Opening and welcome Dies Natalis 2016

Speech by Kristel Baele, President of the Executive Board of Erasmus University Rotterdam

103rd Dies Natalis, 8 November 2016

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, trustees, dear colleagues, students, ladies and gentlemen,

I am proud to stand here and welcome you, on behalf of the Executive Board and the Deans, to this 103rd Dies Natalis of Erasmus University Rotterdam.

I extend a special welcome and of course congratulations to our honorary doctors, Professor John Hauser and Professor Dan Ariely. Also, warm words of welcome to our guest speaker and alumna, Neelie Kroes. Welcome back!

For me, today is a super special occasion because it is my first Dies Natalis as President of the Executive Board. I am honoured that I may celebrate this anniversary together with you, the academic community of this great university.

This year’s Dies theme is Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Economy. A very apt theme, considering the time of year. Some of you might have already started doing your Saint Nicolas (Sinterklaas) or Christmas shopping. What gifts will we buy this year? Digital books or good old-fashioned hard copies? And do we buy offline, or online?

It’s also the time of year, here in The Netherlands, when we have to decide on our health-care insurance plan for 2017. And don’t forget, we need to start planning next year’s vacation as well! Lots of choices to be made - by you, by me, by all of us consumers.

But how do we behave as consumers? How do we make choices? Is a consumer really a ‘homo economicus’ or do we simply just follow our hearts?

The marketing science is developing rapidly. Thanks to Big Data, and advanced statistical methods and models, there is more detailed
information on consumer behaviour than ever before. Through neuromarketing we can even take a look inside the mind of a consumer. Companies can translate all these insights into new products and services.

Wonderful you might say, but having all this consumer data brings the need for greater social responsibility.

What information can be used - and what cannot?

Where do we draw the line?

Maybe we find out this afternoon...I warmly congratulate Rotterdam School of Management and Erasmus School of Economics on their excellent choice of this year’s theme and I am looking forward now to hearing the contributions of both John Hauser and Dan Ariely, and their honorary promoters, Stefan Streimersch and Ale Smidts.

Ladies and gentlemen, we also welcome this afternoon two influential women on stage. I refer to our guest speaker, Neelie Kroes, Chair of the Public Policy Advisory Board of Uber and former Eurocommissioner, who will deliver a speech, entitled 'Who wants to change the world'.

And to Saskia Krijger, (Advisor at the EUR Holding BV) who will receive the prestigious Athena Prize, for her extraordinary contribution to stimulating female talent in our academia.

And who knows, perhaps at the end of today, we will have yet another powerful and influential woman on stage, this time at the White House.

But first our Rector Magnificus, Professor Huibert Pols, will deliver this year’s Dies lecture, wherein he will share with you the contours of our University’s ambitious research plans.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a very festive and inspiring afternoon.

Huib, the floor is yours.