements that had emerged and gained ground in these provinces. The difficulties led to open warfare in 1568. The States-General of the northern provinces, in 1579 united in the Union of Utrecht, passed an Act of Abjuration declaring that they no longer recognised Philip as their King. The southern Netherlands (what is now Belgium and Luxembourg) remained under Spanish rule. In 1584, Prince William, or William the Silent as his nickname is, was assassinated by Balthasar Gérard, after Philip had offered a reward of 25,000 crowns to anyone who killed him, calling him a "pest on the whole of Christianity and the enemy of the human race". Prince William still is considered the Father of the Nation. The Dutch forces continued to fight on under Orange's son Maurice of Nassau, who received modest help from Queen Elizabeth I of England in 1585. The Dutch gained an advantage over the Spanish because of their growing economic strength, in contrast to Philip's burgeoning economic troubles. The war, known as the Eighty Years' War, only came to an end in 1648, when the Dutch Republic was recognised by Spain as independent.

Under the Republic of the United Provinces of the Netherlands the sovereign power rested with the States-General, which consisted of representatives of the different autonomous provinces. From 1585 onwards, the States-General met in The Hague, and between 1588 and 1795 the delegates were drawn from the seven provinces that made up the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, also called Republic of the

United Netherlands (Gelderland, Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Overijssel and Groningen).

When, in 1581, during the Dutch Revolt, most of the Dutch provinces declared their independence with the Act of Abjuration, the representative function of the Stadtholder became obsolete in the rebellious northern Netherlands – the feudal Lord himself having been abolished – but the office nevertheless continued in these provinces. The United Provinces were struggling to adapt existing feudal concepts and institutions to the new situation and tended to be conservative in this matter, as they had after all rebelled against the King to defend their ancient rights. The Stadtholder no longer represented the Lord but became the highest executive official, appointed by the States of each province. Although each province could assign its own Stadtholder, most Stadtholders held appointments from several provinces at the same time. The highest executive power was normally exerted by the sovereign States of each province, but the Stadtholder had some prerogatives, like appointing lower officials and sometimes having the ancient right to affirm the appointment (by co-option) of the members of regent councils or choose burgomasters from a shortlist of candidates. The Stadtholder held the dignity of *First Noble*.

On the Republic's central 'confederal' level, the Stadtholder of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland was normally also appointed Captain-General of the confederate army and Admiral-General of the confederate fleet.

After Prince Willem's death his son Maurice was appointed Stadtholder in Holland and Zeeland, and he was succeeded by his brother Frederik-Hendrik in 1625. So under the Republic the Princes in the dynasty of Orange were one by one appointed Stadtholder, an administrative and military function that gradually got monarchical traits. Sometimes the regents that formed the States after the death of a Stadtholder did not appoint a new Stadtholder. These periods are known as the First Stadtholderless Period and the Second Stadtholderless Period. In times of difficulty, like in the Dutch year of Disaster 1672, the regents again turned to the Prince of Orange and asked to take up the post of Stadtholder again. Stadtholder William III at the end of the seventeenth century after the Glorious Revolution even also was proclaimed King of England and Scotland. He ruled together with his wife Mary (they were the well known couple *William and Mary*).

After the French invasion of 1747, the regents were forced by a popular movement to accept William IV, Prince of Orange, Stadtholder of Friesland and Groningen, as Stadtholder in the other provinces. On 22 November 1747, the office of Stadtholder was made hereditary (*erfstadhouder*). As William (for the first time in the history of the Republic) was Stadtholder in all provinces, his function accordingly was restyled **Stadhouder-Generaal** (General Hereditary Stadtholder).

After William IV's untimely death in 1751 his infant son was duly appointed Stadtholder under the regency of his mother. The misgovernment of this regency caused much resentment, which issued in 1780 in the Patriot movement. The Patriots first took over many city councils, then the States of the province of Holland, and ultimately raised civil militias to defend their position against Orangist partisans, bringing the country to the brink of civil war. Through Prussian military intervention, in 1787 Prince William V of Orange was able to suppress this opposition, and many leaders of the Patriot movement went into exile in France.

