

Ladies and gentlemen,

Zuid-Holland is a region in transition. From an industrial region towards a Next Economy. This requires huge steps towards climate resilience, a shift towards renewable energy and the development of a circular economy. All major European challenges that require innovative solutions, partners joining forces and delivering results.

Our regional 'Roadmap Next Economy' is part of a broader regional investment strategy. Together, we are working hard on speeding up the realization of key projects. The province of Zuid-Holland is for example investing heavily in the energy transformation with a revolving fund of €100 million and joining forces through a regional energy innovation board. We are developing a regional system using the residual heat from our industries near the port of Rotterdam, using geothermal energy and are connecting the system with housing areas and with our Horticulture cluster, or the greenports as we call them in the Netherlands. We hope to trigger investments by the national government, the European Union and of course, private parties. And, pooling the knowledge of the triple helix partners in a regional strategy.

Our region and other regions in Europe are taking the lead in realizing European ambitions. Zuid-Holland has initiated a partnership along the Trans European Networks. It is about "cleaning up" the European fleet of inland vessels. About the introduction of LNG as a cleaner fuel. Companies like Heineken and Shell support the shift towards cleaner transport. The port of Rotterdam is a major European player to make this transition work. It is about investment but also about regulation.

The support from different Funds but also from different Directorates within the European Commission is necessary. How can we speed up this process?

Zuid-Holland is well positioned among Europe's vanguard regions tackling European challenges. We invent, make, test and sell innovations for a strong and livable metropolitan delta. But we could do even better. We need to turn our best ideas into new jobs, businesses and opportunities. While the number of start-ups created in Europe is on a par with competitors such as the United States, Europe lags behind in disruptive innovation and in scaling start-ups into world-beating businesses. A cross border smart specialization approach and the development of an European field lab infrastructure might be the answer to this challenge.

Therefore, we have to do things differently and join forces. Our presence today as triple helix partners shows that we stand united in Zuid-Holland. In July last year we presented our regional investment plan to our prime minister and today we hope you will join us in supporting a renewed and proactive European partnership. We share the same ambition; now we have to answer the question: where is the beef? In other words: we need to deliver result!

I am curious to hear about your experiences in blending regional investments with European funds. What could be changed for European policies to be able to focus more on integral next economy plans? And how can regions join forces to speed up the industrial modernisation process, to combat climate change and to make the transformation towards a circular economy work. I wish you all an inspiring debate.