

Openingstoespraak OVSE PA – 4 juli 2026

Thom van Campen

Mr President,

Excellencies,

Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Dear attendees,

As President of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, it is a privilege to welcome you to The Hague, the International City of Peace and Justice.

The President of the Dutch Senate has just reminded us of Hugo Grotius, whose ideas laid the foundations of international law.

Please allow me to build on that thought.

Law indeed provides the foundation.

But every foundation needs a house.

That house is built by institutions.

And institutions are brought to life by people.

More than a century ago, our fellow Dutchman Tobias Asser understood exactly that.

Asser knew that peace could never depend on legal principles alone. It also required institutions where countries would continue to meet, continue to listen and continue to work together, especially when agreement proved difficult.

That conviction shaped his life's work. Tobias Asser initiated the Hague Conference on Private International Law, helped bring the first Hague Peace Conference to The Hague in 1899 and, in 1911, became the first—and to this day the only—Dutch recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

Asser never imagined a world without differences. He knew such a world does not exist.

His great contribution was to show that lasting peace is built when institutions make cooperation possible despite those differences.

In many ways, that is why we are here today.

As parliamentarians, we understand this instinctively.

One of the things I have learned – both as a member of parliament and as President of the House of Representatives – is that yesterday's opponents can become today's partners in solving a different problem.

Every day we represent people with different experiences, interests and convictions. We debate, persuade, negotiate.

Sometimes we compromise – sometimes we do not.

Our responsibility is not simply to express different views, but to look for common ground and workable solutions.

What we learn every day in each of our national parliaments, we are called upon to practice here during the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

About two hundred and fifty parliamentarians from fifty-two participating States have gathered here in The Hague today. We bring different histories, different political traditions, different cultures and different security perspectives.

Few parliamentary gatherings bring together such diversity.

And exactly that is the OSCE's greatest strength.

The value of this Assembly is not that it removes differences.

Its value is that it enables cooperation despite them.

It offers something increasingly precious in today's world: a place where elected representatives continue to meet, continue to listen and continue to build relationships across borders, especially when tensions are high.

It goes without saying that in today's world those tensions are very real indeed.

Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine continues to violate international law and threaten the security of our continent.

At the same time, we face a range of other challenges that no nation can solve alone: hybrid threats, cyberattacks, artificial intelligence, climate change and competition over critical resources.

They require cooperation. They require trust. And they require strong international institutions.

That is why parliamentary diplomacy matters.

It builds relationships that outlast political cycles, deepen mutual understanding and keep channels of communication open, especially when they are needed most.

More than a century has passed since Tobias Asser received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The world has changed beyond recognition ever since.

But the question that inspired his life's work remains the same:

- How do we continue to work together when our interests differ?
- How do we preserve dialogue when tensions rise?
- How do we strengthen international law when it comes under pressure?

Those questions cannot be answered by governments alone.

They also require parliamentarians who are willing to meet, to listen and to keep the conversation alive.

Over the coming days, you will not agree on everything.

That is only natural.

But if these days deepen our mutual understanding, strengthen relationships and reinforce our shared commitment to cooperation under international law, they will have achieved something of lasting value.

I hope you will leave not only with new ideas, but with stronger relationships.

Hugo Grotius gave us a foundation.

Tobias Asser helped build the house.

It is now our responsibility to make that house a home for dialogue.

Thank you.