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KEER OM VOOR
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EDITIE



The Ukrainian flag in Maastricht Photo: Joey Roberts



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Russians at UM

"The attack by the Russian government has destroyed our brotherly bond"



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Meeting about the invasion

"My biggest fear is that to the rest of the world the war in Ukraine will become normal"

Dutch universities have suspended their institutional contacts with Russian and Belarusian institutes with immediate effect. Meanwhile, two Maastricht professors decided to step down from their positions at Russian universities. "I have experienced several examples of corruption there."

Remco van Rhee, professor of Comparative Civil Procedure, was involved with a Russian journal until recently; together with five international experts, he gave advice on articles. Until last week, that is, because Van Rhee and his colleagues condemn the invasion of Ukraine and demanded that the editors published a statement to that effect on their website.

The editor in chief refused. Van Rhee: "We won't do that, was the reaction, we deal in science, not politics."

Van Rhee: "After that, we all stepped down together. When I urged an editor to remove our names from their site, he reacted cynically with: 'You must be really scared for repercussion in Europe.' Like we were trying to save our own skins. I am glad that we have discontinued our activities."

Van Rhee thinks that some editors – connected to the university of Kazan, to the east of Moscow – have come out in support of the Putin regime. "At any rate, nobody distanced themselves from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Maybe they are badly informed or don't dare to open their mouths, but maybe it is in their best interest to support the regime. I

UM researchers quit academic additional functions in Russia

"Some colleagues have come out in support of Putin"

find that hard to gauge."

MH17

Herman Kingma immediately cancelled his chairmanship of the international advice council of the Siberian State Medical University in Tomsk. "That is a position that rather stands out. And if you stay, that could be explained as support for the regime. I wanted to prevent that, because I think it is terrible what Putin is doing in Ukraine."

Kingma has been a retired professor of Clinical Vestibulology from the UM since 2016, but has in fact just continued to work, he says. "I still have two Maastricht PhD students in Tomsk,

who are just about to complete their theses. I am now in consultation about that matter. You don't want to cause too much damage to individual researchers. I am against Putin, but not against the kind-hearted Russians, who also didn't ask for this war. You don't want to punish them."

At the same time Kingma feels that Dutch higher education would do well to send a univocal clear message and suspend institutional contacts with Russian institutes, as was announced in the past few days.

Kingma: "Relations between the Netherlands and Russia were strengthened in 2013, when Putin came to the Netherlands for the opening of the Amsterdam annex of the Hermitage. Since

then, I myself have started all kinds of collaboration projects with Russian universities. After the MH17 disaster, we in Maastricht wondered if we should continue with these. The answer was yes, but with the invasion of Ukraine, a clear line has been crossed."

Fake institutes

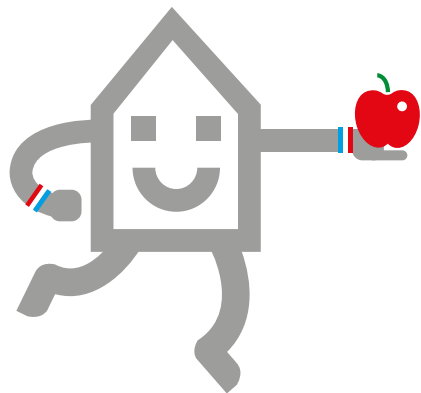
In a statement, rectors from Russian universities said that they support Putin in his intention "to finally put an end to the eight long years of confrontation between Ukraine and the Donbas, to bring about the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine in order to protect Russia against the increasing military threats".

The fact that rectors support Putin, does not surprise Kingma at all. "They have no choice, otherwise they risk being imprisoned for years. Also, many rectors have been selected by the Kremlin, with all the corruption that goes hand in hand with that. I saw many examples of that when I was there, even when I set up the Tomsk International Science Program, a bachelor's like the one we have in Maastricht. I was given maximum support, but in the end, they were empty promises. There was no money for personnel. That disappeared in the pockets of the university board. When I threatened to leave, they suddenly offered me a gigantic salary. But I wasn't going to allow myself to be bribed. The science bachelor's served as a front, to give the impression that the university offered fantastic international education. All the while, it was about image, not about

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SPLINTERS

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column.



