

## **Opening Remarks Jan Willem Holtslag**

### **Working seminar Services Directive**

**February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007**

It is a pleasure, ladies and gentlemen – also on behalf of your co-host the Ministry of Finance of Sweden – to welcome you here at the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

This is the seminar about the so-called Services Directive and the implications for local and regional governments and we are glad to see participants from no less than 17 countries.

In October last year in Finland the High Level Meeting on Governance and the EU came to the conclusion that it is important to share our experiences and our best practices with the implementation of the Services Directive.

We also agreed that an informal network would be beneficial to accomplish this. Our focus is on local and regional authorities as public service providers, their competences in granting licences and their responsibility for implementing the Services Directive.

So, here we are, for a day packed with information to exchange.

I am sure that if you will survive till cocktail-hour you'll feel that you will really have deserved that drink.

Ladies and gentlemen, we co-host this seminar because as a nation we are thoroughly Europe-oriented. And we should be, because the Netherlands benefits from an open and competitive Europe, also in the field of services. Hence today's efforts.

Openness to Europe and to the rest of the world has brought us prosperity and political stability and we believe that this will apply to all Europeans.

Declaring open market is not enough. We have different histories and traditions; we have different balances between local and central government, we have different rules and regulations with protectionist effects.

In other words it will take a lot of work – and that is why we are together – also in the field of services. We will have to take away the obstacles to the free movement of services. For that we have to look for instance at our conditions for licences and permits. Which rules do we really need as tools for public order, safety and health and the environment? We probably all like our own system but we have to find ways to comply on a local level with European rules.

And that is what we are talking about today.

How can we help local and regional governments to apply to the Services Directive for instance when it comes to screening-procedures and the “point of single contact” approach, or “one-counter service” as we call it here in the Netherlands.

You will talk today about both the practical and legal implications and about the organisation of the implementation.

In the Netherlands we have established a close cooperation between local government and the relevant ministries of central government and we took up the challenge to fully apply to the Services Directive within three years. So we need to pick your brains.

Ladies and gentlemen, again let me express my appreciation for your coming here today. We all hope this seminar is the first step to further close cooperation.

Let’s meet again in one or two years time and take stock. Then we can enjoy the results of our endeavours.