

**Laudatio at the presentation of the
Comenius Award 2018 to Herman Tjeenk Willink.**



Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Comenius Award was established in 2011 in order to draw attention to the philosophy of Jan Amos Comenius and the way in which his ideas resonate in our time.

And that is done by paying honour to a person, who in line with Comenius' thinking and acting, draws attention in an eye-catching way to the importance of education, science and culture in a society that is becoming increasingly international.

The coherence between these elements is an important starting point of the Comenius Award. On the one hand because these elements derive directly from the philosophy that forms the basis of life and the writings of Comenius, on the other also because the Comenius Award is not a scholarly award, but a homage to persons who successfully succeed in making several areas of knowledge, in a coherent and excellent way, subservient to the community.

Today the Comenius Award 2018 is awarded to Herman Tjeenk Willink in this Great Church of Naarden. He has devoted his whole impressive career in the service of the society and he may, according to the jury of the prize, be one of the most erudite and integer politicians in the Netherlands. He has himself with his work and in his publications, with heart and soul deployed to the democratic constitutional state, the state that makes it possible for us all to live in a society that Comenius had in mind.

Tjeenk Willink studied law in Leiden and Paris; for many years he was adviser to the Prime Minister and became known as Government Commissioner for the reorganization of the government in the years 80 of the last century. He was a member of the First Chamber of the Parliament for the Dutch Labour party for 10 years of which 6 years as Chamber President (from 1991 to 1997). After that he became, until his retirement in 2012, Vice President of the Council of State, one of the most important functions of the Dutch political system, which also commanded him the nickname "Viceroy of the Netherlands". And that was mainly due to the authoritative and erudite way in which he exercised this function and repeatedly made critical observations about the state of the administration of our country. These are recorded in the beautiful book that was issued on the occasion of his farewell of the Council of State, titled "Not the limitation, but the space. Reflections on democracy and the constitutional state".

He played an important role as “informateur” (investigator) in cabinet formations: the cabinet of prime minister Kok in 1994, at the first cabinet of prime minister Rutte in 2010 and also at the third cabinet Rutte in 2017. The work of an “informateur” – so he said recently – is "*To bring parties to a joint conclusion that they, without “Informateur”, do not want or can reach*". That requires a large involvement, knowledge and understanding of the political party system, careful and thorough analysis, the willingness to leave each of the parties in its value, and yet having the skill and wisdom to connect people.

Tjeenk Willink was appointed Minister of State in 2012. When he retired from the Council of State, he was appointed in the highest Rank of The Order of Orange Nassau, namely Knight Grand Cross. And in 2014, he was awarded the Honor Cross in the House Order of Orange, because of his great merits as an advisor to the Royal House. He also received honorary doctorates from the Erasmus University in Rotterdam and the University of Amsterdam.

A man like Tjeenk Willink is, in the judgement of the jury of the Comenius Award, of invaluable significance for a society. "*It is not only important that you work in the system of that society, but also to the system* ", he said himself. And he has done so by again and again making critical analyses and astute considerations on "the importance of power and anti power", on the "Importance of political controversy and debate on this", on the "legitimacy of democracy" , about the "growing gap between citizens and government" and “the importance of the feasibility and implementation of the policy, whereby the role of professional officials is so substantial ". For Tjeenk Willink were, in every function he fulfilled, explaining and clarifying a feature trait.

Highly esteemed Sir Tjeenk Willink,

Fine that you are here this afternoon in our midst together with your partner and are willing to receive the Comenius Award 2018 personally. From my previous speech you will have understood that the jury of the prize has profound respect and appreciation for everything you have meant and will continue to mean in your career for our society.

The mentioned topics in this laudation can also be found in the philosophy of Comenius, including the way how his reflections are build up by means of analytical and synthetic methods, to link the relationship between phenomena for a better understanding and to disseminate that broadly to promote a better world. To the judgement of the jury you have done this in your thinking and acting and thus you are a Comenius Award receiver fully in line with its objective.