

Speech Lily Knibbeler, Director General, National Library of the Netherlands

Good morning ladies and gentlemen and a warm welcome to all of you in the KB, National Library of the Netherlands, here in The Hague. The KB is proud to be the home for this European Conference, taking place during the Dutch presidency of the EU, with this focus on Empowerment and the role of the libraries.

My name is Lily Knibbeler, I am the director general of this fortunate institution.

The National Library has been a meeting point for people from across the world for over 200 years. Their motivation for coming here has varied from studying in a tranquil environment, using our collections for research, exploring our cultural heritage to participating in discussions. To stimulate people's personal education, to empower them, to guarantee the freedom to form one's opinion and to provide the right conditions in order to do so, now and in the future, we count among our most fundamental drives.

Recently, in addition to the tasks in the domain of scholarly communication and written cultural heritage, we have also gained the responsibility for the digital public library in the Netherlands and we are now set on building a National Digital Library encompassing the three domains we are active in.

In its recent public library law, the Dutch government has explicitly stipulated the tasks of a public library: making knowledge and information available, offering opportunities for development and education, encouraging people to read and to introduce them to literature, art and culture, and organizing meetings and debates. Under this new law, the KB not only has a new digital responsibility, but also a coordinating role within the network of public libraries.

The National Library strongly believes in networks. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we believe, that the strength of an organization as ours is determined by its role and position in networks.

Yesterday you have been welcomed in the impressive public library of The Hague. Today you are our guests in the National Library. Many international and library related organizations are housed in this building of the National Library, here in the Hague. The Hague is the only World library capital. Nowhere else is there a city home to so many major international library organizations, such as IFLA, EBLIDA, LIBER and Europeana. Here the interest of libraries and their policies are formulated and defended, especially at an international level. Here new concepts and services for citizens worldwide are developed and distributed. The Hague benefits directly from this international expertise and, vice versa, its international image strengthens the visibility of the library world.

In striving after our common goals - empowering people, facilitating and safeguarding the freedom of forming one's opinion and stimulating reading and research, the National Library of the Netherlands, as I said, strongly believes in the power of organized collaboration, virtual and face to face, and I am therefore very pleased to see librarians and policy makers from all over Europe gathered here together.

As you all are aware, the Netherlands has the honor of holding the presidency of the Council in the EU for the first half of this year. During this period, the Netherlands' guiding principles are a Union that focuses on the essentials, a Union that focuses on growth and jobs through innovation, and a Union that truly connects with civil society. The crucial role for libraries in empowering Europe is today's main theme and needs no further explanation.

By working together at a national and European level we can achieve coordinated policies, strategies and practices leading to the greatest possible added value of libraries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Now all that remains for me to do is to wish you a successful and inspiring conference!