Ladies and gentlemen,

Growing interdependence is a fact of life of the contemporary world. It transcends and influences national systems. It requires new and more intensive forms of international cooperation to realize its benefits and to counteract economic and political nationalism.

I am sure you recognise these words – the opening lines of your own founding declaration of 1973. I quote them because it’s striking how relevant they still are today. More relevant than ever, one could argue, even though now, nearly four decades after the Trilateral Commission was set up, the world looks completely different.

Back then, in 1973, we faced the real dangers posed by the Cold War and a global arms race which took on absurd proportions. It was the time of ‘ping pong diplomacy’ between the United States and China. And of the oil crisis and the alarming report by the Club of Rome. The US had just broken the link between the dollar and the price of gold. And Europe did not yet have open borders or a single market, let alone a common currency. That was all in the future.

Now, nearly four decades later, the younger generation only know about the Iron Curtain from their history lessons. The same goes for the Dutch guilder, the Deutschmark and the Italian lira. Now, the means of communication are almost unlimited and the world is more of a ‘global village’ than ever. In the past few decades we have also seen ‘the end of ideology’ and the rise of democracy and free trade. It’s a slow but ongoing process, and there’s no turning back. You talked about this earlier today in your session on the Arab awakening.

Because of these developments, countries and regions are growing closer, economically, culturally and socially. China and Russia are no longer the closed societies of the past. India, Brazil and others are asserting themselves as fast rising economic powers. And Europe? Well, despite the current problems we are facing, Europe can certainly point to great achievements in the brief period after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It took in a large number of new member states. It brought about the free movement of people and goods within the EU. And it introduced the euro. We have all gained from these achievements. And especially a country like ours, because foreign trade has been our bread and butter ever since the 16th century.

Which brings me to my central message tonight: that our still-growing interdependence demands a certain kind of behaviour from countries and their political leaders. In the famous
words of Winston Churchill: 'The price of greatness is responsibility'. This means that countries and regions that want to enter the global market and play a role on the international stage have to realise that influence is a two-way street. Besides self-interest, there is always a common interest and a shared responsibility. Take for instance stability on the financial markets. The financial and economic crisis of 2008 and what followed made absolutely clear that in today’s world, everything is interconnected. When a small part of the American mortgage market sneezed in 2008, the entire global economy caught a severe cold. And it has still not recovered.

So I believe that China and Europe have every right to call the US to account for its enormous national debt. And that the international community is right to encourage Russia to join the World Trade Organization. As we are right to ask China to let the yuan be freely bought and sold. And yes, by the same token, it is only logical that the rest of the world is keeping a close eye on Europe, and is insisting that we fix the problems with the euro as soon as possible.

The Dutch position is clear. Our long international tradition obliges us to play an active role on the world stage. This tradition is almost tangible, especially here in The Hague, the home of the Peace Palace and the legal capital of the world. We feel the same sense of responsibility towards Europe, perhaps even more keenly. Remember that the Netherlands is one of the six founding nations of the European Union. Back then, in the first post-war years, the prevailing mood was 'No more war!' / 'Nie wieder Krieg!' Now, some 60 years on, our minds are focused on the euro and the economy. You will talk more about that tomorrow with a number of leading actors. Unfortunately I can’t join you, so if I may I will have my say now.

Europe and the euro have been on a rollercoaster ride. And let's hope that the decisions we took at the summit of 26 and 27 October will mean no more looping-the-loop. What we need now is realism and decisive action. Of course, from the perspective of international law and culture, European cooperation is still an ideal worth striving for. That hasn’t changed since the Second World War. But what Europeans want most from their leaders now is practical and concrete prospects of economic growth and prosperity. Of stable pay and pensions. And a future for their children. I firmly believe that this is Europe’s core task.

Let me put it this way: for Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and their generation, 'Europe' was all about securing a lasting peace. A goal they achieved by joining up Europe’s national economies. By turning their backs on mutual suspicion and protectionism, and embracing mutual profit. For our generation, the priority should be to safeguard and expand our existing prosperity. We can achieve that by taking the next step on good governance and moving forward on a European growth strategy.

And you know what they say: 'Never waste a good crisis.' So now's the time to make sure that we never again see a repeat of the current problems with the euro. That's why the Netherlands proposed appointing a European Commissioner for budget discipline: a man or woman with a mandate to act if euro countries fail to stick to the budgetary agreements in the Stability and Growth Pact, the SGP. Under our proposal, countries in that situation would face increasingly severe and automatic sanctions. Because we have all seen where slack financial discipline leads in a currency union. Never again! That's our message. It’s time we took the 'S' in SGP seriously. So I’m pleased that the Dutch proposal has been well received and that we can now take steps to put it into practice.
At the same time, we also have to get serious about the 'G' in SGP. Because having budget discipline without getting our economies to grow would be like buying a shiny new car with a scooter engine. It would look good, but it wouldn't really get you anywhere. That's why, in recent months, the Netherlands has consistently stressed that Greece and other countries not only need to get their budgets in order, but also need to carry out structural reforms to boost their economies. Like measures on pensions and taxation. In our country we have made a start by raising the pension age in stages from 65 to 67. These are not popular measures, but they are urgently needed. And as I said earlier, besides our own interests, we also have a shared responsibility; countries are entitled to hold their European partners to account.

In addition, Europe as a whole must have a concrete agenda for growth, to boost prosperity and employment. Only recently I wrote a joint letter on this subject to Manuel Barroso and Herman van Rompuy, together with my Swedish and Finnish colleagues Fredrik Reinfeldt and Jyrki Katainen. We believe we should take action soon. For example by completing the internal market for services across the EU and finally reaching agreement on a European patent. It can be done and it can be done quickly. And to be frank, I don't think Europe can afford to just wait and see. There's work to be done.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the Europe to which the Netherlands will continue to be fully committed. Because sixty years of cooperation proves that we are stronger when we act together than when we go it alone. It shows that Europe is a practical instrument we can use to improve the lives of people step by step. The same people that Jean Monnet spoke of when he famously remarked 'We are not bringing together states, we are uniting people'.

I would like to propose a toast to that idea: to the friendship between the people of our beautiful continent and to shared European success in the future.

Source: Official website at http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/