104th Dies Natalis 2017

Presentation Michel Muller, Chair of Erasmus Trustfonds

104th Dies Natalis, 8 November 2017

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me take you back to 1913, the year this great university was founded. De Nederlandsche Handels Hoogeschool was not the result of a governmental decision, made by a civil servant in The Hague.

It was founded on the initiative of Rotterdam families and businessmen, people who firmly believed that this city needed a place for higher education to educate their sons and daughters. In a unique effort, they put together the financial resources to launch the Erasmus Trustfonds and establish a Hoogeschool, which ultimately led to what this great university is today.

As one of our founding fathers said: “to create a laboratory where many talented people can work together.”

It wasn’t easy. Some people at the time thought it was a bad plan (‘onzalig plan’). But in the true Rotterdam spirit, we knew it should be done. We persevered.

And the university has flourished. We made it happen.

Since then, the Erasmus Trustfonds has fostered the growth and development of this university. We fund a variety of initiatives, like endowed chairs, research projects, scholarships and events, but we mostly do so in silence. Sometimes, we’re called ‘one of Rotterdam’s best kept secrets’.

Today, more than 100 years later, history repeats itself. Erasmus Trustfonds and Erasmus University are renewing the entrepreneurial spirit of our founders and the city of Rotterdam with a major leap forward – to create new and significant resources for the university.

First of all, we’re launching EUR Connect, an online platform for everyone involved with Erasmus University. It’s where alumni, students and others share ideas and insights or donate some of their time. My appeal: please join in, register, and open up your networks!

But there’s more.

Today we’re announcing our campaign to launch a substantial endowment fund. We want to create a significant and independent source of income that can be used for research and education at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

When we started this idea two years ago, people were quite sceptical about Dutch people donating to their universities. That was something Anglosaxon - not Dutch. However, the very positive reactions we got from our first meeting with alumni and Rotterdam families immediately pointed in the opposite direction. There is a strong culture of giving in Rotterdam. People like to donate to institutions that they trust. They want to make a difference. So maybe it’s more a culture of asking that’s lacking. And that’s why we decided to launch the endowment campaign “Challenge Accepted”.

A substantial endowment fund means we can support Erasmus University as a top university, with leading scientists performing research with social relevance, and providing education that matters.
A bigger endowment fund enables the university to conduct ground-breaking research, attract top scientists to Rotterdam and support the best students with scholarships.

A bigger endowment fund supports research excellence and future leaders whose work can help solve great societal challenges: living together in vital cities, reducing health and healthcare inequities, and fostering inclusive prosperity.

The best universities in the world have large endowment funds that come from philanthropic donations. Around the world there’s a growing willingness amongst alumni for giving back to their university. This is the principle of ‘learn, earn and return’.

The campaign we launch today is the first of its kind in The Netherlands.

We have already invited individuals, alumni, families and businesses to make a financial contribution to our endowment fund. Some of them are the descendants of the university’s founding families from 1913.

I’m glad to say that a lot of people have responded positively. These are people who want to make a difference and be part of making major initiatives happen. They want to make a significant contribution, contribute by creating something permanent for future generations.

Some of these major donors are here today. Thank you so much! You’ve truly set an example for many and inspired already others to support this campaign.

But I’d like to emphasise that every contribution, big or small, is very welcome in building our endowment fund. Please join our big leap forward.
Ladies and gentlemen, ambition is the word that typifies Rotterdam. We aim high.

Major steps and major initiatives require major investments.

By 2025, we want to have generated **100 million euros** for our Endowment Fund. That’s an unprecedented amount for a Dutch university, but it’s not unusual for universities in other countries that have multi-billion funds. We will work hard to reach that goal.

Thankfully, we are already attracting financial contributions. Together with Rector Magnificus Pols, I’d like to present how much we have come so far. We are very proud of the total amount that has been generated so far by our distinguished alumni and Rotterdam families: 26 million euro!

Ladies and gentlemen, today is about meeting challenges. And today we say: Challenge Accepted! The Challenge to trying to solve world’s problems and also the challenge to generate 100 million for the endowment fund in order to provide a stable income stream for world-class research and education that matters.

Ladies and gentlemen, raise your hand if you are also ready to accept the challenge.

Thank you.