

## Transfer of Rectorship

Speech by Koen Becking

4 June 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have gathered here today for a very special reason: to mark the transfer of the rectorship of Tilburg University. It is a pleasure to welcome you all here today.

A special welcome goes to our King's Commissioner, Mr Wim van de Donk, to the Mayor of Tilburg, Mr Peter Noordanus, the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr Jan Hommen, and to all other friends and colleagues from the university, the academic world and the Brabant region.

Esteemed Rectores Magnifici, colleagues of Philip Eijlander from other universities, you too are especially welcome. Fellow presidents and administrators: how wonderful that you are able to join us! It is also a pleasure and privilege to welcome the entire Executive Board of TU Eindhoven. Your presence is confirmation of our excellent cooperation, not least our ambition of establishing a joint campus in Den Bosch. We have every confidence that this will indeed 'come to pass'.

The central figure in today's proceedings is our departing Rector Magnificus, Philip Eijlander. Philip has held the position for just over six years, a period in which Tilburg University has shown strong development in all areas: education, research and commercial knowledge transfer.

"Perseverance and effective time management. I am a great believer in having eight hours' sleep a night. That is important to me. There is nothing important enough to wake me up in the middle of the night! But that leaves sixteen hours in the day. You might spend one hour relaxing on the sofa, but then you still have fifteen hours for work and other useful things." These words are taken directly from an interview with Philip Eijlander, as reported in that fine publication *Univers*.

Philip has been of great significance to our academic community. That is true whether we are talking about Philip the person, his admirable and balanced approach to questions of integrity, his immense interest and involvement with students, his ambition to stimulate learning in all its facets, his efforts to maintain good relationships within the co-determination bodies, or his formidable sporting achievements. Did you know, ladies and gentlemen, that he once ran a marathon in two hours, thirty-six minutes and fifty-four seconds? It is very clear that we are saying farewell to a

remarkable man – someone with his heart in the right place and his head focused on the right issues.

Governing a university is a delicate undertaking. It is always tricky to find the right balance. Everything boils down to people and the relationships between them. It is all a question of trust and confidence. Our relationship is and always has been excellent. Philip and I have had full confidence in each other since the very first day we began working together. It was often as if we were speaking with one mind, with a keen focus on content but a softer approach to interpersonal relationships. Ours has been a genuinely collaborative effort, including our dealings with staff, students, researchers, alumni and everyone else connected with the university. And we have always enjoyed the full support of the tremendous people around us, the co-determination bodies and the governors.

It speaks volumes about Philip that he has been courageous enough to accept that life sometimes takes an unexpected but inevitable turn. Living with Parkinson's was gradually making the task of running the university even more of a challenge. It was no doubt an extremely difficult decision, but he and Ineke came to the conclusion that it would be better to stand down from the rectorship. There is, after all, far more to life than work alone. We talked about this on several occasions in a very open-hearted and personal way. The same can be said of our collaboration over the years: always open-hearted, personal and based on trust. That applies to every occasion on which we have met, from the very first conversation on the terrace of the Karel V Hotel in Utrecht to our talks in recent days.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The academic world has attracted much interest in recent months, not least due to the student 'sit-ins' at the University of Amsterdam's Maagdenhuis. Although the protestors' arguments are not always cogent or well articulated, and their demands are sometimes less than realistic, it is vital that the future of higher education is indeed the subject of serious discussion.

A university is a community of educators, researchers, students, support staff and alumni. To quote the former dean Arie de Ruijter, it is "an open, layered, multi-actor configuration in which many diverse interests and visions are at play at any given moment."<sup>1</sup> A university can claim to be 'academic' when its education is firmly rooted in high-quality research. The knowledge imparted to students is then always current and relevant.

In almost all Dutch universities, the balance is now being tipped slightly in favor of academic education as opposed to research. It is therefore necessary to invest in our teaching staff: the

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<sup>1</sup> Farewell address by Prof. Arie de Ruijter (2014, p. 8-9)

professors and lecturers. At the same time, we must devote more attention to the inflow of young people, our students. Are they being taught by fully qualified and competent teachers? Are they able to achieve the appropriate academic level? When they graduate and move into the world beyond the campus, will they be equipped to fulfil their responsibilities as true 'global citizens'?

One aspect that is frequently overlooked is that the academic community is shaped to some degree by physical circumstances: the campus. In this respect, we are extremely fortunate. Even so, we intend to invest yet more to achieve a truly 24/7 campus where people meet, interact and learn from each other. It will be a campus where personal development and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills come into their own. We believe that this campus should include a permanent reminder of everything that Philip Eijlander has done for Tilburg University. With your permission, Philip, we therefore propose the following.

