

**Speech New Year's Reception,**

**7 January 2020, Rotterdam**

**Hans Smits, Interim Chair of the Erasmus University Rotterdam Executive Board**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

On behalf of the Executive Board I welcome you to our New Year's reception. It is good to see you all here today. I always feel that the Christmas holiday is a good time to contemplate the past year, recharge ones batteries and make plans for the time to come. To press the reset button, so to say. I hope you all have had a great time with family and loved ones and that you are well rested and ready for the new year.

Here we are at the beginning of a new year and at the beginning of a new decade.

At the start of the past decade, at the end of 2009, the world was a very different place. We sometimes lose sight of how much things change, but if you look at events in the year 2009, the changes become more apparent. Do you remember:

- public life in the Netherlands came to a halt because of extensive snowfall, I repeat: extensive snowfall;
- the most popular phone in 2009 was the Nokia N96, it had no touchscreen, Tesla was still a startup and Barack Obama moved into the White House;
- The youngest millennials were still in primary education;
- and the predictions for the new decade were that we would probably develop a more digital lifestyle. I think it is safe to say that we can leave out the word probably.

Look where we are now, the global issues of 2019 presented, predicted or even contradicted themselves ten years ago. It makes me all the more curious as to what the president of this university will say in his or her speech in 2030. Maybe there will be a hologram speaking and you will be watching through your open-ear audio glasses from somewhere else with a 3D printed glass of champagne. Who knows?

There have been a lot of highlights last year, which we could and would not have achieved without all of you. Therefore I would like to thank you all for your hard work, motivation and inspiration and for your tremendous commitment. Let us look at a few memorable moments.

2019 was the year in which we celebrated that it was 50 years ago that Jan Tinbergen received the Nobel Prize in Economics. And what a wonderful coincidence that last November we welcomed another Nobel Prize winner in the same discipline to our stage in the person of Esther Duflo, when she received her honorary doctorate.

And of course more prizes and fellowships have been awarded, among which were two Vici Grants. We also had a number of staff changes in strategic positions:

- The process for the recruitment of a new President has started. The Supervisory Board hopes to present you my successor in the spring.
- The same goes for the new dean for Erasmus School of Economics. We will be interviewing candidates very soon.
- We are thankful that Frank van der Duijn Schouten has agreed to be interim dean for both Erasmus School of Economics and Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication and we have a new dean, Ansgar Richter at the Rotterdam School of Management.
- We have also welcomed Marijke Weustink as the new director of Real Estate Services, Mireille Spapens as the new director for Marketing and Communication and Margo Strijbosch as director of Research Services.

To them, and to all of you who have joined us in 2019, you are very welcome.

Personally, I prefer looking ahead. But there are many examples of how last year's highlights will resonate firmly into the new year and will result in even more highlights. I will take you through them:

In September of last year we launched Strategy 2024, marking the start of a new phase; the implementation of our strategic ambitions. This means not only putting our Erasmian values into effect, but also building on the experience and working methods that were acquired during the strategy design process: interdisciplinary, inclusive, from the outside-in, including the entire community in a co-creative way. So I invite all of you to feel involved and responsible during this next phase. We will do everything to keep you informed.

But... during the implementation we must be critical. We cannot just add new things to do and new subjects to focus our attention on. We also need to have the courage to stop doing certain things. In order to prevent the work pressure from increasing, we will have to make clear choices. In the near future you can expect a few staff additions to the Strategic Office, as well as an increase in our efforts when it comes to Public Affairs, in the Rotterdam region as well as in political The Hague.

Another highlight that will bear fruit in 2020: LDE. An important alliance between Leiden University, TU Delft and Erasmus University, building on the multidisciplinary coalitions in research and education that exist since 2012. The most important aspect of the strategy is the joint effort in solving significant social issues.

In yet another alliance, Erasmus University Rotterdam, together with TU Delft and Erasmus MC, is exploring opportunities to intensify the collaboration between these three partners. This exploration builds on the so-called convergence-philosophy, the philosophy behind Strategy 2024: in order to have societal impact, we need to tackle problems with solutions that transcend scientific disciplines, by allowing scientists from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds to join forces. Specifically, the proposed collaboration aims at stimulating education and research on Urban, Delta, and metropolitan issues, on health-technology issues, and link the fundamental and applied sciences of Artificial Intelligence and digitalization.

The three institutions and their focus areas very much complement each other. The extended collaboration could also provide an impulse for knowledge development in the Rotterdam-Delft region. Rotterdam major Ahmed Aboutaleb, amongst others, has shown his support. Decisions on structural and organisational embedding are foreseen in the first half of 2020. The collaboration also aims to further strengthen the LDE Strategic Alliance.

And there is still more to say about Erasmus University and alliances. Right after this reception, which unfortunately I will have to leave earlier than I would like, I will attend a signing session with partners within the Make It Happen Brand Alliance. Together with the municipality of Rotterdam, Port of Rotterdam, Erasmus MC and Rotterdam Partners, a new agreement will be signed. Within this alliance, which includes dozens of brands, we work to strengthen the image of Rotterdam and our organizations nationally and internationally. We also aim to attract students, academics, companies, investors, visitors, citizens and events. And speaking of events, as you know Rotterdam will host the Eurovision Song Contest in May, which will draw the attention of 180 million people around the world to our city. This means various opportunities for our university to showcase our excellent research.

I would also like to say a few words about the relationship with the University Council. The Executive Board will do everything within its power to keep having the same constructive dialogue as we have had over the last year. I invite the University Council to keep being critical and to work together with the Board for the benefit of the university. Of course the same applies to the Supervisory Board. May our cooperation, for the sake of this university, be as fruitful and constructive as always.

As I said, the highlights of 2020 will be due to the actions we have started in 2019. Or, in the case of the Rotterdam School of Management, the last 50 years. Over the past 5 decades RSM has firmly established its reputation as one of Europe's most international and innovative business schools. We are very proud of that. Various events will commemorate this special anniversary and I am sure we will hear about them shortly.

Now, on a slightly different note: I am sure that you have read about the events at Maastricht University during the Christmas holidays. They were cyberhacked, resulting in students not being able to access the system, so they could not study and prepare for their exams. You can be sure that we will be increasing our vigilance and our digital security, both technically and in terms of staff.

Furthermore, a letter has been sent to the deans of ESHCC and ESSB, in which is stated that the merger between both faculties will no longer be considered as an option for strengthening the schools. We will be discussing how we will proceed very shortly and we will, of course, keep you informed.

What I also need to mention is that the Executive Board wants the university to be a safe place for students and staff, with professional behavior as the absolute standard and only option to create a sense of well-being for everyone involved. This is a responsibility we all share. Which brings me to this: where I used to work before I came here, I always liked giving a new year a certain theme and we have chosen it to be: taking responsibility. We are all responsible for what happens at Erasmus University. And the Executive Board invites you all to take that responsibility, whether it is in the implementation of the strategy, keeping hackers at bay or providing a safe and secure environment to work and to study.

That's it from me. Now, I would like to give the floor to my dear colleague Roelien Ritsema van Eck for the presentation of the Top Support Award.

Thank you.

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Na prijsuitreiking door Roelien (samen met Rutger en Roelien op het podium):

I would also like to congratulate the prize winners. Thank you for your wonderful achievement for the Erasmus University.

I hope you all have a glass, so we can officially welcome the new year.

Dear colleagues, we wish you all health and happiness, both at work and at home.  
We wish you all: HAPPY NEW YEAR!