Tapijn healthiest building

The renovated Tapijn barracks is the healthiest university building in the Netherlands, Maastricht University's

communication department reports. But, how can a building be healthy, you are wondering? It appears to be a building that "demonstrably contributes towards the health, productivity, and happiness of its users." Whether that is the case, is a decision that is not taken lightly; the International WELL Building Institute and Green Business Certification Inc. come around for an extensive inspection and take specialised measurements. Only when a building meets more than a hundred requirements, does it receive a certificate.

The supplied air at Tapijn, for example, is always completely fresh – it is not circulated. Also, food and beverages sold there have less than 25 grams of sugar per portion. At least 25 per cent of the work spaces have sit-standing desks. During construction, heavy metals were used as little as possible (as they may be hazardous when people are exposed to them), and everyone gets sufficient daylight due to the many windows in the offices.

Old crap



This is not the first time that tension between Russia and Western Europe has mounted rapidly. Air-raid shelters were built everywhere in Limburg during the Cold War for fear of an atomic bomb. There was even a government advertisement concerning the matter, says Jos Notermans, fellow founder and manager of the Air-Raid Shelter Museum in Maastricht, to newspaper *De Limburger*. "Whenever a new building is built, you can receive a subsidy if you install an air-raid shelter underneath it."

Anyone who thinks that there are enough spaces available when the time comes, will be in for a disappointment. "If you want to know how many air-raid shelters are still operative in Limburg, we will be done in a jiffy. There are actually none," says Notermans. The carbon filters of the shelter in the bunker where the museum is housed, for example, originate from 1965. "All old crap."



Shivering in the office

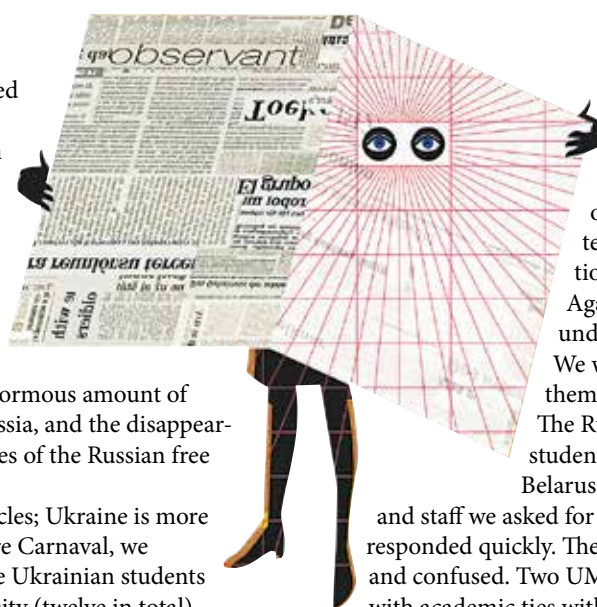
It may well be the mildest winter ever, but in the mornings, it is quite cold. Even inside the university buildings, it is still chilly then. 15.2 degrees Celsius chilly: to be exact, said an employee from the ADP (Archives, Documents and Postal Affairs). Measured this

Monday morning at half past eight. The centrally set 20 degrees is only achieved hours later, while the heating is turned up fully. After all, we need proper ventilation because of Covid, so windows or doors are open. Hopefully, the UM pays a fixed gas price.

All other news pales in comparison to the war

For me, watching television is an evening activity. It's something you don't do during the day, unless there is a cycling race going on. Even so, I frequently turned on the TV in broad daylight last week (during Carnival break) to stay up to date with the war in Ukraine. The radio was tuned to *Radio 1*, I kept refreshing my news apps, and in the evenings the newspaper – yes, I'm showing my age – provided even more analysis and explanation. Our own local university news, which had occupied our attention until the day the war

began, absolutely paled in comparison to the images of the Russian invasion, the bravery and courage of the Ukrainian people, President Zelensky's speeches, the bombings, the stories of the refugees, the nuclear threat, the enormous amount of disinformation in Russia, and the disappearance of the last vestiges of the Russian free press. We've postponed articles; Ukraine is more important now. Before Carnaval, we contacted some of the Ukrainian students at Maastricht University (twelve in total) and asked them if they would like to keep a diary for us. One student understandably let us know a week later that he wasn't up for it. Another student won't be able to talk to us until the end of this week, he wrote, after some insistence on our part, in an email times-



