

Toespraak minister Bonnici, Leeuwarden 12 juli 2018

Excellencies,

Welcome to Fryslân. Merĥba lil Fryslân.

Welcome to Leeuwarden.

Welcome to the other European Capital of Culture.

It is an honor to welcome you here in the government building of the province of Fryslân.

This year in this building we've welcomed visitors from various countries.

From China to the United States.

I've visited your ambassador in the Hague.

We were very pleased that your excellency mister Debattista was present in January during our mini-conference about multilingualism, with representatives from Wales, Ireland, the Faroe Islands and the Basque Country.

It was great to share our experiences about multilingualism.

Multilingualism is one of our main topics in the year of Cultural Capital.

Fryslân is a multilingual province.

We have our own language, the Frisian language.

It is very important to us.

We also use it in the parliament of our province.

We will take a brief look in our historic meeting room later on.

All those international visits show that Cultural Capital connects.

Not only this year, but also in the past years and in the years ahead of us.

I read the report about how successful Cultural Capital has been in Valletta so far.

Hundreds of thousands of people visited your events.

15 percent more tourists. More jobs. A lot of media attention.

And the year is far from over.

I compliment you with these great results.

We experience the same positive effects.

In the first quarter of this year 200.000 people visited our events.

A lot of extra tourists have come to our region, especially from foreign countries.

Right now the exhibition about the famous artist Escher in the Frisian Museum draws a lot of visitors.

Escher was born here in Leeuwarden.

The museum decided to extend its opening hours to accommodate the large number of people who want to visit the exhibition.

As you know Cultural Capital is not only about art.

I already mentioned multilingualism as one of the main topics.

But also biodiversity and water technology are among the important subjects that we are discussing.

That debate will continue, also in the years to come.

We hosted a lot of national and international conferences.

For example the international World Trade Center organisation held its annual general assembly in Leeuwarden, bringing 250 representatives of 60 countries to Fryslân.

In May the Frisian regional public broadcaster Omrop Fryslân hosted the annual conference for 33 European regional public networks.

It started with a reception in this building.

We experienced once more that the status as European Capital of Culture really puts our regions and cities in the international spotlight.

The question of the freedom of press was one of the subjects we talked about.

Also in regard to the discussion about the tragic death of the journalist in Malta and comments that has been made about it by the chairman of the Valletta 2018 organisation.

I stated that the press is a very valuable asset to our democracy.

That we cannot tolerate anybody who is in disregard of the media.

The media has a role as a watchdog, but we as a government have to guard the media.

Therefore I am very grateful that you decided to come to Leeuwarden in the light of the discussion about the freedom of press.

And that you are willing to discuss about it in the public spotlight.

To me it shows that we share the same opinion about the importance of the press.

I also see it as the next step to further improve our relationship.

A relationship that already intensified in the past years and will further develop in the upcoming years.

We will be forever connected through the Capital of Culture.

Our goal is to make the most out of this special year, also in our relationship with Malta.

Thanks again for coming to Fryslân. Tige tank dat jo hjir binne.

Nirringrazzjak għall ġejjin.