

## Speech at the Opening of the Academic Year.

*Dr. Koen Becking, president of the Tilburg University Executive Board*

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Ladies and gentlemen, friends, students, colleagues

“The region: a world to be won”. That is the theme of today’s official Opening of the Academic Year. It is a notable occasion, since we are also regretfully saying farewell to four members of our Supervisory Board, including its president Ruud Lubbers. The theme could not be more appropriate. Mr Lubbers is one of the ‘founding fathers’ of globalization studies and was quick to point out a possible pitfall of internationalization: people’s “renewed attachment to the close-at-hand,” to borrow Ernst Hirsch Ballin’s apt term.

I do not have to tell you that internationalization is gaining ground by the day. In recent decades, Tilburg University has undergone a marked development, one which is set to continue. Just look around you. Anyone who enjoys a stroll around our green and pleasant campus, stops for a coffee at the new Starbucks or visits our new sports center cannot help but notice how quickly our world is becoming a true ‘global village’. In the last ten years alone, the number of international students here at Tilburg has increased tenfold. In 2004, just fifty international students graduated from Tilburg. Today, more than five hundred do so every year. Only this year, an international faction was formed within the student representative body. It seems appropriate to hold future meetings of the academic community entirely in English.

Almost everyone acknowledges the wonderful opportunities that internationalization represents. There are exchanges of knowledge and talent, while our ‘typically Dutch’ academic community is enriched by people and practices from other cultures. At the same time, internationalization brings certain challenges. This is evident from various ongoing social discussions, such as those concerning European politics, economic inequality (I refer to Piketty) and sustainability. There are some who question the value of globalization and the free market economy. They point to the advantages of the regional level of scale, contending that society can draw strength from a ‘local loyalty.’ In fact, global and regional need not be mutually exclusive. They can be complementary, used in combination to achieve the desired social, economic and cultural enrichment.

The appropriate response to internationalization has recently been discussed in depth by representatives of the Netherlands’ knowledge economy. Earlier this year, around one hundred leaders (and future leaders) met to consider four possible scenarios for our country’s universities. The titles given to those scenarios speak volumes: ‘national tradition’, ‘regional strength’, ‘international selection’ and ‘European variation’. Each scenario raises dilemmas which will no doubt be familiar to you. Will international ‘hyper-competition’ dominate, or will we reconsider the public values and interests which are linked with the close-at-hand: the region? That the future of the university should be subject to such intense debate is, I believe, a good thing.

The outcome of that debate is very difficult to predict. We know that scenarios rarely, if ever, materialize precisely as foreseen. This does not, however, absolve universities of their responsibility to arrive at a clear vision of how they will respond to future developments. They must make plans. Tilburg University has done precisely that. Our Strategic Plan 2014-2017 is the result of an in-depth consultation process and the conclusion is clear. We must dare to set ourselves apart, to maintain our own distinctive profile against the backdrop of increasing international competition. This entails making certain choices, which first and foremost must seek to maintain the high quality of education and research that we have worked so hard to attain.

We do **not** believe that we have to choose between the international and the regional. Our strategy stresses the importance of striking a balance, and the necessity of combining developments in both arenas. In short, we believe that regional cooperation will enhance our ability to compete at the international level. We wish to work alongside other educational institutes and partners in both the public and private sectors, not only within our own region but far beyond. Tilburg University has the good fortune to be located within a region of great innovative ability and potential, a region which is home to many prominent international companies, research institutes and education providers. Moreover, the public sector authorities within the region, both local and provincial, acknowledge the importance of cooperation. We have recently joined various other educational institutes in Brabant to produce a joint agenda. It will lead to various projects and initiatives designed to strengthen the entire region, based on the assumption that we will enjoy the ongoing support of the local and provincial authorities.

The first concrete results are beginning to materialize. As Mr Hirsch Ballin has already mentioned, Tilburg has joined forces with TU Eindhoven to establish the 'Tilburg Center for Transformation in Regional Law and Governance'. This research institute will examine the conditions which must be in place to ensure the success of a region. Its findings will offer a greater understanding of how we can maximize the innovative ability and attractive force of regions such as ours.

