On Thursday 14 January 2016, Netherlands Atlantic Youth, together with the JASON Institute and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a public meeting on “The Dutch EU Presidency 2016”. Several speakers were invited to talk about the goals the Dutch hope to achieve during the EU presidency and to discuss what the presidency entails for the Dutch government in these turbulent times. Around 60 interested students and young-professionals attended the meeting. Furthermore, former Minister of Defence Wim van Eekelen was present.

The first speaker was Arjen Westerhoff, project leader of the parliamentary dimension of the Netherlands’ EU Presidency 2016. Mr. Westerhoff elaborated on the main goal for the Dutch parliament, which he described as “working together in order to increase parliamentary engagement in the EU decision making progress”. In order to reach this goal six innovative and interactive parliamentary conferences, all dealing with topical and relevant themes for the EU, are scheduled to take place throughout the months of the Dutch EU presidency. One of the striking – distinctive features of the conference that will be held on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) will be the introduction of fictitious scenario based discussions. This has never been tried on a parliamentary level before. These scenario based discussions fit in perfectly with the innovative goals of The Netherlands EU Presidency.

Subsequently, Gabriëlle Metz and Roy van Kenkel, both experts in the field of European Integration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, elaborated on the main (foreign) priorities and goals for The Netherlands during the EU Presidency. To take away any confusion, they first emphasized the difference between the European Council, of which Donald Tusk is currently the president, and the Council of the EU, which The Netherlands presides over since 1 January and which represents the executive governments of the EU member states. Further clarification was provided on the Lisbon Treaty that has given the European Parliament a stronger role. It has therefore become increasingly important to create an effective dialogue.
with this co-legislator in order to make effective decisions. In this respect the institutional aspects that the presidency entails for the Dutch were illustrated. After this brief illustration a short insight was given into the logistics and the venues in Amsterdam, where the presidency will mainly be conducted through official meetings with the delegates of the 28 member states. In conclusion, Metz and Van Kenkel reviewed the main goals for The Netherlands during its presidency. The priorities lie in creating a workable framework for a safe international security environment while also dealing with migration issues, focussing on economic growth and sound finance, creating employment and, last but not least, making sure that a future-proof EU is established by bringing EU citizens closer to EU-institutions. Next to this, the Dutch presidency will also focus on creating a dialogue on the rule of law, increasing transparency and advancing good governance.

The last speaker of the evening was Jean Pierre van Aubel, leader of the Task Force Netherlands EU Presidency 2016 at the Ministry of Defence. In response to his question what the Netherlands should focus on with respect to issues of Defence, answers from the public ranged from border control and maritime security to a more effective cooperation between member states. Van Aubel explained that the priorities for the next six months indeed concern ISIS, the migration issue and the relationship with Russia. According to him, the changing international security environment has led High Representative Mogherini to conclude that we need a new global Security and Foreign Policy strategy to adapt to these changing circumstances. This new strategy should be ready at the end of the Dutch presidency in June. Secondly, a start is going to be made on implementing this new strategy. It is therefore important to look at the capabilities the EU needs to fulfil the ambitions of the new strategy. According to Van Aubel, cooperation between member states is essential in order to give the Common Security and Defence Policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy a better chance of success. In conclusion Van Aubel emphasized once again that the key objectives in the area of Defence are to increase the effectivity and visibility of these policies, to strengthen the military capacities of the EU as well as to raise awareness within national parliaments that commitment is needed when it comes to an integrated EU policy on Defence. This is what the Ministry of Defence wants to bring forward in the next six months.

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