

EPSA 2017 Final Event, 20-11-2017

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the municipal government, I am delighted to welcome you officially, here in the beautiful town hall of Maastricht on the occasion of the awarding of the EPSA 2017 best practice certificates.

This year's leading theme '*An Innovative Public Sector in 2017 – New Solutions to Complex Challenges*' is something that Europe needs more than ever. In this year of the twenty-fifth's anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht finding new solutions suits the goal of '*Europe Calling!*' perfectly. '*Europe Calling!*', a program of the City of Maastricht and the Province of Limburg in regard to the treaty's anniversary, strives to revive the debate on Europe in the broadest sense, and doing this 'bottom-up'.

I would like to quote our mayor, Mrs. Annemarie Penn, on this:

"Each fire starts with a small spark. Surely, here in Limburg, here in Maastricht, we could nourish that spark into a new fire of a united Europe. A bottom-up approach by the generations who form the present Europe". And also a quote of the governor of the province of Limburg, Mr. Theo Bovens: *"Europe calls for new ideas and stories for her future"*.

It seems to me, ladies and gentlemen, that this exactly what you have been doing and proving the last few years. Public servants have an important task in bringing society further and not only executing existing policies. Society is permanently changing and so are the challenges you were confronted with, be it on a local level or a supranational one. You have dared to face these challenges and to find ways to cope with them. And maybe the most important: your solutions have proven to be effective.

The Maastricht Treaty 25th Anniversary programme will recount the exciting and turbulent history of Europe. It is a history that began optimistically with an early leitmotiv of new, seemingly unlimited opportunities. But it is also a history of solidarity that has come under pressure, of financial and economic hardship, and of disagreement about Europe's openness – a disagreement that the refugee crisis has once again put into sharp relief. It proves that Europe needs constant upkeep – and the logical place for that is Maastricht, where it all began a quarter of a century ago.

Back to you now. For me it is obvious that the public sector's main role is or at least should be a contribution to a better society. The public sector is there to serve society as a whole and finds its legitimation only in the common needs of people living and working together, be it on different scales. Your projects and efforts have been recognized as best practices by the EPSA jury as an outstanding contribution to a better society. Apart of the recognition you are receiving these days I really hope that this event will help you to find ways to disseminate the results of your efforts.

Ladies and gentlemen, your meeting these days, and especially the presentation of your in practice proven examples of projects for the benefit of the European citizens, is making an important contribution to provide the expertise that we are looking for in the debate on Europe here in Maastricht. I sincerely hope that your experiences in your own nations, regions and municipalities will contribute to much needed solutions. In sharing your experiences lies the future of our Europe: not necessarily on a national or even supranational level, but also in the regions and municipalities where we have to live with each other every day.

You are gathered here under the umbrella of the European Institute of Public Administration. The Institute is one of our main links 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, regional and local public administrations are familiar with Maastricht as they have been here to attend EIPA's seminars and conferences.

You can be assured that this city and this region greatly value your presence, and I am therefore thankful to you all for visiting Maastricht.

As you represent the most innovative and best performers in the European public sector, you are the ones that are also well aware of the challenges we are facing in the near future. I am sure the EPSA 2017 will offer you many new connections and ideas that will help you to adapt to that future.

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

Ladies and gentlemen. Surely you will experience a little bit of the wonderful international atmosphere in our charming city centre during these days, but I invite you to come back someday and enjoy Maastricht a bit longer.

Thank you again for visiting us, I wish you a very pleasant evening and I trust you will have a very successful event.