[Video: dedicated bench]

Your bench – or '*Benkske*' – will stand alongside the bench that bears the name of the former chairman of the Board of Governors, Ruud Lubbers, with whom you worked for many years. Your name will have a permanent place on our campus and in *your* city, Tilburg.

Our university enjoys a prominent place within the city and region. It has a distinctive profile as a specialist university, an extremely attractive campus and an excellent culture of cooperation and joint enterprise. For all these reasons, I believe it is the type of institute which will attract ever greater interest from prospective students in future. Compactness of scale, high quality, attention to personal development and to social thinking: all go hand in hand with professional knowledge and excellent preparation for the job market. If this vision calls for some modification to governance arrangements or how we allocate our resources, we must be prepared to discuss such matters. We are fortunate to have a system of consultation and co-determination which permits constructive debate of the highest quality.

Nevertheless, all Dutch universities are facing a situation in which student numbers will rise but budgets will, at best, remain stable. They may even decrease. If there is no opportunity to select, or to selectively downsize or discontinue certain activities, the entire university system will eventually come to a grinding halt. The first indications are already visible: academic personnel face an excessive workload, career opportunities for teaching staff are limited, there is widespread dissatisfaction with temporary employment contracts, research proposals have relatively little chance of being approved, and the substantial burden of accountability has caused nothing but irritation and annoyance.

I hope that the current debates about the future of higher education will prompt further serious discussion of these topics. My choice is clear: manage by quality rather than quantity, devote greater attention to profiling, and provide greater opportunities to be selective. It is difficult to reconcile selection and quality on the one hand with accessibility and quantity on the other. A clear choice must be made!

I would like to say something else about Philip. Klaas Sijtsma, our dean of social sciences, once described Philip as 'the rector of deep deliberation' and 'the wise rector who could keep the deans in check'. Much has already been said about Philip's qualities and his significance to our university. I must also mention his marvelous sense of humor, which has often helped to break the ice in many difficult situations.

It also seems appropriate to mention that Philip is an inquisitive person, as indeed am I. We both like to know what is going on in the world and we have often discussed news and current affairs, whether in the fields of politics, sport, education... you name it. In the interests of transparency, I feel duty-bound to confess that our Monday morning meetings always included a discussion of the previous evening's episode of *The Farmer Wants a Wife!*

Many people have equally fond memories of working alongside you, Philip. They have contributed their recollections to this marvelous *Liber Amicorum*, which I would like to present to you now.

I am nearing my conclusion.

From the outset, you and I opted to place the emphasis on the combination of research and education. We developed and implemented a policy whereby we could increase investments in the quality of both research and education. The objective of the BEST quality program is to promote real cooperation, to enhance the quality of service provision, and to restructure the support services in order to allow the reallocation of some five million euros to education itself. Using the resource appropriation policy, and with the support of the faculties, we were able to release almost 25 million euros for education and research. This money will give further form and substance to the new education profile. Of the resources we receive, the proportion allocated to the faculties will increase by 3% in 2016. This will hopefully enable staffing levels to be maintained. There are two other projects on which we recently reached agreement with the deans: we intend to make substantial investments in career services for students, and we will launch a fellowship program for female academic staff. It is my great honor to announce that it is to be known as the Philip Eijlander Fellowship Program.

There is yet more good news with regard to gender equality. It has been decided to conduct a full study of remuneration policy. If the results reveal any differences in pay and benefits based solely

on gender, we shall take steps to resolve the situation as a matter of urgency in good consultation with the participation council.

This university has never shied away from debate. We have always pursued active and intensive consultation with students, professors, staff and alumni. The Tilburg academic community is a special and very pleasant setting in which to work. It has been a great privilege for me to have done so alongside Philip. I now look forward to forging an equally rewarding partnership with his successor, Emile Aarts, as we take further steps to secure a healthy future for Tilburg University. We enjoy an excellent starting position: our finances are sound and there has been a spectacular increase in applications from prospective students. Students show ever greater appreciation for our efforts, and according to the experts we have been the best specialist university in the Netherlands for many years. In a recent QS ranking, we emerged as the country's best university for Economics.

I really have reached my conclusion now. In recent months, Philip and I have been in the habit of closing meetings with a cheerful cry of 'onwards and upwards!' I can think of no better way to round off this official farewell: 'Onwards and upwards, Philip!'