A person in a uniform

Description automatically generated

**‘Whatever the weather**

**We must move**

**TOGETHER’**

**The U.S. in Europe and Europeans in the U.S.**

(On the occasion of the MLK tribute dinner February 9, 2025)

Dear attendees,

“**Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ’Round**”, the borning struggle. Today, we are gathered to honor the life and legacy of Dr. King, Jr. (MLK). Dr. King became the most visible and prominent leader in [**American Civil Rights Movement**](https://youtu.be/WPuBGcng6Tw?si=M2E36ztjnQa8H841&t=4). His idea of encouraging to volunteer and improve communities lives on today and is applied in social justice movements all over the world.

Countries develop through empowerment of the civil society and the authority of the government. In these times we see that states and their rulers claim a place in the world, causing shifts in the balance of power.

It marks an era in which the old days are over and in which we ourselves will have to respond to the coming changes, at least if we do not want to be secondary.

Wonder, discovery and how to make progress in the way we live are part of the construct of civilization and of the conditions for peaceful coexistence. The U.S. and Europe are aware of the fragility of the construct and are resisting aggressive regimes by taking responsibility to protect and making efforts to keep environments safe.

In **Europa**, “A Distant Mirror”, as the title of a book by Barbara Tuchman reads, people were not only at each other's throats; science and the achievements of the Enlightenment, such as tolerance, freedom and equality, led to a foundation for peaceful coexistence.

And after the Second World War, the idea took hold that European integration was the only way to deal with the far-reaching nationalism that had plagued the continent until then.

450 Years ago, the **Netherlands** was under Spanish rule. Serious discontent with their rule led to dangerous opposition that Spain crushed with a regime of terror and punitive taxes. Open rebellion followed, leading to a struggle and to independence, sealed on 26 July 1581 with **'The Act of Abjuration**'. The document is considered as the Declaration of Independence.

The 1st decade of the 17th century was dynamic:

* the Golden Age began to flourish;
* the Dutch East India Company was founded;
* the **Pilgrim Fathers** arrived;
* during the 'Eighty Years' War' a ceasefire with Spain was agreed;
* Henry Hudson was hired by the Dutch East India Company, leading to the establishment of the province of New Netherlands, with New Amsterdam as the name of the seventeenth-century fortified settlement.

In 1620, the Pilgrims, aware of the meaning of the text of the Declaration, set sail for America. It is widely accepted that the spirit of text inspired the Declaration of Independence of the United States of 1776.

Four years after the ‘**First Salute**’ (November 16, 2026, 250 years ago), John Adams, descendant of Pilgrims and the second President of the United States, went to the Netherlands for support and recognition of American independence, sometimes called “the Marshall Plan in reverse”.

But to be fair, Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers, complained about the limited assistance the Netherlands had given the United States during the American Revolution, saying "***Holland is a nation of shopkeepers***".

During 1782 the Dutch Republic formally recognized the independence and in that same year John Adams as America’s first ambassador to the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

Much later, between 1820 and 1900, 340,000 Dutch emigrated to the U.S., and tens of thousands more joined them after World War II. Many of them made history.

Still, I wonder if it was easier to approach each other 250 years ago. Especially because it is known that former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once joked, “***there is no telephone number to call to speak to Europe***” and Madeleine Albright is said to have quipped once that “***to understand how the European Union works, you have to be either a genius – or French***”.

Anyway, **Netherlands - United States relations** is considered one of the strongest and longest in contemporary history. In addition to representing the U.S. Mission in the Netherlands, the recently resigned ambassador stood out for a strong emphasis on embracing cultural and public diplomacy. The newly appointed ambassador has business as a background.

**As for the United States**, the "**American Dream**" and, according to the former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, “**the indispensable nation**”, the first landing by English settlers, the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers and French colonisation may called its genesis.

Further development was dynamic: civil war, as well as wars leading to independence, involving other European powers, encounters with people from Europe like Lafayette, Solzhenitsyn with his commencement address "**A World Split Apart**" at Harvard University June 8, 1978, and Thomas Mann, who lived in Princeton before moving to Los Angeles in 1941.

But also the achievements of the Enlightenment, events like race riots and human rights activism, the first attack on home soil, Joe Biden's analysis in 2011 that "***the Fractured GOP is the problem***", the storming of the Capitol, and the invention and revolution of advanced technologies and innovations have also driven the country’s development.

Here too, people were at each other’s throats and sought peaceful coexistence, but unlike Europe, big dreams, institutionalization of power and authority, and the belief in obvious ("manifest") and certain ("destiny") became a reality, making the country (and the world around) stronger.

