

Speech Paul Polman
on the occasion of acceptance of the
Treaties of Nijmegen Medal 2018
5 April 2018

Introduction

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Becoming the recipient of the Treaties of Nijmegen Medal 2018 is a great honour, especially at such a special time, with Nijmegen named this year's Green Capital of Europe.

And to follow former laureates like Jacques Delors, Umberto Eco, Neelie Kroes and the European Court for Human Rights is particularly humbling.

Of course, I am also delighted because Nijmegen plays an important role in the legacy of Unilever.

Anton Jurgens, founder of the Jurgens Margarine Factory in Oss, moved to Nijmegen in 1904.

He was attracted by the beauty of the city.

And in 1917 the company followed suit when it decided to move the Headquarters of the 'N.V. Anton Jurgens Vereenigde Fabrieken' from Oss to Nijmegen.

The Head office, based in the former Hotel Keizer Karel, remained there until 1928.

Meanwhile, in 1912, Anton's brother, Frans, acquired a centuries old estate called 'Heyendael', commissioning the architect Charles Estourgie to build a grand villa on the estate, in Dutch neo-Renaissance style.

In 1949, the Sint-Radboud Foundation acquired the Heyendael-estate from the Jurgens-family for the university.



Vrede van Nijmegen Penning

To this day, the Jurgens-villa, or ‘het kasteeltje’ as it often called, is still considered to be the symbol of the Radboud University.

These historic links make today’s occasion in this beautiful Saint Stephens’s Church even more special.

The Treaties of Nijmegen

It is appropriate to reflect today on the remarkable legacy of the Treaties of Nijmegen from 1678 and 1679, and their enduring significance.

200 years after the French Revolution of 1789 – one of the great turning points in history – the Chinese Prime Minister was asked about the significance of the event.

He famously replied: “*Too soon to tell*”

I think we already understand the historical significance of the Treaties of Nijmegen, and lessons they hold for the future.

The Treaties represent a crucial moment in European history, the ending of a long period of interconnected European conflict.

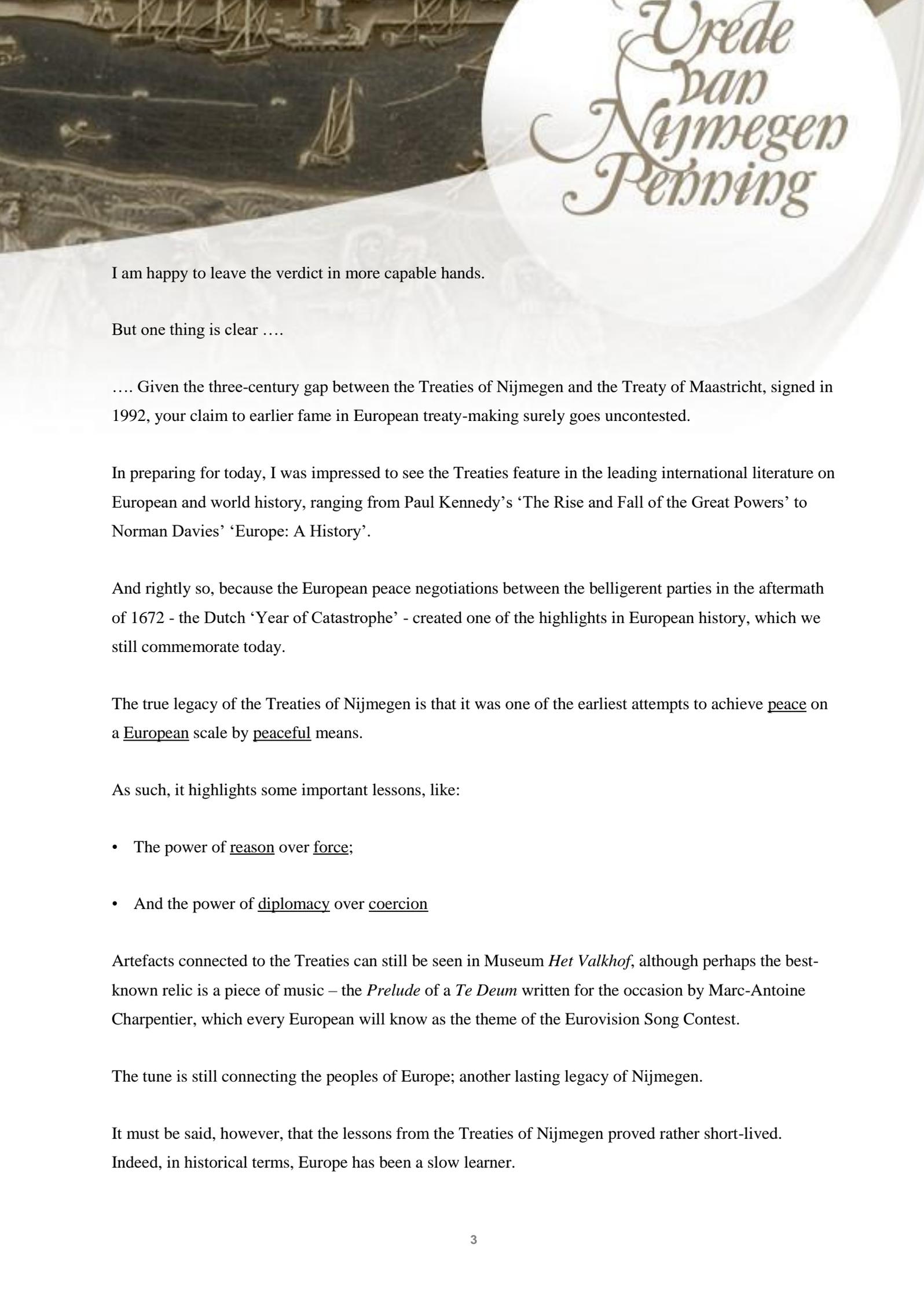
For a brief moment, Nijmegen was the political centre of Europe.