### **French period: Batavian Republic (1795-1806), Kingdom Holland (1806-1810), part of France (1810-1813)**

The exiles returned with French armies in the winter of 1795 and overcame the frozen Dutch Water Line. Stadtholder William V of Orange-Nassau and his son Willem-Frederik were forced to flee to England following the French invasion, and the office of Stadtholder was abolished in 1795 when the French revolutionary forces installed the Batavian Republic. The States-General were abolished and replaced by a National Assembly.

After Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig (October 1813), the French troops retreated to France from all over Europe. The Netherlands had been annexed to the French Empire by Napoleon in 1810. But now city after city was evacuated by the French occupation troops. In the power vacuum that this created a number of former Orangist politicians and former Patriots formed a provisional government in November 1813. Although a large number of the members of the provisional government had helped drive out William V 18 years earlier, it was taken for granted that his son would have to head any new regime. They also agreed it would be better in the long term for the Dutch to restore him themselves, rather than have the Great Powers impose him on the country. The Dutch population was pleased with the departure of the French, who had ruined the Dutch economy, and this time welcomed the Prince.

## **Independent again since 1813**

After having been invited by a Triumvirate of noblemen, on 30 November 1813 William disembarked a warrior ship and landed at Scheveningen beach, only a few yards from the place where he had left the country with his father 18 years previously, and on 6 December the provisional government offered him the title of King. William refused, instead proclaiming himself "Sovereign Prince". He also wanted the rights of the people to be guaranteed by "a wise constitution". The constitution was written in 1814.

The constitution offered William extensive (almost absolute) powers. Ministers were only responsible to him, while a unicameral parliament (for which the old name 'the States-General' was reinstated) exercised only limited power. He was inaugurated as Sovereign Prince in the New Church in Amsterdam. In August 1814, he was appointed Governor-General of the former Austrian Netherlands (the Southern Netherlands) by the Allied Powers who occupied that country. He was also made Grand Duke of Luxembourg, having received that territory in return for trading his hereditary German lands to Prussia and the Duke of Nassau. William thus fulfilled his family's three-century dream of uniting the Low Countries.

## **United Kingdom of the Netherlands 1815-1839**

Feeling threatened by Napoleon, who had escaped from Elba, William proclaimed the Netherlands a kingdom on 16 March 1815 at the urging of the powers gathered at the Congress of Vienna. His son, the future King William II, fought as a commander at the Battle of Waterloo. After Napoleon had been sent into exile, William adopted a new constitution which included much of the old constitution, such as extensive royal powers. He was confirmed as hereditary ruler of what was known as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Congress of Vienna.

The States-General was divided into two chambers. The *Eerste Kamer* (First Chamber or Senate or House of Lords) was appointed by the King. The *Tweede Kamer* (Second Chamber or House of Representatives or House of Commons) was elected by the Provincial States, which were in turn chosen by census suffrage. The 110 seats were divided equally between the North and the South (modern-day Belgium), although the population of the North (2 million) was significantly less than that of the South (3.5 million). The States-General's primary function was to approve the King's laws and decrees. The constitution contained many present-day

Dutch political institutions; however, their functions and composition have changed greatly over the years.

The constitution was accepted in the North, but not in the South. The under-representation of the South was one of the causes of the Belgian Revolution. Referendum turnout was low in the Southern provinces, but William interpreted all abstentions to be *yes* votes. He prepared a lavish inauguration for himself in Brussels, where he gave the people copper coins (leading to his first nickname, *the Copper King*).

The spearhead of King William's policies was economic progress. As he founded many trade institutions, his second nickname was *the King-Merchant*. In 1822, he founded enterprises and universities in the Southern provinces, such as a new University of Leuven, the University of Ghent and the University of Liège. The Northern provinces, meanwhile, were the centre of trade. This, in combination with the colonies (Dutch East Indies, Surinam, Curaçao and Dependencies, and the Dutch Gold Coast) created great wealth for the Kingdom. However, the money flowed into the hands of Dutch directors. Only a few Belgians managed to profit from the economic growth. Feelings of economic inequity were another cause of the Belgian uprising.

