

**Welkom European Public Sector Award 2019 in Statenzaal in Gouvernement aan de Maas op 6 november 2019**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the house of the Province of Limburg.

The birthplace of the European Union.

Because it is in this house, in this chamber of our provincial parliament to be precise,

where in nineteen ninety-two the Maastricht Treaty was signed.

The Maastricht Treaty that was so crucial for the further unification of Europe,

and introduced the eurocitizenship.

A historical event that of course makes this place a perfect location to present a European Award.

Certainly a European Public Sector Award, which – in this edition – has the overarching theme:

"New solutions to complex challenges - a public sector citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future"

A bit of a mouthful, but that does justice to the complexity of **our times**.

**Our times** in which so many different things are taking place simultaneously. Things that make many eurocitizens insecure. For example:

- the affordability of pensions due to an ageing population;
- or politics that turn into a soap opera with something like Brexit;
- or the barely foreseeable consequences of climate change;

to name just a few.

While **our times** are also times when

- more and more 'own' truths are being preached, and
- science is only an opinion,

- or only right when it says what we want to hear...

And **our times** are also times in which citizens all around the world are revolting more and more; making their voices of protest heard.

It therefore comes as no surprise that less than two weeks ago, UN chief António Guterres called on leaders worldwide to listen to all the demonstrators.

"With turmoil in people's lives, peace on the streets doesn't come any closer." That's what he said then.

He emphasised that each situation is unique, but that, in his view, it is clear that there is a growing deficit of trust between people and political establishments.

Or, as he literally put it: "this is a growing threat to society."

Here in Europe, too, we are seeing more and more people taking to the streets:

- like the yellow vests in France;
- the supporters and opponents of Catalonia's independence in Spain;
- ...and the British who may or may not want to stay in Europe..

The Netherlands, too, has seen unprecedented large demonstrations in recent weeks.

Here it was the farmers and the builders who made their protest voices heard *en masse*.

Because they feel threatened in their existence by the many climate measures..

It is in **these times**, ladies and gentlemen, that you have to stand firm as a public servant, and to build a relationship of trust with citizens, and to temper their insecurity.

You can be proud that you seem to be succeeding in this.

Otherwise, you would not be sitting here today - in this Chamber, which is so historic for Europe - waiting in suspense to hear whether or not you will be receiving an award.

An award for your own solution to complex changes and therefore your contribution to a public sector that is citizen-centric, sustainable and fit for the future.

Before handing you over to the next speaker, I would like to congratulate you all warmly on this good work.

After all, if you are going home with an award or not, your commitment to that European public sector of the future, will make you all winners.

Congratulations!