We already have an excellent example of how successful regional cooperation can be in the form of 'Silicon Valley'. The region has established a global reputation as the seedbed of groundbreaking innovations in the world of information technology. This is not solely due to the efforts of private sector companies. According to Professor Edward Glaeser, who was the keynote speaker at our Cobbenhagen Summit earlier this year, success is rooted in high-quality education. "*The Valley achieved its status by making its luck with education. (...) It has superb educational institutions and continues to invest in its schools and universities.*" Prof. Glaeser, who is Professor of Economics at Harvard University and Director of its Rappaport Institute, went on to state: "*The single best way to create a smart city is to create schools that attract and train able people.*" So, it all begins with drawing talented people to the region... and keeping them here. Clearly, those people will be far more inclined to stay in the region if it offers a good working environment, a good social infrastructure and, not least, opportunities for ongoing education and personal development. Our TIAS Business School enjoys a unique position in this regard, especially since the recent restructuring of its programs. This is the sort of environment in which exciting new developments will emerge and flourish, just as Facebook sprang up on the campus of Harvard University.

A few months ago, we entered into a formal partnership with various private sector companies and knowledge institutes in the region. The charter establishing this 'Alliance of Brabant' was signed in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Maximá, whose visit underlined the significance of the new initiatives in regional cooperation. It is my great pleasure to announce yet another new initiative today.

In partnership with TU Eindhoven, we intend to establish a Graduate School in Den Bosch. We shall combine our strengths to push forward the development of Data Science, or 'Big Data' as it is also known. That development is of crucial importance to modern society. In recent years, Tilburg University has established a very strong position in education and research examining the societal implications of Big Data. We enjoy a similarly strong position in the field of enterprise and entrepreneurship. Our colleagues in Eindhoven have addressed the same themes from the perspective of the technological disciplines, and they too have developed a very high level of expertise.

The announcement of this new partnership is being made simultaneously by Hans van Duijn, Rector Magnificus of TU Eindhoven, at the opening of that institution's academic year. Our joint Graduate School will focus on Data Science in relation to the various aspects of enterprise, legislation, governance and economics. Tilburg will lead the programs concerned with law, public administration and economic aspects, while Eindhoven will contribute its unparalleled knowledge of the IT side of Data Science, as well as the experience it has gained in setting up successful spin-offs. The School will be housed in the magnificent Mariënborg building, a former convent located within a few minutes' walk of the railway station. With the support of the City of Den Bosch and the Province of Noord-Brabant, the two universities can – and will – make this new Graduate School a great international success. It will be a place where very clever and ambitious young people are prepared for a future in which data in all its many forms will be of huge importance to society. The Graduate School will also help them to put their newly acquired knowledge into practice as they start and develop their own spin-off companies. A full feasibility study co-funded by Den Bosch, Noord-Brabant, Eindhoven and Tilburg is to commence shortly, whereupon the financial decision can be made before the end of this year. Another example of the value of regional cooperation is provided by the 'Econasium', an initiative launched as a pilot project by Tilburg University in association with the Odulphus Lyceum. This year, no fewer than thirteen secondary schools in Brabant will be taking part. The Econasium provides an additional challenge for students in higher vocational education, preparing them to study economics at degree level. It therefore expands the pool of future talent.

The overall intention is to create a region which, more than ever before, is a seedbed for young talent. Young people should not have to look beyond Brabant to find education of the very highest quality. Moreover, given the particularly broad approach that we at Tilburg have adopted under the motto 'Understanding Society', that education will provide a moral compass for the graduates of tomorrow. We offer an environment which allows independent minds the opportunity to come together, exchange ideas and knowledge, and develop new initiatives. This is not a 'given': it cannot be taken for granted. Good, innovative education demands ongoing investment. We cannot rest on our laurels but must further enhance the quality of our education for the benefit of future generations – your children and mine. They too will wish to earn a living, contribute to society, achieve their dreams and carve out a memorable career. Tilburg University is already working hard to improve its education. We do so through innovations such as the award-winning website [www.nederlandrechtsstaat.nl](http://www.nederlandrechtsstaat.nl), which provides access to academic commentary and debate about our national constitution. We also do so by striving to improve performance year on year. The results of the most recent National Student Survey suggest that the efforts of the teaching staff in this regard have not gone unnoticed. The ratings given by students at Tilburg are higher in 2014 than in 2013 for all aspects of education and coursework. Our overall score far exceeds the national average, whereupon we have risen from tenth place to sixth in the rankings.