William was also determined to create a unified people, even though the north and the south had drifted far apart culturally and economically since the south was reconquered by Spain after the Act of Abjuration of 1581. The North was commercial, Protestant and entirely Dutch-speaking; the south was industrial, Roman Catholic and divided between Dutch and French-speakers.

Officially, a separation of church and state existed in the kingdom. However, William himself was a strong supporter of the Reformed Church. This led to resentment among the people in the mostly Catholic south. William had also devised controversial language and school policies. Dutch was imposed as the official language in (the Dutch-speaking region of) Flanders; this angered French-speaking aristocrats and industrial workers. Schools throughout the Kingdom were required to instruct students in the Reformed faith and the Dutch language. Many in the South feared that the King sought to extinguish Catholicism and the French language.

## **Belgian revolt 1830**

In August 1830 Daniel Auber's opera *La Muette de Portici*, about the repression of Neapolitans, was staged in Brussels. Performances of this show seemed to crystallize a sense of nationalism and "Hollandophobia" in Brussels, and spread to the rest of the South. Rioting ensued, chiefly aimed at the kingdom's unpopular justice minister, who lived in Brussels. An infuriated William responded by sending troops to repress the riots. However, the riots had spread to other Southern cities. The riots quickly became popular uprisings. Soon an independent state of Belgium was proclaimed.

The next year, William sent his sons William, the Prince of Orange, and Prince Frederick to invade the new state. Although initially victorious in this Ten Days' Campaign, the Dutch army was forced to retreat after the threat of French intervention. Some support for the Orange dynasty (chiefly among Flemings) persisted for years but the Dutch never regained control over Belgium. William nevertheless continued the war for eight years. His economic successes became overshadowed by a perceived mismanagement of the war effort. High costs of the war came to burden the Dutch economy, fueling public resentment. In 1839, William was forced to end the war. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands was dissolved by the Treaty of London (1839) and the northern part continued as the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was not renamed, however, as the "United"-prefix had never been part of its official name, but rather was retrospectively added by historians for descriptive purposes (cf. Weimar Republic).

## **The Netherlands and Belgium separated Kingdoms since 1839**

Constitutional changes were initiated in 1840 because the terms which involved the United Kingdom of the Netherlands had to be removed. These constitutional changes also included the introduction of judicial ministerial responsibility. Although the policies remained uncontrolled by parliament, the prerogative was controllable now. The very conservative William could not live with these constitutional changes. This, the disappointment about the loss of Belgium, and William's intention to marry Henrietta d'Oultremont (scandalously both "Belgian" and Roman Catholic) made him wish to abdicate. He fulfilled this intent on 7 October 1840 and his eldest son acceded to the throne as King William II. William I died in 1843 in Berlin at the age of 71.

## **The modern Constitution of 1848: Constitutional Monarchy and parliamentary democracy**

1848 was a revolutionary year in Europe. To avoid the upheavals that were taking place in many European countries King William II turned from a conservative into a liberal overnight. He allowed major changes in the Constitution. Since 1848, the Netherlands has also been a parliamentary democracy, a system in which ministers are accountable to the elected parliament and responsible for acts of government by the monarch.

The Dutch parliament, known officially as the States-General, consists of a lower house – the House of Representatives – and an upper house – the Senate. The former's 150 members of parliament are directly elected by the Dutch people at least once every four years. Since 1848 the Senate's 75 members are elected by the members of the Netherlands' provincial councils, the directly elected assemblies in each of the Netherlands' 12 provinces.

Under the Constitution, the monarch and the ministers together make up the government. Since 1848, the ministers, not the monarch, have been politically responsible for what the monarch says and does. In the Netherlands the monarch plays no part in politics. While he or she signs all Acts of Parliament and Royal Decrees, these are co-signed by the minister responsible. Ministers and state secretaries are appointed by Royal Decree and sworn in by the monarch. Here, too, ministerial responsibility applies: decrees appointing or dismissing members of the government are co-signed by the prime minister, who is in turn accountable to parliament.

