

Ontvangst EPSA; 4 november 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Maastricht, the
birthplace of the European Union.

Welcome in particular to our Town
Hall, one of the finest historic
buildings in our city.

Our splendid Town Hall dates from
1644 and illustrates the rich history
of Maastricht.

The municipal government is greatly
honoured to welcome you, as
innovative performers in public
administration, to this building.

We naturally do not need to explain
that the public tasks is a daily topic
here.

That is why we applaud the
advancement of knowledge in this
specific field.

So you may rest assured that we value your presence here.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Your conference is not only taking place here in Maastricht, it is also taking place at the heart of Europe.

You are of course aware that Maastricht is the birthplace of the European Union and its currency, the euro. Both were established in

the Maastricht Treaty, concluded here seventeen years ago.

I must add that this world-famous treaty has also proven to be a huge advantage for our city.

Since then, we have been referred to as the Fourth City of Europe, after Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg.

Not in terms of size, of course, but rather in reference to our European profile.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is not only the Maastricht Treaty that we have to thank for that, however.

Our European status is largely due to our geographical location.

After all, the Maastricht region shares two hundred and twenty

kilometres of border with Belgium and Germany, and only eight kilometres with the rest of the Netherlands.

You will understand that people, goods and services are constantly crossing the borders here.

Indeed, in this region we are more or less forced to think and act as genuine Europeans.

In addition, Maastricht is home to more than one hundred international institutes, some of which are closely allied to the European Union and the United Nations.

EIPA is one of them.

That is why the municipal government's policy and all the organisations and businesses operating in our city are European in outlook.

Let me give you an example. We made an enormous push to be the first city in the Netherlands with a high-speed railway connection. And we succeeded.

You can now travel by train to the European capital, Brussels, in about an hour, to Paris in less than three, and to London in slightly less than four.

As for the future of our economy, our aim is to develop into a high-

tech knowledge city of European stature.

That means that we intend to attract a large number of advanced research institutes and innovative, knowledge-driven companies, in particular in technology and the biomedical sciences.

But I must admit that a city of one hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants is too small to work towards being a European-scale,

knowledge-driven economy all by itself.

So we have decided to join forces with our neighbours.

Maastricht is located right at the heart of the Meuse-Rhine Euroregion, a contiguous area that encompasses cities such as Aachen in Germany and Liège and Hasselt in Belgium within a thirty kilometre radius.

This united region has no less than four million inhabitants, more than two hundred and fifty thousand companies, four leading universities and a total of seventy thousand students.

It also has two international airports and a number of other major airports nearby.

It has two TGV stations, several large inland harbours and three international conference centres.

Our Gross Regional Product is approximately half that of EU member state Denmark!

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am mentioning these figures in order to show you the enormous importance of innovation in the European public administration for this city and region.

So if you ask me, ladies and gentlemen, you could not have

chosen a better place in which to hand out the European Public Sector Awards.

I therefore hope that Maastricht will offer you sufficient inspiration for a fruitful debate on the future of public administration in Europa and to honour de nominees.

I also hope that after the meeting ends, you will have to time enjoy all the delights of our charming city

centre, and to soak up the wonderful European atmosphere.

Thank you again for visiting Maastricht, and I wish you the best of luck during your conference.