Opening Academic Year 2025-2026, 1 September 2025

Vinod Subramaniam, Voorzitter College van Bestuur Universiteit Twente

(gesproken woord geldt)

Today is about the city of Enschede, *Eanske.* Today is not about us as institutions, nor about you Prime Minister (although the protests might suggest otherwise). It is about *Eanske* - our home as institutions, and the home for the coming years for all the new students beginning their educational journeys. We celebrate this year a remarkable and joyful milestone - 700 years of *Eanske*. And although we as institutions have only been around for a part of *Eanske's* journey, we are delighted as the University of Twente and Saxion to be celebrating **together** this opening of the academic year - in honour of our home town. We are **stronger together**.

Over these 700 years, Enschede has also proven its resilience, literally rising as a phoenix from the flames of the great city fire of 1862, figuratively rising from the ashes of the decline of the textile industry, and reinventing itself after the fireworks disaster, the *vuurwerkramp*, precisely 25 years ago this year. Our mayor, Roelof Bleker, worked almost a decade to rebuild Roombeek and has experienced that resilience first-hand.

The birth and development of this university came in a period when the city and the region were seeking a new economic pillar. The knowledge institutions and their people - and I embrace the entire chain of university, Saxion and ROC van Twente - and the young people we educate, have left their mark on the Enschede of today. Sometimes visibly, sometimes less so. But we unequivocally contribute to the well-being and prosperity of this city, this region, this country, and beyond.

That contribution is under pressure. The government cutbacks are affecting us. Prime Minister, the cuts introduced by your government are having a major impact on our organisation and require us to make tough choices to continue to make our contributions to society. And as educational institutions, we are now also being asked to dig deep to demonstrate the resilience that has shaped Enschede's DNA over the centuries.

We are strengthened by the knowledge that we have demonstrated resilience in the past. But… as the theme of this opening suggests, **Stronger Together**, we can't do it just on our own. We also need recognition from the national government. Sometimes it feels as if the distance from The Hague to Enschede is twice as long as the reverse, and people in the region do not always feel the support they need. That is why your presence, Prime Minister, today is important. It is essential to continue connecting with each another: to share our perspectives and listen to each other in order to gain a deeper understanding. It's important for me to be able to look you in the eye and confront you with the effects of policies made in Den Haag.

What we do here in creating knowledge, driving innovation, and educating young people is of paramount importance for Enschede, Twente, Overijssel, the eastern Netherlands, the Netherlands, and far beyond our borders. Government cutbacks are disastrous for us as knowledge institutions, but equally so for this region, this ecosystem, and ultimately for its resilience.

Knowledge is our most important natural resource. However, unlike other resources, it is one in which you must continually invest to ensure lasting benefit. In times of abundance, that choice may be easy to make. But also in times of scarcity, we must dare to do so. For our futures, and

for future generations. It reminds me of the quotation, often attributed to Derek Bok, legendary president of Harvard University: “And if you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

I want to bring this closer to home. Your distant predecessor, Prime Minister Wim Schermerhorn, had a hand in the founding by the Dutch government of the International Training Center for Aerial Survey (ITC), and was its first rector. The ITC, now a faculty at our university, was a form of engaged global citizenship by the Dutch government. In its 75 year history, ITC has built a global reputation working in capacity development and cooperation all over the world. The recent cuts in ODA (Official Development Assistance) funding by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which primarily funds ITC, directly affect us, and are forcing a reorganisation in this faculty. This is a direct consequence, but one that also has broader implications. We have spent decades in building deep relationships and collaborations in places that we look to as a nation for economic cooperation and access to critical raw materials. Building these long-cherished relationships took years. Breaking them down can happen in the blink of an eye - *in een vloek en een zucht*.

This summer, I visited family in India. I was often asked, 'What is happening in the Netherlands?' The Netherlands' changing course has not gone unnoticed internationally. Our position as an engaged global citizen, and as a champion of peace and justice, has taken a severe blow.

There, I noticed the significant impact of the choices we make here in the Netherlands. It showed me that what is decided in The Hague is felt far beyond our borders. For Enschede, Twente and the whole of the Netherlands, knowledge is our most important – if not the only – natural resource. It will only flourish if we continue to invest in it together.

That is why the region and the national government must continue to find common ground through dialogue and create trust. Because only by nurturing that connection – locally, nationally and internationally – can we continue to fulfil our role as a university and build our future: **stronger together.**