Quite surprising given its size at the time.

That is not to say that the city lacked historical significance on a European scale. Quite the contrary.

In medieval times, Charles the Great frequently resided in the city, and the Brothers van Limburg, creators of the seminal Book of Hours ‘*Les tres riches heures du Duc de Berry*’ - notwithstanding their name - actually came from ... Nijmegen.

Moreover, there is the long-running debate battle between Nijmegen and Maastricht to prove which is the oldest in the land, which will doubtlessly continue.



Vrede van Nijmegen Penning

I am happy to leave the verdict in more capable hands.

But one thing is clear

.... Given the three-century gap between the Treaties of Nijmegen and the Treaty of Maastricht, signed in 1992, your claim to earlier fame in European treaty-making surely goes uncontested.

In preparing for today, I was impressed to see the Treaties feature in the leading international literature on European and world history, ranging from Paul Kennedy's 'The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers' to Norman Davies' 'Europe: A History'.

And rightly so, because the European peace negotiations between the belligerent parties in the aftermath of 1672 - the Dutch 'Year of Catastrophe' - created one of the highlights in European history, which we still commemorate today.

The true legacy of the Treaties of Nijmegen is that it was one of the earliest attempts to achieve peace on a European scale by peaceful means.

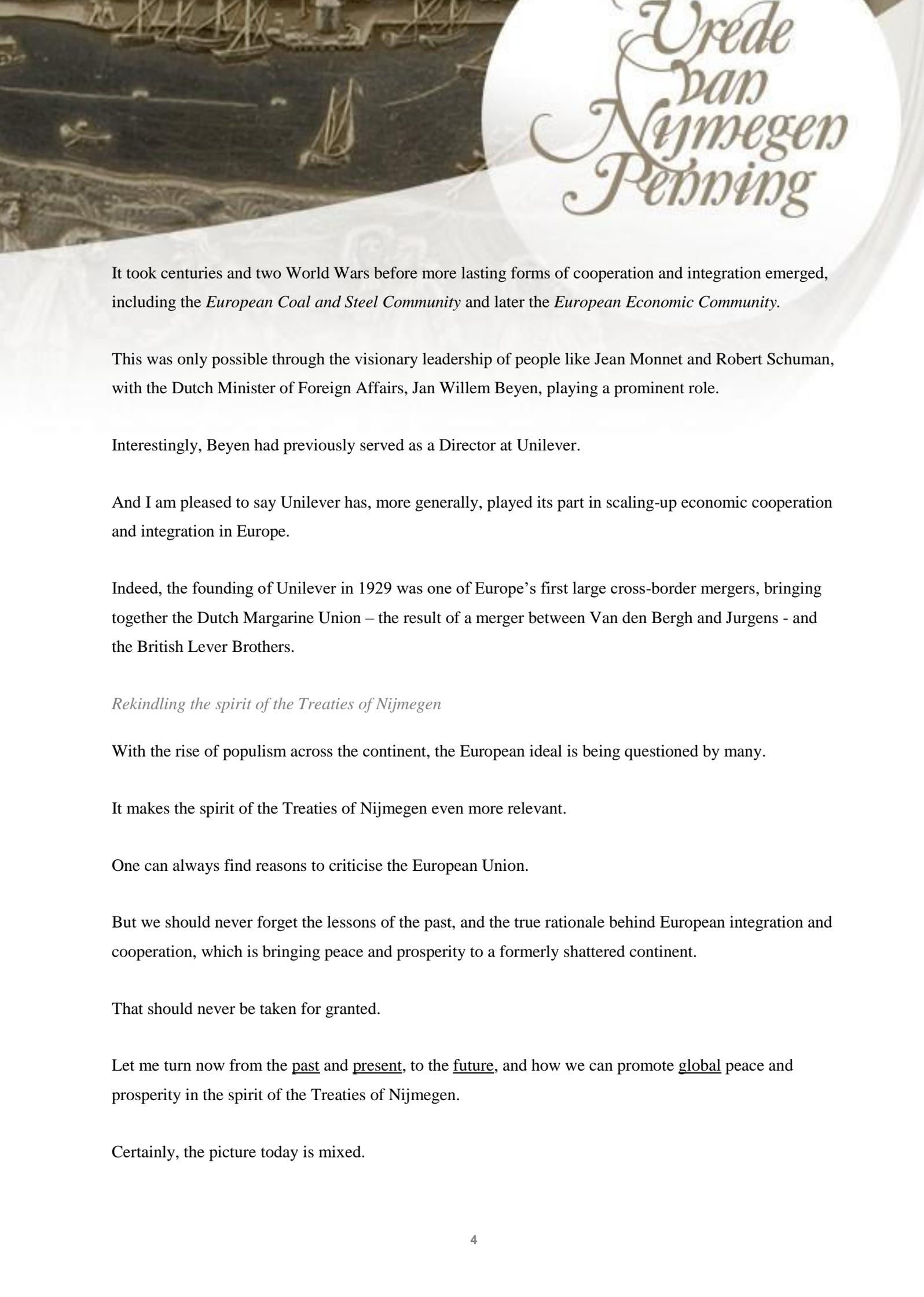
As such, it highlights some important lessons, like:

- The power of reason over force;
- And the power of diplomacy over coercion

Artefacts connected to the Treaties can still be seen in Museum *Het Valkhof*, although perhaps the best-known relic is a piece of music – the *Prelude* of a *Te Deum* written for the occasion by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, which every European will know as the theme of the Eurovision Song Contest.

The tune is still connecting the peoples of Europe; another lasting legacy of Nijmegen.

It must be said, however, that the lessons from the Treaties of Nijmegen proved rather short-lived. Indeed, in historical terms, Europe has been a slow learner.



Vrede van Nijmegen Penning

It took centuries and two World Wars before more lasting forms of cooperation and integration emerged, including the *European Coal and Steel Community* and later the *European Economic Community*.

This was only possible through the visionary leadership of people like Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, with the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jan Willem Beyen, playing a prominent role.

Interestingly, Beyen had previously served as a Director at Unilever.

And I am pleased to say Unilever has, more generally, played its part in scaling-up economic cooperation and integration in Europe.

