

Speech by Kristel Baele, President of the Executive Board

New Year's reception, Tuesday 10 January 2017

'2017: a year of cooperation'

Dear colleagues and students,

I hope you had happy holidays. I've already talked to several of you during the round Rector Pols and I did on campus. However, for those we haven't greeted yet: let me start by wishing you a very happy, healthy and successful new year, on behalf of the Executive Board.

For me, I've spent the holidays with family and friends. Getting as much fresh air with my friends outdoors at the beautiful Veluwe, and soaking up culture in Rotterdam.

It was good to recharge the batteries after an intense year, my first as president of this great university.

Ladies and gentlemen, a new year's reception is the perfect time to take stock – to see what's behind you, and to take a look at the things to come.

2016

Let's first take a look back at 2016. I think we've had a very successful year. 2016 had lots of great achievements; in fact there are too many to mention them all, but here are a few:

You know that digitalization and diversity are high on my agenda. For digitalization, we've been working on the future of education, introducing three new MOOCs and launching MyEUR to improve the service towards students. Farshida Zafar was bestowed the first SURF Education Award as the biggest change maker. Furthermore, Chief Diversity Officer Hanneke Takkenberg and her team have presented ambitious plans to increase diversity at this university. Because diversity is not a nice to have, but a must have. More on this issue later.

When I look back over 2016, I think of all the leading, innovative and socially relevant research by our scientists. Some of our best have joined forces in the three Erasmus Initiatives we introduced at the last Dies Natalis.

I also think about how we met the government's performance agreements with flying colours. I know it took great effort from a lot of you, so I'd specifically like to thank you for that.

Also a special thanks to all the people still working on our website after the recent hacking attack. It has reminded us just how important online security is.

I think back to the distinguished visitors we received and the efforts from our very active students, for example when they hosted UN secretary Ban Ki-moon. We were also honoured with a visit from King Willem-Alexander at campus and Queen Máxima at ISS. I'm keen to find out which distinguished guest will visit us this year.

Other highlights of 2016: the first Rotterdam Talent Week, growing our international student numbers by 13 percent, and the new double degree with the Willem de Kooning Academy and Codarts. They are our partners in the Rotterdam Arts and Science Lab. I think it's a great example of the cooperation between higher education institutions in Rotterdam. All these highlights were achieved through teamwork and corporation. As the song goes: we know we never walk alone in Rotterdam.

I'm very proud to be part of a community that is able to realise all this. This 'getting things done' mentality really typifies our university.

2017

Now let's look ahead at what 2017 has in store. There are plenty of plans, projects and ambitions, and I can't mention them all. So here are a few, just to build your sense of anticipation.

Early in the year, we're going to 'renew our marriage vows' with the city of Rotterdam. We're close to signing a new agreement with the city in which we are so deeply rooted. We will work closely on finding solutions to the complex urban issues, and enhancing international profile and branding of city and university.

Talking about Rotterdam: as an enthusiast of cinema I'm really looking forward to the International Film Festival, starting at the end of this month. We're celebrating five years of cooperation with this inspiring festival. This year we will feature special viewings for students and staff. We will organise debates and Studio Erasmus.

For students on our campus, this year we'll re-open the beautifully renovated University Library, the all-new Park Noord and the modern Sanders Building. This will dramatically increase the number of places for students to sit and study. And it doesn't stop there. This year, we'll see the launch of the final phase of campus development, Campus in Ontwikkeling 3.

Cooperation off and on campus is also vital for our education and research efforts. We're working on introducing 10 new MOOCs, further enriching our education.

2017 is also the year for the three new Erasmus Initiatives to shine and become known. Through these Initiatives we'll be meeting the challenges of our changing society, building bridges between disciplines, between researchers, between people.



Diversity in education and research will be enhanced by a network of diversity officers at each school to exchange knowledge, while working on a tailor-made approach at each school. Our stimulating programme for international and multi-disciplinary masters will kick-start this year too. Please provide us ideas for these new international masters.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm really looking forward to 2017 – and I hope you are too. It is going to be a year of opportunities and possibilities. It won't be easy to realize all of our plans and ambitions, and there are certainly tons of things to do, but I know that with the right attitude and through cooperation we can overcome every hurdle. As we are a team, should you require help, don't hesitate to ask a colleague. Together we stand strong.

A couple of months ago, I was interviewed by Erasmus Magazine. The article was headlined 'Firmly at the helm'. Catchy and flattering of course, but in fact steering the 'Erasmus University' ship is a team effort. Only by working together, all of us - students and staff - can make this university better every day.

Together we made it happen in 2016, and I'm fully confident that together we will make it happen again in 2017!

And now it's time to raise our glasses. Happy new year!

(toast)