

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the municipal government, I am delighted to welcome you officially, here in the beautiful town hall of Maastricht. I hope you'll agree with me that our city is an enjoyable place for everybody, not only because of the excellent educational institutions, but also because of the magnificent old city centre, the shopping area, the river Meuse, the many cafés and restaurants and a wide range of cultural events and activities.

Maastricht is a city whose history stretches back many centuries. It has been :

- a Roman encampment,
- a military settlement enclosed by fortifications,
- a religious centre where approximately one third of the inhabitants were priests, brothers or nuns,
- a city of historic buildings and monuments,
- and - from the start of the Industrial Revolution - a centre of industry.

Traces of all these historical periods can be seen all around our town. Some years ago, yet another process of change got under way.

You have all heard of the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, which breathed new life into the European Community and later gave birth to the euro. Maastricht was the cradle of our European currency. Although we all complained when everything became more expensive then, we

were happy because it made things easier, and we began to believe in it because it was there and became part of our everyday lives

Be that as it may, Maastricht is a city in transition. We are transforming ourselves into a service economy and into an international centre of knowledge and culture.

The university has been the driver of this transition, and the hope is that it will push Maastricht into a new and healthy future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The fact that you have come here is not unusual. Maastricht has – through the ages – always been a city with an international and European profile.

You are simply one of a long line of people and nationalities who were eager to visit Maastricht: the Romans, the Spanish, the French under Napoleon, the Belgians, and the Dutch up in Holland.

We appreciate the fact that they wanted to visit our beautiful city. It's just a pity that they usually showed up with a large army and overstayed their welcome by occupying the city for lengthy periods of time. Some did not survive to tell the tale. For example, the famous French musketeer d'Artagnan died in front of the gates of Maastricht. We didn't let just anyone in.

But that was a long time ago. In our times the city gates are no longer closed to people from abroad. And the message passed on by the city and the universities here has been heard. Maastricht currently has the largest international student body in the Netherlands.

And besides that, more than one hundred European and international institutes, like EIPA, are now located in Maastricht.

Established in 1981, EIPA is an integral part of Maastricht and has grown over time; today, with a staff of 120 employees from 23 different European nationalities, this Institute is our link to excellence in Europe, as every year it attracts thousands of civil servants from all over Europe to our city of Maastricht. This is beneficial to our reputation, to our local economy and to employment in the region. There is no doubt that many senior civil servants working in European and national public administrations are familiar with Maastricht as they have been here several times to attend EIPA's seminars and conferences.

Their activities vary, but there's one thing they have in common: thanks to their networks and relationships they are in contact with the entire world on a daily basis. Maastricht is the vibrant centre of Europe in miniature: the region around Liège, Maastricht and Aachen, where three countries come together. The combination of three languages and five regions closely reflects Europe's diversity.

It goes without saying that Maastricht too is being affected by demographic transition and the economic crisis, but that does not alter the fact that we can create economic and social dynamics that will make Maastricht strong and guarantee it a robust future. Maastricht is going to organise these dynamics in three areas:

Firstly, Maastricht as a city of culture.

Our city has a very varied arts and culture scene and it will be greatly expanding its cultural infrastructure in the next few years. This will underline our claim to be a city of culture. This image will result in investments and will attract knowledge workers, innovative companies and visitors who stay for several days.

Maastricht is therefore putting itself forward as a candidate for European Capital of Culture in twenty eighteen. It is competing for the title in cooperation with its partner cities in the Euroregion – Aachen, Hasselt and Liège, Heerlen and Sittard-Geleen and the Dutch and Belgian provinces of Limburg and Liège plus the German speaking region in Belgium. The main purpose of the candidacy is to boost Maastricht's economic structure and image as an internationally renowned centre of culture. That means that in the next ten years, the culture offered must be improved and Euroregional cooperation must be strengthened. Maastricht's candidacy should produce – among other aims - a strong European and cultural profile and an increase in employment and the number of international visitors and expenditure.

Secondly, Maastricht as an international knowledge centre

Almost a quarter of Maastricht's residents are foreigners, and almost half the inhabitants are under thirty-five. Maastricht houses countless international institutions. And although we have a peripheral location with respect to the west and centre of the Netherlands, we are located favourably with respect to Brussels. Together with knowledge institutions in the municipality and region, we will create conditions in the coming years to reverse the reputation of this area: from an incorrect self-image

as an introspective border city with an ageing population, to a young and open internationally-oriented community at the heart of Europe.

For this reason, Maastricht is seeking to participate in Brainport twenty twenty. This is one of the economic core themes set out for the future by the Dutch Government. Brainport links the existence of knowledge institutions such as the universities and universities of applied sciences in Maastricht, Eindhoven and Tilburg to the innovative and industrial business community.

The campuses in Eindhoven, Chemelot Sittard-Geleen, Avantis Heerlen and the Health Campus in Maastricht are the focal points for these developments. The top technology region that will result from this concept will be one of the top three innovation regions in Europe in twenty twenty and one of the top ten in the world. According to forecasts, the Health Campus Maastricht alone will result in two thousand five hundred direct jobs by twenty twenty and several times that number in indirect jobs.

Thirdly, Maastricht as an urban residential centre.

The demographic transition is literally providing Maastricht with room to invest in its quality as an urban residential centre. In other words: there is a supply for every demand, with wonderful urban facilities in splendid natural surroundings. In combination with the green region, that is a distinctive argument for attracting newcomers and investors. We are creating that climate together with the partners in our city.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have almost finished.

The municipal authorities have a strong focus on linking people and organisations. We are working together to build a Maastricht where people are tolerant towards one another and where they can develop to the full. The many economic, social and cultural projects that are planned for our region are a confirmation of a bright future for the city.

I am particularly honoured to welcome all of you today to the Maastricht Town Hall. You all come from public sector organisations, so are well aware of the challenges we are facing in these difficult times. Myself, a city administrator, I am also dealing with the same issues most of you experience on a daily basis. You represent the most innovative and best performers in the European public sector. Let me stress however that my own city, Maastricht, although not having submitted a project to EPSA 2011, is also in an ongoing process of modernisation and innovation. In this respect, let me mention more knowledge-intensive society and a proactive citizenship.

And you have a role to play too. You are our ambassadors. I hope that you want to carry out to all your friends en teworks all over the world that Maastricht is not only a wonderful place to be, visit and live in, an old town with a very young hart, but also an exciting breeding ground for culture and sciences.

Thank you very much.