Indeed, the founding of Unilever in 1929 was one of Europe's first large cross-border mergers, bringing together the Dutch Margarine Union – the result of a merger between Van den Bergh and Jurgens - and the British Lever Brothers.

Rekindling the spirit of the Treaties of Nijmegen

With the rise of populism across the continent, the European ideal is being questioned by many.

It makes the spirit of the Treaties of Nijmegen even more relevant.

One can always find reasons to criticise the European Union.

But we should never forget the lessons of the past, and the true rationale behind European integration and cooperation, which is bringing peace and prosperity to a formerly shattered continent.

That should never be taken for granted.

Let me turn now from the past and present, to the future, and how we can promote global peace and prosperity in the spirit of the Treaties of Nijmegen.

Certainly, the picture today is mixed.

On the one hand, this is arguably the best time in human history to be born.

Most of us are living longer, healthier lives, with more children surviving past the age of five, and more people than ever receiving education.

Yet many don't feel that way.

Charles Dickens, writing about two other famous European cities, Paris and London, wrote in *A Tale of Two Cities* that:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

Certainly, there are many challenges on the other side of the ledger.

Poverty, climate change, inequality, conflict and alienation.

If we don't tackle these global challenges, they have the potential to overwhelm us.

And any system where too many get left behind is sowing the seeds of its own destruction.

The good news is that in 2015 the world came together to adopt the UN Sustainable Developments Goals.

17 Goals to irreversibly eradicate poverty in a sustainable and equitable way.

A roadmap to a better world.

In the run up to the adoption of the SDGs, I had the honour to serve on the UN Secretary's General High-Level Panel to advise on their formulation.

It followed my company's earlier response to addressing these challenges, set out in our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan.

In our view, free markets and capitalism are worth defending, but not without a moral basis, a point brilliantly captured by Victor Frankl, the Auschwitz survivor, when in his 1946 book, 'Man's search for meaning' he wrote:

“What we forgot to do when we erected the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast, is to erect a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast”

And that is what the current system is need of: a move to responsible capitalism.

In our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan , we have set out a commitment to grow our business in ways never done before, by decoupling our environmental footprint and increasing our positive social impact.

Ambitious?

Yes certainly, but when your brands are used over 2.5 billion times a day, you have to understand your role in - and responsibility to - society.

Our purpose is to work for the billions, not for the billionaires.

Likewise, the SDGs are a call to do exactly that.

But we need to act fast. 2030 is less than 5000 days away.

The time of policy declaration has passed. The time for implementation has arrived.

That means working together, in a spirit of collective partnership.

In this, governments have a key role to play, and I am delighted that Minister Kaag for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is here today.

The Netherlands has been a leading light internationally in promoting the SDGs. We should be grateful for that.

But it doesn't stop at the level of national governments or international agencies.

We also need the active involvement of regional and local government.

So it is great that the Province of Gelderland has made sustainable food production a priority, and has just launched its Climate initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with 55% by 2030.

Several Dutch municipalities have already declared themselves to be a *Global Goals City*, or are in the process of doing so, including the City of Nijmegen.

I hope others will follow.

That brings me to the role of companies, because without business we cannot deliver the SDGs.

The total level of official development aid is around 160 billion US dollars. Yet implementation the SDGs is estimated to need 3-5 trillion US dollars.

We need to move from the billions to the trillions. And only business can get us there.

The Business & Sustainable Development Commission – set up in 2016 and bringing together 40 CEOs – has galvanised action by showing the business opportunity the SDGs represent.

Their report '*Better Business, Better World*' calculated the opportunity to be more than US\$12 trillion across key economic systems, with the potential to create up to 380 million jobs by 2030.

And there is a huge cost to not acting.

Indeed, the cost of inaction is already starting to exceed that of action.

The International Monetary Fund has established that climate change alone is costing the global economy 5.3 trillion US dollars a year.

And the cost of conflict prevention and war is estimated to be at least double that – every year!

According to one study, most profits in the consumer goods industry could be wiped out in 30-50 years, and even earlier in Foods, if we don't move to more sustainable business models.

