

Keynote Speech

Dear President Professor Brinksma, dear Rector Professor Bredenoord,

Honourable Member of Parliament Ehler,

Dear participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here to with you at the EU Strategy Days organised by the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Universities like yours play a fundamental role in promoting inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

You equip students with tools, knowledge and skills to create solutions, generate wealth, and effectively share that wealth with their communities, through companies and job creation.

You foster the right conditions for our best and brightest to have innovative ideas, to tackle big challenges together, across borders.

And you make sure that this knowledge and the research and innovation they generate are available to our societies, empowering your learners to be more entrepreneurial, no matter their gender or their socio-economic background.

This is the root of the concept of inclusive excellence.

We want to make sure that anyone with the ability to add to the prosperity of our society has the preparation to succeed.

Now, the question of how universities can better contribute to inclusive and sustainable prosperity can only be answered by the

European higher education community itself. And events and discussions like this are essential to facilitate that brainstorming.

Our role is to support you. What are our concrete actions?

First, we have been facilitating the deeper cooperation of the higher education community for several years.

Here, the European Universities initiative is doing very solid work. If anyone can map paths forward for universities, these are universities working together.

And their experiences are bearing fruit.

Look no further than the UNIC alliance, where the Erasmus University Rotterdam is the coordinating university.

UNIC is focusing precisely on social inclusion in university life, as well as in the broader context of superdiverse post-industrial cities.

This means developing pedagogies that foster social and community engagement skills in learners, tackling diversity and inclusion challenges through solid research, and focusing on diversity, social cohesion, social justice, equality, and civil society through real-life urban case studies.

Each of our European Universities alliances focuses on creating solutions for concrete challenges they face. They do so in their local communities, in their regions, with innovative partners in industry, and with the civil society.

And their experiences feed back into our work in the European Commission.

This was the case, for example, of our recent Council recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials.

Micro-credentials certify the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, for example a short course or training.

They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills and competences they need for their personal and professional development.

We could not have put this recommendation forward without the valuable input of alliances which are testing and developing models for this to become a ubiquitous reality.

In addition to support for deeper cooperation, we have been working with the higher education community on increasing the opportunities for mobility.

We know mobility is a very solid investment in our human capital, with its potential to decrease skills shortages while improving employment opportunities in Europe's regions.

That is why we are working with the Member States on a **Learning mobility framework** – the 'Europe on the Move' Recommendation.

Our aim is to further boost learning mobility opportunities for every learner, teacher and apprentice in the European Education Area.

We also want to bolster the inclusiveness of mobility by proposing that at least 20% of all learners benefiting from learning mobility abroad should be people with fewer opportunities.

Finally, funding is essential to support universities in fostering inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

The Erasmus+ programme is there to assist you, with its strong focus on inclusivity and equity.

We want to ensure that our opportunities are available to everyone that can benefit. That is why the programme is reaching out to people with fewer opportunities.

I commend the Erasmus University Rotterdam for being active in Erasmus+ projects when it comes to inclusion. Here, I would like to mention the "IDEA-net" project, which is working to equip universities on their path to building strategies for diversity, access, and inclusion, and expanding the knowledge of both leadership and support staff.

We also have Horizon Europe, our largest research and innovation programme which plays a very important role. Because prosperity is not a zero-sum game. We can and should generate more wealth by solving problems and creating solutions.

As we are starting to reflect on our way forward for the new framework programme, we involve the Member States, regions, local authorities, and all relevant stakeholders like universities, research organisations, industry, and the general public in this reflection. It goes without saying, the European Parliament and the Council play an important role as well.

In fact, we have set-up a high-level expert group to advise the Commission on the programme's future. I would like to thank Professor Annelien Bredenoord, the Rector Magnificus of

Erasmus University Rotterdam, for being a dedicated member of this group.

We hear the strong call for the simplification of the programme, in terms of architecture and administration. This, too, is a matter of inclusion as well as excellence. After all, we want every excellent research organisation to be able to successfully apply, no matter their size or experience with the programme.

If they can generate prosperity, they should be able to compete in the programme's calls.

This is true for many actions in the Horizon Europe, be it a programme that works for researchers in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions or a simple gateway to knowledge in the activities of the EIT.

And it is especially important that we continue investments in the innovation ecosystems around our universities, supporting new research and new start-ups. These ties are supported both through Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, through the EIT, the EIC, among many other tools in our arsenal.

Finally, all this investment in people, in knowledge, is the basis for transdisciplinary solutions. Solutions that involve the citizens affected by them, together with the expertise to make things work.

This is a reason why connecting research and education is so important. You make citizen participation possible, connecting to your local communities.

This is an important priority for the Commission as reflected through the New European Bauhaus initiative.

The Erasmus University Rotterdam is, once again, a great example of how universities can enable community participation. The CULTUURCAMPUS project blends education, research, policy and culture to transform the disadvantaged urban area of Rotterdam South. And I am very proud to see your university engaged in developing alternatives we direly need.

I hope you continue being involved in the New European Bauhaus, for example, through the New European Bauhaus Stewardship Lab. This is an opportunity for universities to reflect upon and shape the role of higher education in the green transition.

Dear colleagues,

These initiatives, this support we offer the higher education community, yield results because you make them happen.

Ultimately, inclusive and sustainable prosperity requires a holistic approach. And universities, being at the centre of these efforts, have a fundamental role to play.

As we rethink this role today, you can count on our support through constant dialogue, policy directed towards your needs, and funding to bolster your efforts.

Thank you.