

Speech New Year 2015

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

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Leading in Social Sciences and Humanities

Dear colleagues,

In a great book (2012) that accompanies the television series 'The Dutch Golden Age', authors Hans Goedkoop and Kees Zandvliet elaborate on the impact of the seventeenth century. To them, the Dutch Golden Age can be seen as the gateway to our modern world. The seventeenth century never fails to amaze. They note that 'it was a period in which the Netherlands became a laboratory for participatory research into globalization, migration, tolerance, consumerism, capitalism and many other things still so applicable to our world today.' (p.6).

Nowadays, participatory research is still important, given the content of the new vision on science that was published by the Dutch government in November last year. Although some themes remain the same, new themes do show up: data science, healthy aging and safe and secure societies.

Our university is very well positioned to address these themes, since we offer an excellent academic environment that specializes in the social sciences and humanities. In terms of research and education, but also in terms of the possibilities to have a real impact on society. Honorary doctorate professor John List made this very clear at our last Dies Natalis in November. His impressive work with new generations but also his vision on our university inspired many of us. The dean of the School of Economics and Management pointed out that the new strategy for his School was exactly that: to excel in research, education and valorization.

Let me say a few words about last year. We made good progress with the DAF Technology Lab and with the Graduate School on Data Science and Entrepreneurship in collaboration with the Eindhoven University of Technology. Tilburg University International joined the University Council and the draft Vision on Education was presented. We made enormous progress in our efforts to interest students to come and study at Tilburg University. Open Access became a very relevant topic and some promising results have been presented.

There were many successes, but we were on the other hand overwhelmed by the tragic loss of professor Willem Witteveen, his wife and daughter. We have dedicated a visiting fellowship and a student award to commemorate the lives and work of Willem and Marit, who died in the disaster with flight MH17 in Ukraine. We have renamed the common room into the professor Willem Witteveen Room. In December, we lost professor Hein van Duivenboden, who fought tirelessly against the illness ALS. Hein was a beloved professor of public administration at TIAS.

The Golden Age was a period of great breakthroughs in science and the Dutch were very internationally oriented. Leiden University was established in 1575 as the first university in the Netherlands. Nowadays, our universities become even more international. I have asked some of our international colleagues to share their experiences with us today.

2015 will be an exciting year. The executive agenda focuses on five issues. These are the implementation of the vision on education, a rise in market share, the Graduate School, our Leadership in times of change, the BEST-program and finally the so-called 'Go for Grants'-program with which we want to stimulate our funding. We realize that some colleagues are in doubt of their future job because of BEST and that not everything is clear yet. Please know that we are fully aware of your concerns.

Obviously, the appointment of the new Rector Magnificus is of great importance to all of us, since he or she will be the new leader of the academic community. Since I have only one colleague in the Executive Board, you can imagine that the appointment of our new Rector is also of great importance to me personally.

The last two years we were fortunate enough to receive the Dutch Queen twice. Interestingly enough, these were not the same persons! I do not expect the Royals to visit us this year, but you never know. We would be very grateful if this might happen again.

I am confident that the year to come will be very inspiring. Your research, teaching and all others projects, supported by our great support staff, is of mayor importance to science, to students and to society. The academic community and the support staff that we have, on this great green campus, is extraordinary in all its manifestations. I really enjoy listening to your stories!

The French artist Paul Signac once said: 'The Golden Age has not passed; it lies in the future.' And since the future is in the hands of our talented young people, I would like to introduce you to the first of four speakers that will share their experiences on living and working in the Netherlands and in Tilburg.

The first is Gabi Dodoiu from Romania.

I wish all of you an inspiring year, full of trust, great health and with the caring attention of your loved ones.