

## **Welkomwoord door Gouverneur Bovens bij de uitreiking European Public Sector Award (EPSA) op 22 november 2017 in het Gouvernement te Maastricht**

Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted to welcome you to this historic location in the Provincial Government Buildings: de Statenzaal or the Council Chamber. This is the house of the Limburg provincial parliament. You are now in one of the most historic locations in the city of Maastricht, and Maastricht has many such locations. In the distant past, the Romans, Spanish, French and Prussians roamed through the city and left their mark behind.

At this location, however, we are in the birthplace of Europe. Here in de Statenzaal or the Council Chamber of this house, the Maastricht Treaty was signed twenty-five years ago. Here, the European Union was established. Our Europe Calling programme celebrated the creation of the European Union in nineteen ninety-two.

But you have come to this house today primarily for the presentation of the European Public Sector Award 2017, the EPSA.

However, the EPSA 2017 also focused on Europe Calling. You highlighted Europe Calling at all EPSA meetings. Maastricht and the Province of Limburg are proud of the fact that the Treaty was concluded here twenty-five years ago. We draw attention to this fact at every opportunity, because we clearly recognise ourselves in the Europe for which the Maastricht Treaty stands.

One of the ways in which we did this was to hold a series of discussions about the future of Europe.

In December of last year, for instance, we organised the EU & Me conference featuring politicians both past and present, academics and business representatives, during which we re-experienced the original summit. But we also sent out a distress signal regarding the *raison d'être* of Europe as it is today. On the seventh of February, the actual anniversary of the Treaty, we entrusted the city to the Generation Maastricht as a sign of hope. In anticipation of this event, EIPA organised an EU Forum on the tenth of November two thousand and sixteen in Maastricht.

It has now become clear that the way ahead for Europe is by no means easy. According to the many critics, it's too bureaucratic, there are too many rules and it's too expensive. And the refugee issue has caused great divisions within Europe. Brexit has demonstrated that the divisions within Europe are greater than ever.

Ladies and gentlemen

In my opinion, the theme of the EPSA 2017 'An Innovative Public Sector in 2017 - New Solutions to

Complex Challenges' is perfectly in line with the challenges currently being faced by the European Union.

The EPSA 2017 presents and rewards best practices involving an innovative approach to the increasingly complex challenges in the public sector in Europe. Best practices that allow public authorities to respond sharply to a rapidly changing environment and developments that may have major consequences.

But what are these complex challenges? I will list several of them to illustrate the problems facing the European Union at present. They include, of course, the refugee issue, economic uncertainty and low economic growth, frequent high unemployment, uncertainty regarding the stability of the banking sector, climate change and terrorism. But also a lack of trust in public authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen

The EPSA brings together the most innovative performers from the European public sector, in other words you! The EPSA's aim is to make valuable knowledge transparent, available and practicable throughout Europe. The EPSA is an important European learning environment. Fortunately, your competition is held in a calmer atmosphere than is often the case in the European political arena.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is something else that we are proud of in Maastricht and that is EIPA, which has been located in this city since nineteen eighty-one. EIPA is the most important training centre for the European public sector. It also makes a substantial contribution to solving the problems currently being faced by Europe. EIPA now has thirty-five years of experience in training and educating the European public sector.

I firmly believe that innovative solutions to contemporary complex problems are the backbone for the Europe of tomorrow. This is something to which EIPA contributes.

Ladies and gentlemen

Happily, there are signs of a European spring. In his State of the Union address, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker demonstrated more ambition and optimism for a united Europe than we would have thought possible some time ago. It was for such a Europe that the Maastricht Treaty was signed here in the Council Chamber twenty-five years ago. Ladies and gentlemen, it is in this more positive atmosphere that you have come here today for the presentation of the EPSA.

Unfortunately, I am not able to stay for the entire ceremony as my presence is required at the

Limburgse Bestuurdersdag. An annual event at which Limburg administrators discuss their position, their role and their profession. Thank you for your attention and for coming to this house.