

Spoken speech by Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, at the opening of the exhibition ‘Rembrandt and his Contemporaries – The Golden Age of Dutch Art’ in het Sakip Sabanci Museum in Istanbul, on 20 February 2012

Mr President, President Gül, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Go to the Galata Bridge and internalize the feeling of a bustling metropole . That’s how it is now. And it was also like that 400 years ago. The Dutchman Cornelis Haga would have seen similar economic activities when he arrived here 400 years ago in 1612. He came here after a four-month journey by sea. And the defence minister of the Ottoman Empire, Khalif Pasha, asked at that moment - and I said to President Gül, this afternoon, that that was a marvellous idea - he asked them that a diplomatic representative from the Dutch Republic would be appointed to set the seal on the two countries’ growing trade. And so Cornelis Haga, the son of a Dutch merchant, became indeed the first envoy to Turkey. And this was a boost for the bilateral trade and for cultural exchange between the two countries. Cornelis Haga filled his lavishly furnished residence, not far from the present Consulate General in Istiklal, with souvenirs of Turkey. And when he returned after all to Amsterdam, after 27 years living here, he took his souvenirs with him.

President Gül, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is four hundred years ago this year, that Cornelis Haga presented his credentials to the Sultan Ahmet the First of the Ottoman Empire. Four hundred years of diplomatic, economic, social and cultural ties between the Netherlands and Turkey. This anniversary will not pass unnoticed. Not at all. Far from it. Over 250 activities have been organised to celebrate, here as well as in the Netherlands, and many by civil society, celebrating the ties between the Netherlands and Turkey. And they include visits, trade missions and indeed cultural events. President Gül, your presence here underscores the importance of our bilateral relationship.

The exhibition that opens today, displays a really unique collection of paintings by Dutch masters of the Golden Age, like Rembrandt and not to forget Johannes Vermeer. But they are not the only Dutch art being showcased in Istanbul. Istanbul Modern is exhibiting items from the collection of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, my home town

actually. More contemporary works from the Van Abbe collection in Eindhoven can be seen in SALT. And the history of our diplomatic relations is on view at the Pera Museum. All of this here, in Istanbul, at the junction of Asia and Europe, where the history and culture of two continents do meet.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not have to tell the Dutch business people present here about the opportunities offered by Turkey's unique geographic location. I don't need to tell them about the Turkish economy which grew over the last years by some nine per cent. A percentage to be jealous of. And the Netherlands is indeed one of the largest foreign investors in Turkey, and nearly two thousand Dutch businesses are doing their work here in Turkey. And Turkish-Dutch entrepreneurs are achieving commercial successes in many fields of the economic life.

Economic and cultural cooperation go hand in hand. Today is a case in point. As it has been said already, Dutch companies have helped to make this exhibition possible. ING, Shell, Philips, Unilever and KLM worked with us to bring this Rijksmuseum exhibition to the Sakip Sabanci Museum. This wonderful museum in Istanbul. Paintings by Rembrandt, as well as Vermeer, that have never been seen before, here in Turkey. I believe that this unique exhibition is also a fitting way to mark the tenth anniversary of the Sakip Sabanci Museum. You can be proud of it!

As you view the hundred and more works on display – paintings, drawings, prints and other works from the Golden Age – I do hope you will think back to the time when the ties between Turkey and the Netherlands were created. Think back please to that century, that golden age, when Haga's letters of credence initiated into our diplomatic relations. Think back and please at the same time do look forward to consistently vibrant relations between Turkey and the Netherlands.

Thank you.