The monarch has several 'unwritten' rights in respect of his or her relationship to the government. We recognize the description of these rights by the British journalist and scholar Walter Bagehot in his 1867 book *The English Constitution*, who described them as 'the right to be consulted, the right to encourage, the right to warn'.

The monarch has a number of formal duties, which include signing Acts and Decrees, ratifying (as part of the government) international treaties, presiding formally over the Council of State as its president and, on the third Tuesday in September, delivering the annual Speech from the Throne in a Joint Session of the States-General, which sets out the government's policy for the year ahead. Alongside these duties, the monarch works on behalf of the inhabitants of the Kingdom. As head of state, it is the monarch's task to unify, represent and encourage the people.



In other words, the monarch serves to unite people and groups, and supports individuals and organisations in their efforts to promote social cohesion. In this non-partisan role, the monarch helps ensure stability, continuity and progress in the Netherlands. The head of state gives expression to the prevailing national mood at times of celebration or mourning, and represents the Kingdom at home and abroad. Every year the monarch makes a number of state visits and receives heads of state and government on visits to the Netherlands. He or she frequently attends conferences, openings, celebrations, commemorations and other official events. In this way, the monarch draws attention to important social initiatives and supports other worthy activities and events.

### **The monarch's role in forming a new government<sup>1</sup>**

The Constitution contains no rules about the process of forming a government. Instead, the process is determined by procedures and customs that have developed over time. Until recently, the head of state played a significant role as facilitator in the formation process. In the past, the monarch would initiate the formation process after an election (provided the House of Representatives had opted not to hold a debate on the formation of the new government). After consulting the presidents of both Houses of Parliament, the vice president of the Council of State and all the parliamentary party leaders, the monarch would appoint one or more informateurs (mediators) to explore the scope for forming a new coalition government. If the informateurs concluded that forming a new government was a viable possibility, the monarch would then appoint a formateur (generally the likely prime minister) to approach prospective ministers and state secretaries in the new government.

In 2012 the House of Representatives amended this procedure, whereby in future the House – rather than the head of state – would initiate the process of forming a new government. After the election of 2012, this new procedure was used for the first time in the formation of the current Rutte-Asscher government. The House appointed informateurs and the formateur directly and assigned each actor their given task. The Constitution requires that the monarch appoint, dismiss and swear in all government ministers and state secretaries. In view of this constitutional role, and at the request of the House, the Queen was kept apprised of all developments in the most recent formation process.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacqueline Biesheuvel-Vermeijden's presentation at the Quito meeting of ASGP in 2013.

The current Dutch prime minister is Mark Rutte. Since 5 November 2012 he has headed the Rutte-Asscher government, a coalition comprising the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the social-democratic Labour Party (PvdA).

## **The Royal House**

The Dutch Royal House is the House of Orange-Nassau. As we explained since the fifteenth century the history of this House has been closely linked with that of the Netherlands. Generations of stadholders, kings and queens born into the House of Orange have made an important contribution to governing our country. Orange is the colour of the Royal House and it is inextricably linked with the Netherlands, as you may have noticed when the Dutch participate to international football matches and other sporting events. On Queen's Day and on birthdays of some members of the Royal House the Dutch flag is raised with an orange pennant.

Since 1813 until April 30 of this year the Netherlands have known 6 monarchs: three Kings in the 19th century: William I, William II and William III, and – since 1890 - three Queens: Wilhelmina, Juliana and Beatrix. King William III had a few sons, but they all died young. So as an old widower he married a young German Princess, Emma of Waldeck and Pymont. They got a daughter, Wilhelmina, who was only ten years old when King William III died. She was too young to reign, and the King's widow, Queen Emma, acted as regent for her daughter Wilhelmina until 1898.

Having reached the age of majority, Queen Wilhelmina reigned for 50 years through two world wars and the decolonisation of Indonesia. She and her ministers spent the years from 1940 to 1945 in exile in London. Queen Wilhelmina and her husband, Prince Hendrik, Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, had one child, Princess Juliana, who was born in 1909. Prince Hendrik died in 1934. Queen Wilhelmina abdicated in 1948.

