

Speech by the Vice-Mayor of Maastricht, Ms Vivianne Heijnen, at the Handing Over of Best Practice Certificates at the Municipality of Maastricht, 4 November 2019

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As Vice-Mayor of Maastricht, I am delighted to welcome you officially, here in the beautiful town hall of Maastricht, on the occasion of the awarding of the EPSA 2019 Best Practice Certificates. I would like to welcome especially Professor Dr. Marga Pröhl, until last week Director-General of the European Institute of Public Administration, and Mr. Marco Ongaro, her successor as Director-General. Dear Mrs. Pröhl, on behalf of the city of Maastricht: thank you very much. Dear Mr. Ongaro, what a nice occasion to get acquainted with your new surroundings.

This year's leading theme '*New solutions to complex challenges*', where the public sector aims at being citizen-centric, with solutions that are sustainable and future-proof, is something that Europe needs more than ever. Two years after the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht, finding new solutions suits the goal of '*Maastricht working on Europe*' perfectly. The program '*Maastricht working on Europe*' is a joint project of the City of Maastricht, the Province of Limburg and Maastricht University. Our common goal is to position Maastricht as a meeting place for citizen dialogue and debate, and establish a Centre of Excellence for research on Europe and European integration. In short: a workplace for a better Europe. For everyone. Our mission is to stimulate active, critical debate with citizen engagement at its core.

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 as representatives of all kind of public administrations, have been doing and proving the last few years. Public servants have an important task in bringing society further. They should not only executing existing policies. No, 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 and are an example for others who are wrestling with similar problems.

Looking back on the results of the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht, we are confronted with the exciting and turbulent recent 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, of disagreement about Europe’s openness, of tensions on the relations between separate nations and the Union, and so on. It proves that Europe needs constant upkeep – and the logical place for that is Maastricht, where it all began more than a quarter of a century ago.

Back to you now. For me it is obvious that the challenges the public sector is confronted with demand citizen-centric and sustainable answers. After all, the public sector is there to serve society as a whole. It finds its legitimacy 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 future for every European. Apart from 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 practical 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 surely 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 reaches out to thousands of civil servants from all over Europe, and also introduces them to 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.

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 2019 will offer you many new connections and ideas that will help you to adapt to that future.

Finally I have a message that we like to repeat whenever we receive guests to our city. 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 beautiful 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.