

Speech by Kristel Baele, President of the Executive Board

Opening of the Academic Year 2016-2017, Monday 29 August 2016

Meeting tomorrow's challenges today

Your Excellencies, Mr. Mayor, distinguished guests, dear colleagues, students, trustees, ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the opening of the academic year 2016-2017. A new and eventful year, with many things to look forward to. I am honoured to address you for the first time on this festive occasion.

A special welcome to our guest speaker, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation **and** alumna Lilianne Ploumen. Welcome back at Erasmus University, thank you for accepting our invitation to deliver the guest lecture at your alma mater. We are looking forward to hearing your speech.

Also a special welcome to the student athletes of this university who participated in the Olympics and the European Universities Games. There's going to be a special celebration for you at the HeartBeat Festival this evening, but from this podium I want to congratulate all of you for your fantastic achievements.

Remembrance

At the start of this new year, I would like to honour the tradition of mentioning the names of those from our university community who passed away last year. May I invite you to rise.

We deeply regret the tragic loss of two students:

Chihangir Bercan

Kingsley James Sipkema

We also mourn the loss of the following colleagues and former colleagues:

Cock Bukman

Cor van Eijk

Fred van der Grift

Petra Groeneweg

Pjotr Hesseling

Marian Hoeks

Joop Huisman

Simon de Jong

Heinz Kimmerle

Lense Koopmans

Will Koppelaars

Harrie Langman

Hanneke Mastik

Vasant Moharir

Peter Odell

Peter Siep

Wiek Slagter

Harry Wagenbuur

Our thoughts are with their loved ones, in deep appreciation.

Thank you, please be seated again.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tomorrow's challenges manifest themselves today. Take, for instance, climate change, globalisation, urbanisation, migration and digitisation. Universities' civic role, and the civil role played by **our** university, is more important than ever in view of these increasingly rapid changes. Universities must take the lead in solving the complex societal issues we face today and those we will be facing tomorrow.

Winston Churchill once said, "The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see." **Today**, at the official opening of another new academic year, I will share with you a view on our future role and meaning within Dutch society, starting from the present, and taking the story of the foundation of our university as a source of inspiration.

[THE PRESENT]

And now, the present. This is the moment when some 7,500 first-year students will embark on one of the most fascinating stages of their lives. We are delighted to offer them an appealing and lively campus. This academic year will see the re-opening of the University Library with its 900 new spaces for individual study. In addition, we will see the re-opening of the renovated Erasmus Law School building.

Our university is doing well. Our degree courses are highly rated and our researchers are internationally recognised. I am also very proud of our students, whom we are educating to become enterprising people who hold highly responsible positions in the

business community and civil society organisations. Take our alumna Lilianne Ploumen, who is a great example of such a student.

While at the university, our students hone their senses of social responsibility. They devote their knowledge and time to the city and its inhabitants, as volunteers at schools and as advisers to the highest-ranking municipal authorities. They help vulnerable people in our society: disabled people, homeless people, elderly people and refugees. To us – students, faculty and staff – giving something back to our city and its inhabitants is an essential part of Erasmus University. The Student in the spotlight segment we will witness in a moment illustrates how well they do that.

Thankfully, we are a financially sound university. Regrettably, we have had to restructure some departments over the last few years. The Executive Board realises that these were difficult and occasionally painful processes for both employees and their teams, and we are glad that we can now put them behind us and move on.

All things taken together, we have **reason** to be proud. We are **justified** in feeling proud.

And we should not hesitate to show this pride. We should be sharing the stories of the university in our personal and professional life.

[VERLEDEN]

The story of our university is closely tied up with the history of its foundation. Three Rotterdam-based entrepreneurs, Ruijs, Van Stolk and Mees, laid the foundation for this university. They were practical people who were able to identify and take up tomorrow's challenges. Despite the scepticism expressed by their fellow merchants, they considered an academic education to be indispensable for their successors and the future managers of their companies. As for the Faculty of Medicine, this was

founded due to the sense of justice and passion of a general practitioner, Mr Jan Lamberts. Having been stirred into action by the occasionally disgraceful conditions in which some of his patients lived, Mr Lamberts sought to establish a medical school and university in the city of Rotterdam.