We also continue to invest in research, once again pursuing innovation wherever possible and appropriate. We have many researchers who are recognized as among the best in Europe, and

in some cases the best in the world. For many years we have been successful in attracting research funding, with five new Veni grant applications approved in the last round. And then there is our multidisciplinary research institute TILEC, which in 2013 achieved official accreditation as a Center of Excellence. These are all notable achievements, but we realize that there is more to be done. It is increasingly difficult to compete in terms of salaries, and the new legislation announced by the government will do nothing to help the situation. Assessments of our faculties and research groups show that we must continue to focus on creating an attractive international research and business climate. It is most gratifying to note that the City of Tilburg has undertaken to provide even greater support in this regard.

As we invest in the quality of research and education, we notice that we can now count on increasing support from the private sector, particularly companies in our own region. One notable example is the DAF Technology Lab. Its 'augmented reality' applications enable us to undertake research and education in a manner which is unique in Europe. The Lab is part of the new education building and its facilities are available to all faculties. The DAF Technology Lab provides a good illustration of how internationalization (DAF is part of a global concern) and the region can reinforce each other.

Our alumni are also playing an increasingly prominent role. The Alumni Association has very generously agreed to pay half the costs of the outreach program for excellent students, thus ensuring its future.

Our robust agenda for education, research and valorization serves to prepare Tilburg University for the future. Our unique profile, encapsulated by the motto 'Understanding Society', continues to take shape but it requires further refinement. We have opted to examine social issues from the perspective of diverse disciplines. We offer excellent education in those disciplines and, with the help of technological innovations, are able to arrive at practical solutions. We invest in a university setting which makes all this possible. We are also in the process of strengthening the internal organization. Professor Willem Drees will take up his new appointment as Dean of the Tilburg School of Humanities on October 1. He is with us today. Welcome!

We have implemented the BEST program with a view to improving the standard of service provision, with even greater focus on education and research, to which additional funding will be devoted wherever possible.

Jan Hommen was installed as the new President of the Supervisory Board on June 1. The Board will be strengthened with the necessary academic expertise as soon as possible. All decisions and appointments are made in close consultation with the relevant representative bodies. On that note, I can add that Tilburg is now the proud recipient of the national Student Union's first '*Toffe Peer*' Award, given in recognition of our excellent management-student relations.

I am very gratified to note that we are making good overall progress in implementing our strategy. We are 'on course'. I am particularly pleased to be able to say this as we bid farewell to four members of the Supervisory Board, whose tenure therefore ends on a high note. Earlier today, the King's Commissioner for Noord-Brabant, Wim van de Donk, spoke at a somewhat smaller gathering to thank Ruud Lubbers, Mike Leers, Bernard Koeckhoven and Adriana Esmijer for all their hard work. On behalf of the Executive Board, I would now like to address a few words to the three gentlemen. Unfortunately, Adriana Esmeijer is unable to be with us due to personal commitments.

Mike,

Over the course of many years, latterly as Vice President and chair of the remuneration committee, you have made a most impressive contribution to our university. Soon after I took up my appointment, we met on a number of occasions. I recall fondly how involved, direct,

inspirational and down to earth you were. Through you, I extend thanks to the departing members of the Supervisory Board on behalf of the entire university. Thank you.

Bernard,

This is the second occasion that I have given a farewell speech in your honor. The first, you will recall, was when you stepped down from the board of KRO. With your broad expertise and experience, you too have contributed so much to Tilburg University. Over the course of the years, you and I have met on many occasions. I have always enjoyed those meetings, and I hope that I shall continue to do so for many years to come. Thank you.

And finally, Ruud. Perhaps not everyone realizes how important the relationship between the President of the Supervisory Board and his counterpart on the Executive Board is. I have always considered our relationship nothing short of excellent, at both the professional and personal level. I have learned much from you. Thank you for all the years that you have been involved in the life of our university, as professor, administrator and a source of inspiration. I know that I am not alone in saying that it has been marvelous to have such a mentor.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I shall conclude with one optimistic thought. Let us remember that in our region there is an entire world to be won!

Thank you.