



Article in BeNeLux-News by Consul Gerard Huiting, advisor BeNeLux-Europe-Circle

BeNeLux-Europe-Award 2025

Recently, an extraordinary event took place in the iconic Havenhuis in Antwerp, organized by the BeNeLux University Center Foundation (B.U.C.). Under the leadership of Chairman Prof. Anton van der Geld, this academic session brought together dignitaries, prominent speakers, and other guests in a packed hall, once again demonstrating the strong reputation and impact of the B.U.C. within the Benelux region.

The theme of the session, *“Well-being and a Humane Society,”* formed the centerpiece of a series of inspiring speeches and ceremonies that emphasized shared values and sustainable collaboration among the Benelux countries.

The session was introduced by the B.U.C. Chairman, who emphasized the fundamental role of academic and cultural collaboration within a humane society in a passionate speech. Port Ambassador Marc Van Peel welcomed the guests and outlined the historical and economic significance of the Havenhuis as a venue.

A special moment was the presentation of the prestigious award to H.R.H. Princess Astrid of Belgium and Prof. Mr. Dineke de Groot, President of the Supreme Court of the Netherlands. B.U.C. Chairman Van der Geld and Deputy Counselor Prince Felix de Merode delivered an impressive laudatory speech highlighting the achievements of both laureates. Princess Astrid was accompanied by her husband Prince Lorenz, Archduke of Austria-Este, and their youngest daughter Princess Laetitia of Belgium. Princess Laetitia, who is currently studying in England, had traveled

to Antwerp specifically for this occasion, making her presence especially meaningful.

The academic session featured a wide array of inspiring speeches, including those of State Minister Prof. Mark Burggraaf Eyskens and State Minister Prof. Jan Peter Balkenende, who each offered unique perspectives on topics such as European cooperation and sustainable economic and political reforms. Reflections by the laureates, as well as the epilogue presented via video message by State Minister Prof. Herman Count Van Rompuy, deepened the insight and perspective of this BeNeLux gathering.

The powerful closing argument of Prof. Guus van Heck, titular holder B.U.C, on European research into Well-being and welfare provided a compelling conclusion to this academic session.

Musical interludes by harpist and teacher Emilie Bastens created a serene atmosphere and added an artistic touch to the session. During the concluding reception, valuable diplomatic and cultural ties were strengthened.

The event was an impressive demonstration of collaboration and intellectual exchange. Chairman Anton van der Geld deserves praise for his ability to bring together such influential individuals and relevant themes. The Havenhuis provided the perfect setting for a day that not only strengthened intellectual and diplomatic bonds within the Benelux but also served as an inspiration for future initiatives.



Among the diplomatic representatives and organizational delegates were, among others, Belgian Ambassador H.E. Anick Van Calster, Dutch Ambassador H.E. Brechje Schawhöfer, Ambassador-Counselor Princess Z.E. Dirk Wouters, Military Bishop Mgr. Dr. Everard de Jong, Princess Elenora de Merode, Deputy Secretary-General of the Benelux Union Michel-Etienne Tilemans, Court President Mr. Marieke Koek, State Councillor Paul Commenencia, Plenipotentiary Minister of Sint Maarten Drs. Gracita Arrindell, and National Ombudsman Mr. Reinier van Zutphen, Dutch Consul-general Karen van Stegeren