Our founding fathers and the various founding deans, such as Prof. Querido, Prof. Van Doorn and Prof. Sanders, held views that were considered revolutionary at the time, and stuck to them despite plenty of opposition. They supported a new type of education – practice-oriented, multidisciplinary and socially engaged.

This approach, this culture, is in the DNA of our university and constitutes the core of our identity.

This same powerful identity enables us to address new challenges, as well. Not only the global challenges affecting us, but also local challenges – in our city, in our university, in the heads and hearts of our students and academic and non-academic staff. Today, I want to tell you more about our approaches to two of these challenges: first, educating for tomorrow's world and second, digitisation.

1 The importance of education

Right from the start, Erasmus University added a twist to the higher education offered to its students, which had to be wide-ranging and multidisciplinary, because this would increase the employability of modern academics in modern society. Today, that approach is still proving to be the right one. After all, the global challenges we are facing today and will face tomorrow cannot be solved through a monodisciplinary approach. Thanks to our partnerships with Delft University of Technology and Leiden University, and with Rotterdam art schools Codarts and Willem de Kooning Academy, we have been able to further implement this legacy, thus allowing our students to

follow highly innovative and multidisciplinary programmes. In this way, we are doing justice to their talents, passion and creativity, and helping them prepare for the challenges they will face in the future.

It is vital that we realise that high-quality education is the backbone of our university – and not just because our students expect so from us.

2. Digitisation

And now, more about the challenge of digitisation. Artificial intelligence, robotisation, Big Data, global digital access to knowledge. What do these things mean to our university? Last spring, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, there was a consensus that digital technology will serve as the engine to a fourth Industrial Revolution, a revolution that will fundamentally change our way of living and working, change our job market and change our education system.

Erasmus researchers have taken up this challenge.

The ongoing switch to digitisation also threatens the knowledge-intensive professions for which we are preparing students. Some say that these professions will change drastically or even disappear altogether. Digitisation is forcing us to rethink our curricula, the way in which we facilitate learning processes, and the demands for a digital infrastructure imposed on us by new teaching methods. We are taking up this challenge.

There are several front running teams at Erasmus University that have already implemented new methods, such as our MOOCs and the flipping-the-classroom concept for small-scale motivational teaching. A university-wide vision group is currently drafting a strategy for digital education, which is likely to be presented this

autumn. In addition, we are going to invest quite heavily in training and new facilities for staff.

And that's not all. Next Monday, Erasmus University, along with all the other Dutch universities, will launch a plan to make the Netherlands a frontrunner in the field of digitisation. It is called *A Plan for a Digital Society, Where People Matter*. We are seeking to put the Netherlands on the world map as a leading testing ground and as a country pioneering in human-oriented digitisation. This will be done in association with our knowledge partners, the government and the business community.

In closing, I would like to say, ladies and gentlemen, that entrepreneurship is in our DNA and has put us in an excellent place to meet tomorrow's challenges head on. Today I have shared some of my views with you, but of course, please feel free to exchange your thoughts with me during this year.

On behalf of the Executive Board, I wish you all an inspirational new academic year.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is now my great pleasure to introduce our guest speaker Liliane Ploumen, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

Having graduated with a degree in the History of Society, Minister Ploumen has followed an interesting and challenging career path to date. With her specific knowledge and expertise, she has contributed much to the success of many international organisations including Foster Parents Plan, Mama Cash and the development organisation 'Cordaid'.

Today, Minister Ploumen is leading Dutch efforts to achieve sustainable, inclusive economic growth and this afternoon, she will share with us her take on the

contemporary social challenge of financial inequality in our globalized world. Minister Ploumen, the floor is yours.