In this context, several names of individuals and key events come to mind, all of whom emphasize the importance of freedom and who, through cooperation, have conceived and realized great plans:

George Washington (**a**), Abraham Lincoln (**b**), Tsar Nicholas II and Andrew Carnegie because of the “Temple of Peace” in The Hague, President Wilson's Fourteen Points, President Truman’s the Economic Recovery Act of 1948, known as the Marshall Plan, and several key politicians who worked for the reunification of Germany.

And on cultural and academic level the Fulbright Program, many other ties that emerged from people's empowerment such as “Overseas Americans Remember”, as well as universities and think tanks.

In these times of revolutionary changes, now it's Trump's turn, bringing many uncertainties and decisive solutions.

On September 30, 2015, Donald Trump asked for and received blessing, but whether **1**) the "American idea", **2**) the mottos “In God we Trust” and "Out of many, one", and **3**) the statues "the Contemplation of Justice" and "the Authority of Law" on either side of the steps to the **Supreme Court** will continue to be respected in their current meaning or whether the meaning will be emphasized or diminidhed because of **Project 2025**, also known as the 2025 Presidential Transition Project, remains to be seen.

The political initiative, published in April 2022, certainly aims to promote conservative and right-wing policies to reshape the federal government and consolidate executive power.

In any case, Trump’s foreign policy vision is dynamic and remarkable and is reminiscent of the era of continental expansion: Canada, Greenland and the Panama Canal are on a list. On the other hand, the idea of creating the 'Russia-Ukraine peace plan', which focuses on freezing the current conflict to stop the war, is a good example of an attempt for a constructive approach to build peace.

John Adams writes in a letter dated May 12, 1780 from Paris to his wife Abigail:

"***I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy in order to give their children a right to study the humanities***."

244 Years later, Trump made his first trip overseas since winning last month's presidential election. This was seen as offering Macron an early opportunity to play the role of mediator between Europe and the U.S. Trump said while in Paris for the reopening of the Notre Dame:

"***It certainly seems like the world is going a little crazy right now. And we'll be talking about that***".

But not only Macron, also Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski and Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni, both with their influential network, offer an opportunity to renew transatlantic relations.

On January 20, at noon EST, Donald J. Trump, who began with a trifecta of Republican control in Washington, was sworn in as president for the second time. And although the Senate must approve candidates nominated by the president for top positions, many of them had already been approved through so-called recess appointments.

More than two months ago, the Minister of Finance, Scott Bessent has launched policy objectives: **1**. real economic growth + 3%, **2**. reduce the budget deficit to -3% and **3**. the US must produce 3 million barrels more oil per day. It will be interesting to see how this is translated into policy, just like with the tax plans. And speaking of policy objectives, I remember a conclusion of 15 years earlier, when Former Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan saw the light and said:

*"****I made a mistake in presuming that the self-interests of organisations, specifically banks and others, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity in the firms***”.

The future is open, but it seems there are American billionaires who have set themselves the task of reforming Europe as they see it. For Europe, this could lead to the erosion of the democratic rule of law.

Bill Clinton told to me in 2008: "***I love your country***". Today, American foreign policy has changed and the outlook for Europe seems less rosy. Europe must work on itself and, if we move together, then on the basis of a balanced relationship with common principles.

The US and Europe never completely abandon each other. As the nearly fifty thousand Americans in the Netherlands know, we share a philosophy of life, which we experience to this day. It is the intensity of the relationship that varies and depends on domestic and foreign circumstances, as well as on the direction of the POTUS’s policies.

Thank you very much for your attention.

delivered during the MLK tribute dinner February 9, 2025, organized by Overseas American Remember (OAR)

Erik van der Kooij, director Feeling Europe FNDN

1. George Washington (founding father of the United States) wrote:

Why are we today so concerned about social justice and economic inequality? Is it not because those who live in poverty today still have lives more likely to be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short?" Is not the quality of life a moral good to be sought and appreciated? And therefore, from an equity perspective, we show concern for the quality of every life.

This appreciation of living with plenty, with opportunities to earn and to learn, with good health, with the manifold advantages of modernity, was especially voiced by Presidents Washinton and Lincoln in their proclamations asking Americans to set aside a day in the month of November to give thanks and not take their lives for granted or as an indulgence in undeserved privilege.

1. Abraham Lincoln wrote:

“The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies.  To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and even soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God…”

“Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore.  Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battlefield and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.  No human counsel hath devised, nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.  It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people.”