



# WORLD TRADE CENTER®

## NETHERLANDS ALLIANCE

MAGAZINE OF COOPERATING WTCA MEMBERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

**TOP WOMAN OF THE YEAR 2017**  
**INGRID DE GRAAF (AEGON)**

FROM SECRETARY TO  
BOARD MEMBER

**ELSKE DOETS**  
**BUSINESS WOMAN**  
**OF THE YEAR 2017**

'I LIKE TO GO  
TO THE EDGE'

**COLUMN**  
BEING A WOMAN  
IN A MAN'S WORLD



**SPECIAL**  
WOMEN IN  
BUSINESS

**NEELIE KROES VS THE CORPORATE WORLD**

THERE SHOULD  
BE MORE **DIVERSITY**  
IN THE WORKPLACE'



WE'RE ON THE RIGHT PATH, BUT ACCORDING TO NELLIE KROES THERE IS STILL PLENTY OF WORK TO BE DONE IN TERMS OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE WORKPLACE. NINE QUESTIONS FOR THIS 'POWER-WOMAN'.

Text: Ymke Frijters & Frank van Bergen



# NEELIE KROES

## VS THE CORPORATE WORLD

**Who are real power-women in your opinion?**

"I don't use that term, I would rather call it influential. I think Angela Merkel is a good example of this. She has an absolute starring role in her own country and on the world stage. Furthermore, she's an extraordinarily friendly person. I also think Christine Lagarde, the number 1 of the IMF and former minister of France, is an influential woman. I worked with her. As a woman, she holds an important position."

**Have you ever experienced any hindrance because of being a woman?**

"I did long ago. At the time, it was still not possible for women to carry out certain functions. These days, that hindrance is luckily no longer relevant. I can't say if I contributed to this. What I still remember well: when I got married, the most senior boss invited me for coffee. 'When you get pregnant, I assume you'll quit your job', he said. That was accepted in those days. Nowadays, no one says this of course. This indicates how much can change in a human lifetime."

**What should in your opinion be changed in Dutch corporate life in terms of equality for women?**

"As far as I'm concerned there should be a lot more diversity in the workplace. Figures indicate that the percentage of women in management positions has dropped again. That's why I became a big proponent of women's quotas a long time ago. I was initially very much against it. But if you have to wait for things to change, I think you need eternal life. For me it's very important for young girls to finish their education. Whether or not you keep working, it's very important for you to improve your resume. Degrees are a very important insurance for financial independence."

**You work for Uber. They didn't look too good this summer in relation to intimidation and chauvinism.**

"There was wrongdoing, especially in San Francisco. Unfortunately this is not only the case at Uber; there are a lot of other companies in other countries that I wouldn't trust. Measures were imposed and CEO Travis Kalanick has resigned. Uber now has a new CEO with a very impressive track record. I'm pleased with that. By the way, I think it was very courageous for the woman to stand up. When something is wrong, you need to have the courage to address it. Even if it doesn't personally concern you."

**During your EU directorate Forbes listed you as one of the 100 most influential women in the world. How do you experience that?**

"I put it into context. This listing is of course related to the function I held at the time. I'm not going to get too big for my boots. It can also be relevant in your job: it means that your work is being taken seriously. People value me for what I do or because they agree with me."

**Are there people that you look up to?**

"At the end of my second term in Brussels I met an Italian woman who participated in a robot research project at the University of Turin. She was 92 years old at the time. During a conversation I asked her about her life. At the age of sixteen she married a man who didn't want her to pursue education or travel. He died when she was 72 and that was her turning point. She went to university, wrote books and did research projects. This teaches me that you're never too old to undertake things. If you're dreaming of something, don't ever say afterwards: 'I would have liked to do that.'"

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**'When something is wrong, you need to have the courage to address it.'**





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office have  
an airport?



Does the world already know everything about Neelie Kroes?

"I wouldn't say that I'm an open book, but the world has slowly got to know more about me. I'm a public figure, so I can't complain about that. People that recognise me on the street are always friendly. Those who want to say mean things don't run into me, I imagine. If people disagree with a political decision, so be it. When someone close to me has a negative opinion about something, I listen to the criticism or try to come up with arguments."

How do you look at the current state of affairs in Europe, after your departure?

"Things are looking up again. I'm positive about the current atmosphere and effort. 18 months ago, we were in deep trouble, and that's now behind us. The current European Commissioner, Timmermans, is doing a good job. He's a real European and an inspired person. During my time as a European Commissioner, I had the opportunity to work with so many talented people from all the member states. Working in a team like that is inspiring."

If you could do one thing in your life again, what would it be?

"Everything that I have on my plate right now, such as fundraising for the Rijksmuseum and helping to stop female genital mutilation together with Amref Flying Doctors, is very interesting to me and keeps me busy. But if I could change something, I would make more time for my grandchildren. I prefer looking forward, you don't have to look back. I still think life is exciting."

**'Timmermans  
is doing a  
good job.'**

## NEELIE KROES

Former VVD politician Neelie Kroes (Rotterdam, 1941) can justifiably be called an influential woman. Shortly after her university education in economics, she began her distinguished career in the Dutch parliament (Tweede Kamer). From 2004 to 2014 she held the position of European Commissioner and from 2009-2014 she was also the Vice-Chairman of the European Commission. In 2007 Neelie Kroes was number 59 on the Forbes list 'The 100 Most Powerful Women'; a year later she was at number 47. Since 2016 Neelie Kroes has among other things been chairman of the policy advisory board for taxi company Uber, board member of Salesforce and Advisor to Bank of America Merrill Lynch.