

**Opening biobank UZA: Biobanking: the importance for the  
Antwerp Region/landscape**

**18/12/2019**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Throughout history, Antwerp has always been a **meeting place** for researchers, scholars, scientists, cartographers, mathematicians. In the past, Antwerp was a **knowledge centre** par excellence, a **stimulating place** for creative and innovative ideas and the top address for exchanging them.

Our **common wish, dream and ambition** for the future of the Antwerp region can and must be nothing less than this.

And yes, we **achieve amazing things**, and yes, we do stand out. Not at least in **scientific innovation and research** in the field of **medicine**.

Just recently, I had the privilege to speech at the 60th edition of the colloquium of the **Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp**, a **world-class beacon** in **tropical diseases and health care**.

Over the same period, I witnessed the launch, or better, the attempt, of the **drone network** that will **transport blood, tissue, medicine and samples** between 21 hospitals in the Antwerp area.

On November 19th, the first edition of the **Pulmonary Innovation Forum** was successfully organised by **Eu.reca, the European Respiratory Cluster Antwerp**.

This knowledge platform focuses on the **lung and on combating lung disease**. In my recent annual speech for the Provincial Council on the topic of clean and healthy air, I made grateful use of their insights, knowledge and expertise.

And today, **UZA, UA and their partners** open this Biobank Antwerp. This makes me **happy, proud, thankful**.

Thankful, for all the **talent, the resourcefulness, open-mindedness of the people** collaborating and participating in this project.

Thankful, for **aiming high** and for aligning our medical setting with **21st century medicine**, focusing upon on **predisposition, early detection, molecular based** and **pre-emptive diagnosis**.

Since early 2000, things have changed gradually and for the best. Back then, **various tissue and cell banks** existed alongside each other in this region. Obviously, that situation was **far from ideal or desirable**: all these separate banks **costed a great deal of money**, and they **lacked efficiency**.

**New legislation in 2008** created a huge leap forward.

The **2008 Human Tissue Banking Law** resulted in centralising all these various banks into a **Central Antwerp tissue bank**.

Furthermore, this law led to the **creation of the largest Flemish corneal bank in Antwerp**, as well as to the **renowned innovative Tympano-ossicular bank**.

**Quality improvement. Expansion of scale. Access to larger or very specific sample collections. Innovation.**

These are just some of the **valuable advantages** created back then.

But there was **more to achieve**, there were **opportunities to excel**.

The **2018 Biobanking Law on human body material** paved the way forward for the **transformation** of the Antwerp Tumor Bank to what became **today's Biobank Antwerp**.

The **tumor scope** evolved into a **very broad scope**, with an **improvement of quality** and thus **increasing research potential**.

**None of this** would have been possible **without a strong history of well-organised biobanks**.

**None of this** would have been possible **without the strong support** and the **hard work** of many of our **researchers and medical professionals**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

**“The first wealth is health.”** Ralph Waldo Emerson couldn't be more right.

**Good health is a precondition for almost everything** we consider **valuable and important**: a happy family, a successful career, a rich and extensive social life, and of course, one's general well-being.

In brief, good health is a **precondition for accomplishing one's goals and dreams.**

For all these reasons, **I enthusiastically applaud this aspiring initiative**, this **remarkable research centre of excellence.**

I am a strong believer in and advocate for **strategic, carefully thought-out and sustainable cooperation.**

This is the **way forward**, this is the **way to stand out**, Biobank Antwerp being a **fine example and practice of this approach.**

I am convinced that the biobank will **contribute considerably to better or even the most optimal care**, as well as to the best possible preconditions for scientific research.

The **list of partners** involved looks **impressive and inspires confidence**.

Let me conclude by **congratulating and by thanking you**.

Not just a **very personal and sincere thank you**, but foremost, **thank you on behalf of all our people**, from **Antwerp province** and **far beyond**.