

## **Europe? Let's put our own house in order first**

Europe. I don't really want to talk about it in depth, but just mention it. Ultimately, from a 'global' perspective there are sufficient reasons for reinforcing trade and for having a stronger voice with respect to the other world powers. But from a 'local' perspective, there are plenty of reservations about the plethora of rules that are imposed and their interpretation. These result in excessive procurement rules and an exaggerated fear of state aid. Striving for a 'level playing field' does not always produce the intended result. Maybe it does within Europe itself, but what about the rest of the world? What boundaries do we think we can still set today?

'Think global and act local' has been the success formula that has enabled many companies to grow internationally. In addition: focus. Not trying to do everything all at once. Implement something, and then either make a real success of it or discontinue it in due course.

And today, with all the international dynamics, a long-term vision is more important than ever. With a high implementation tempo and by selecting clear themes that ultimately serve the same purpose: continuity for the company, opportunities for growth and achieving an ambition that is attractive to young talent.

And that also applies to our country. Aside from Europe, there is still plenty to do in the Netherlands. Let's put our own house in order first. We need to start investing again, and we are already behind schedule. We still spend too much time talking, rather than doing. National government and the provinces are encouraging fragmentation by providing financial support for all sorts of very similar initiatives. We have a lot of good universities, but they are now starting to compete with the business world because their own revenue model doesn't work any more. We keep patents on the shelf, while innovation should be focused precisely on implementation. We know the gas is running out and that our social safety net depends on it, but we are not yet working on a new business model for Netherlands Inc. And we think you can stimulate employment with all kinds of subsidies and grants, laws and regulations. The result being that this complicated system is controlled by a variety of different bodies. Whereas the responsibility for employment should really be put back where it belongs: with the people themselves.

And I know one thing for sure: if the government doesn't become the driver of these processes, the cities will do it. That's where the people live who want to do things differently. That's where you can find the basis for all sorts of new business models. People who want to help solve environmental problems with new technical possibilities and an integrated approach. Together with the city councils. But without a national vision of where we are going, even that will take too long.

If we want to change things in the Netherlands, we need entrepreneurs with ambition, officials with courage and politicians with vision to take us to the 'next level'. The entrepreneurs recently took the first step: the VNO-NCW (Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers), MKB-Nederland (Dutch Federation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises) and LTO Nederland (Dutch Federation of Agriculture and Horticulture) have made a statement with the NL Next Level initiative, and over the next few months proposals will be developed on how entrepreneurs can contribute to the Netherlands of the future. These proposals will focus on such topics as the Netherlands as a Sustainable Urban Delta, entrepreneurship, innovation, digitization and 'main ports'.

Now it is up to the politicians to take the next step. I shall look forward to seeing this in the parties' manifestos for the general election.

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