In 1937 Princess Juliana, only daughter of Queen Wilhelmina and Prince Hendrik, married Prince Bernhard of Lippe-Biesterfeld. They had four daughters: Beatrix (b. 1938), Irene (b. 1939), Margriet (b. 1943, in exile in Canada) and Christina (b. 1947). Queen Juliana reigned from 1948 to 1980, a time of major changes in Dutch society, including post-war reconstruction, student unrest in the 1960s and 1970s and the oil crisis in the mid-1970s. Queen Juliana's informal manner and concern for social issues won her great popularity.

Queen Juliana abdicated on 30 April 1980. She died on 20 March 2004 and Prince Bernhard on 1 December the same year. Queen Juliana's four daughters gave her 14 grandchildren, who got lots of offspring, so the hereditary throne is in no danger anymore.

Queen Beatrix was a very dutiful head of state. She was somewhat more formal than her mother, but she had a warm personality and showed great involvement in national events, whether joyful or sad. Because of her great work ethic and commitment she was highly respected by the Dutch. She always has had approval rates of over 80%, figures any political personality in the Netherlands could only dream of.

### **Abdication and the preparation of the change of the Throne.**

Unlike other countries with a monarchy in the Netherlands Kings and Queens do not always reign until they die. We are used to the abdication of the monarch, when he or she has reached a certain age. As Queen Beatrix was reaching the age of 75, we took into account the possibility that she would resign in favor of her oldest son some day. Nevertheless, she was in very good health and as popular as ever, so there was no need to step down. One thing was for sure: stepping down would be her personal decision and she did not have to accept any pressure from anyone in making that decision.

She indeed chose her own moment and announced her abdication on January 28, 2013. At four o'clock the Prime Minister called the Presidents of the Houses of Parliament and announced that the Queen would be making a speech for national television at seven o'clock. The Presidents called the Secretary-Generals and we called each other. We had to keep it a secret, but that did not have to last long, as rumor spread quickly when it became known that the Queen would be giving an unexpected speech. We immediately knew that for the coming three months we would be saddled with an enormous extra work load, as it would be our task to organize a Joint Session of the States-General, that is a joint meeting of the two Houses of our Parliament. You know that the seat of government and parliament in the Netherlands is The Hague, but the formal capital is Amsterdam. The Constitution prescribes that a new King will be inaugurated in the capital Amsterdam. On the central square in Amsterdam, the Dam, you find a large Royal Palace. Next to the Royal Palace there is a very old church, which, nevertheless, is called the New Church. In this New Church all Kings and Queens of the Netherlands have been sworn in. So it would be logical to have parliament meet again in this

New Church which, by the way, these days does not fulfill religious functions anymore, but is a national museum.

Two central constitutional events would be taking place on April 30, the first being the abdication. Queen Beatrix would abdicate in the Royal Palace in Amsterdam. This is the constitutional procedure by which she formally relinquishes the throne. Once the instrument would be signed, her eldest son, the Prince of Orange, would become King under constitutional law. He would be King Willem-Alexander. As from that moment Queen Beatrix would be called Princess Beatrix again. A monarch who abdicates in our country does not keep the title King or Queen. The second event would be the investiture in parliament. The new King and his spouse, the then Queen Máxima, would go to the New Church and enter the Joint Session of the States-General. The essence of the investiture is the oath taken by the King in front of parliament and an oath in return from each Member of Parliament.

It was up to us to organize this Joint Session of the States-General. The President of the Joint Session, according to the Constitution, is the President of the Senate. We both are Clerks of the Joint Session, Geert Jan as Secretary-General being the First Clerk and Jacqueline the Second Clerk. The day after the announcement of the abdication we formed an organizing committee of members of our staffs, which was chaired by Geert Jan and has worked very efficiently.

The organisation of the Joint Session required close cooperation with other parties involved in the planning such as the Prime-Minister's Office, the Municipality of Amsterdam, the Armed Forces as the events would be enhanced by military ceremony, police and security officials, management and staff of the New Church, musicians, florists, technicians, you name it. The King would be the guest of parliament, so we kept in touch with the Royal House. There was also coordination with the Foreign Ministry as we expected quite a few guests from abroad. There was much to be done: drafting the invitations, providing transport and lodging for the guests, the decoration of the Nieuwe Kerk, the musical accompaniment, establishing the media policy, security measures, inviting citizens from all walks of society. There were many things to arrange and prepare for. As of course the whole ceremony would be broadcast on national television and internet we worked closely together with the national broadcasting.