Engaging with the SDGs also provides an opportunity to restore trust – badly undermined over recent years by the behaviour of some.

The latest Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that only 15% of the general population believe the present system is working, while 53% do not.

Yet, trust is what binds any society together.

Business has to step-up. It cannot be a bystander in a system that gives it life in the first place.

People rightfully expect business to be an agent of change.

Indeed, more than 60% believe a company can take actions to increase profitability, while at the same time improving economic and social conditions.

Many Dutch companies are leading the way by adopting sustainable growth business models aimed at long term value creation, and by playing an advocacy role.

The Dutch Sustainable Growth Coalition, for example, has taken a public stand with a call to put the SDGs at the heart of Dutch Government policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the 17th century, at the time of the signing of the Treaties of Nijmegen, the Netherlands was famous for its 'VOC-mentality'.

I hope our country's attitude in the 21st century will be remembered by later generations as having been the era of another sort, of the Dutch 'SDG-mentality'.

Because our country has so much to offer.

Partnerships, as I mentioned, are crucial to make the SDGs happen. The Dutch are well known for their capacity to closely work together, both within the public and private domain, as well as in public-private partnerships.

The nine Dutch Topsectors, including Topsector Agri & Food and the Topsector Life Sciences & Health, are leading in the world, and serve as great examples of successful partnering.

The Netherlands can make a significant contribution on the world stage, while at the same time growing the economy, based on the motto:

'Global Challenges, Dutch Solutions'.

At Unilever, we will continue to focus on the SDGs where we can make the biggest contribution, including the need to change global food and land-use systems.

For example, through the *Food and Land Use Coalition* (FOLU) - which I have the honour of chairing - we are addressing the issue through public-private partnership.

Our objective is to ensure sustainable and nutritious food for all, while combating climate change.

Next to companies, the role of investors is also key.

The call by the CEO of Blackrock, the world's largest asset management fund, for companies to pursue long-term value creation is encouraging and a sign that financial markets are gradually beginning to move.

I also don't want to miss the opportunity to emphasise the vital role of academia.

Continued academic underpinning of the SDGs will significantly strengthen the probability of achieving the desired outcomes.

I had the privilege of closely working with many gifted academics in recent years, including Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University's *Center for Sustainable Development* in New York, who has done so much to advance the SDG-agenda on the global level.

In the Netherlands, I am glad to see the Dutch National Science Agenda (*Nationale Wetenschapsagenda*) has closely linked its research-priorities to societal challenges, thereby making an important contribution to the Global Goals, and bridging the gap between science and society.

Conclusion

To conclude, everyone's contribution is much needed, be it governments, business, NGO's, academia and individual citizens.

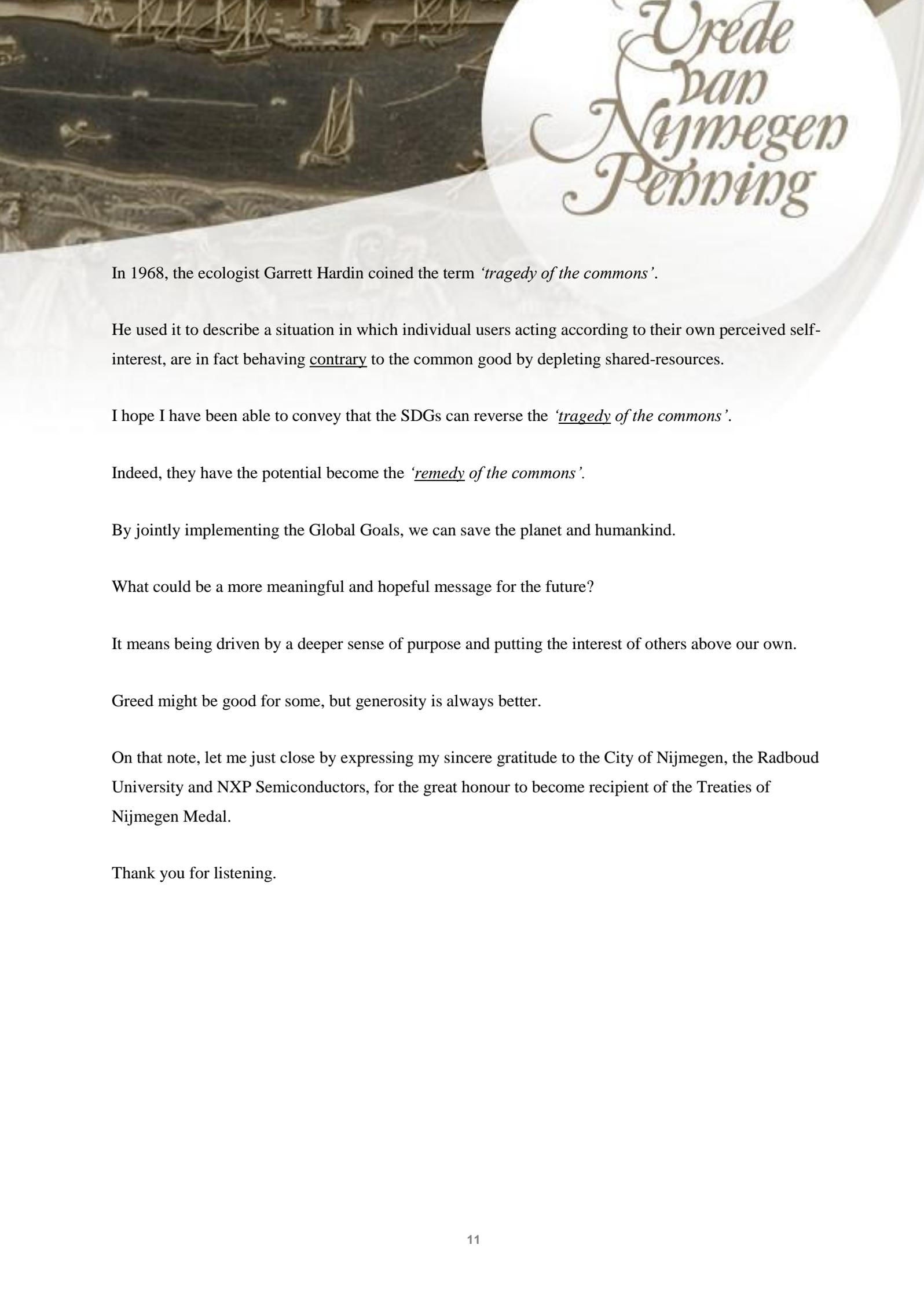
Fortunately, the momentum is building.

There are many reasons to be positive:

- Over 50% of consumer's in all major markets want to buy brands that are sustainable and responsible;
- An increasing number of businesses are embedding the SDGs into their strategies;
- 84% of graduates want to join purpose-driven companies;
- Financial markets are starting to move. Last year the World Bank issued the first SDG Bond;
- And, closer to home, the new Dutch Government has agreed an ambitious climate change policy to live up to its obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Arguably, all the SDGs actually directly relate to climate change, whether food security, deforestation, renewable energy or sustainable consumption.

Climate change and development are two sides of the same coin.



Vrede van Nijmegen Penning

In 1968, the ecologist Garrett Hardin coined the term '*tragedy of the commons*'.

He used it to describe a situation in which individual users acting according to their own perceived self-interest, are in fact behaving contrary to the common good by depleting shared-resources.

I hope I have been able to convey that the SDGs can reverse the '*tragedy of the commons*'.

Indeed, they have the potential become the '*remedy of the commons*'.

By jointly implementing the Global Goals, we can save the planet and humankind.

What could be a more meaningful and hopeful message for the future?

It means being driven by a deeper sense of purpose and putting the interest of others above our own.

Greed might be good for some, but generosity is always better.

On that note, let me just close by expressing my sincere gratitude to the City of Nijmegen, the Radboud University and NXP Semiconductors, for the great honour to become recipient of the Treaties of Nijmegen Medal.

Thank you for listening.