## **Investiture in the Joint Session of the States-General**

In the five minutes film which we are going to show now, you will see the constitutional and ceremonial highlights of the Joint Session of the Houses of parliament. Our Communications Department has been so kind as to not underexpose the role the two of us had the honor to play during the ceremony.

First you see the entrance of some prominent guests, such the President of the European Commission and the former Secretary-General of the UN, Koffee Anan, and members of virtually all other Royal families in existence in the World. It is not customary that other monarchs attend an investiture. The new King should in protocol be the highest person present. The only head of State present was the Prince of Monaco, most other Royal families had sent the Crown Prince or Princess. So we received Prince Charles and Princess Camilla, the then Prince Philip and Princess Mathilde of Belgium, Prince Felipe and Princess Laetitia of Spain, Princess Victoria, the Crown Prince of Japan, the Princess Consort of Morocco etc.

You will see that after the opening of the assembly by President Fred de Graaf of the Senate Geert Jan reads a letter from Prime-Minister in which he announces the coming of the new King to Parliament. By this letter the Prime Minister took ministerial responsibility for the change of the throne and the acts of the new King. After that Geert Jan went to the back entrance of the Church to welcome and usher in the Queen who had just stepped down, now Princess Beatrix, the new Crown Princess, the Princess of Orange, Catharina-Amalia, and the rest of the Royal Family.

Then you will see the entrance of the Royal Couple. At the entrance of the Church the King and Queen are received by the Committee of Ushers out of the States-General. This Commission which consisted of five Members of Parliament, chaired by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, is accompanied by Jacqueline. Membership of this Commission was considered very prestigious.

After he was seated, the King gave a speech and then you will see he is confirmed in office and swears to be faithful to the Constitution and to faithfully discharge the duties of his office. After the swearing in of the King the President of the Senate gave a speech and read the oath formula of the Members of Parliament. In return to the oath of the King, the members of the two Houses swear or affirm that they will uphold the doctrine that the ministers, and not the King, are responsible for acts of government and that they will uphold the rights of the monarchy. Geert

Jan and Jacqueline read the names of all Members of Parliament, including the delegates from the three small countries in the Caribbean, Aruba, Curacao, and Sint Maarten, that are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. About 10 out of the 225 Members of the States-General did not want to take the oath on principled grounds. The names of these members we did not read. The core of the investiture was this exchange of oaths between the King and the Members of Parliament. The procedure is described in the Constitution and the Law on the Investiture of the King. So there was no coronation and the ceremony had no religious aspects. After the President of the Joint Session has ascertained that the investiture has been completed, the herald leaves the New Church to announce that the new King has been inaugurated. Then the Herald returns and Joint Session is closed. Now you will see in four minutes a ceremony which lasted about 90 minutes.

After the Joint Session the Members of Parliament and the guests went to the Royal Palace for the Royal Reception. From then many festivities took place in the city and in the country. There were concerts, there was a water pageant in the harbour of Amsterdam. And a banquet attended by the Royal Family their guests, the members of government and parliament and, not only us, but also the members of our staff that had worked so hard to help organizing the ceremony. The latter of course was very special from a protocol perspective, but highly appreciated by our staff.

April 30, 2013 will be remembered as an unforgettable day in the history of the Netherlands. Political systems which combine monarchy and parliamentary democracy, may seem to be outdated in modern time. The Netherlands, like some other countries, demonstrate, that as long as a monarchy is widely supported by the people it can fulfil a unifying function and be a source of stability and ease. A King or Queen can play a cohesive, representative and supportive role. In our time monarchs reign by the grace of the people, under a democratically established Constitution. Supported by his wife Queen Máxima, King Willem-Alexander had a flying start as our new King. The Dutch seem comfortable with their new Head of State.