tamped in the middle of the night. He is too busy organising protests and donation campaigns. Again, very understandable. We will interview them next week. The Russian UM students (78, and ten Belarusian students) and staff we asked for their thoughts responded quickly. They are shocked and confused. Two UM researchers with academic ties with Russia also answered their phones almost immediately. They have resigned from their positions at "their" Russian universities, to the dismay of their Russian, Putin-loving colleagues. On Tuesday afternoon, a conversation in *Studio Europa* between Professor Mathieu

letter from the editor

Segers and Minister of Finance Sigrid Kaag demands our attention. In the evening, there's a debate about Putin's war, organised by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. And last but not least, two Polish UM students began a donation campaign last Monday. They are particularly seeking warm blankets, baby food, nappies and formula, ready-to-eat food (such as cereal bars) and medical items (bandages, first aid kits), says Alexander van Vugt, a bachelor's student of International Business. On the first day, they already received a lot of items that will later be transported to Poland. Donations are coming from all over the region, and from people of different nationalities. Including Russian people.

Riki Janssen

Every week, the editor-in-chief writes about what has been happening at the *Observant* office

“A colleague in Kharkiv spent four days in an air-raid shelter”

Continued from page 1

good education.”

That is also the reason for the many fake university institutes, says Kingma. “One day, for example, you meet the director of the International Institute for Smart Technology, and later you hear from the vice rector that this doesn’t even exist, that it is a construction on paper. Civil servants from the Kremlin feel that this subject deserves some attention, so then the university sets up a fake institute for appearances’ sake. That is something that slowly dawns on you. My education institute was actually just such a paper construction. Except my young staff, the students actually gave it real content. Looking back, it is very disappointing, but the students and my

staff were so enthusiastic, I did it for them.”

Windows shot to pieces

For Van Rhee, this is not the first time that he has stepped down from his duties in Russia. Since 2010, he has taught at the universities of Kazan and Yekaterinburg. His lectures were about the fundamental principles of procedural laws as can be found in, among others, the European Convention on Human Rights. “The students were enthusiastic and even came to the conclusion themselves that affairs in Russia were not always in order. When Putin invaded the Crimea, I stopped teaching.”

In the years after that, the collaboration with Ukrainian scientists from the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv grew. “In view of the

Association Treaty between Ukraine and the EU, in 2014, intended for far-reaching political and economic co-operation, law reform was also on the agenda. Together with professor Irina Izarova and others, I organised meetings throughout the country on this matter.”

In the meantime, Van Rhee knows that Izarova has fled the country with colleagues. “Others are stuck and cannot travel westward because of the acts of war, while others have joined the army in order to resist. I heard from one colleague in Kharkiv that she spent four days in an air-raid shelter. She wanted to return to her apartment, but all the windows had been shot to pieces.”

Guest appointments

Van Rhee is now trying to help the colleagues

who crossed the border. “We are making an inventory of what is needed. I have offered to book hotels and help them apply for grants, so that they can pick up their academic work. We also want to help them maintain an important procedural law journal.”

The Faculty of Law may help them with that, says dean Jan Smits. But that is not all. “We are going to create a few guest appointments for refugee law scientists from Ukraine. We will do that in consultation with the Dutch government because of the refugee status. We are also considering teaching refugees who end up in this region and who are interested in law.”

Maurice Timmermans

UM students organize fundraising campaign for Ukrainian refugees

“Everyone helps, including the Russian community”

Piles of pillows and blankets, dozens of boxes of food, water, care products and medical supplies. In the parking lot behind Duboisdomein 30, the war in Ukraine suddenly becomes tangible. The goods – the result of a fundraising campaign for humanitarian resources set up by two UM students – will be transported to the Ukrainian-Polish border in the near future.

On this Monday afternoon, the first day of the fundraiser, the call to donate goods is immediately answered. While a dozen volunteers – mostly students – check and sort the stuff, packed cars and pedestrians with well-filled bags come and go.

Some bring items that were unused in the attic or garage, others went to do special purchases. “We also donate to Giro 555, but it is more tangible if your goods go directly to the refugees,” says a UM employee, while she and her son and daughter load bags full of groceries from the trunk. “The children also bought things with their savings, which they thought was very important.”

Polish student Alexander van Vugt (Bachelor of International Business), who set up the campaign together with compatriot and Law student Filip Radzikowski, was positively surprised by the turnout. “By the way, also thanks to the help from the Russian community. They want to contribute, maybe because they feel bad about the whole situation.” Moreover, the campaign seems to be widely taken up: in addition to students, employees and alumni, people without a direct connection with UM also bring goods.

According to Van Vugt, there is currently a particular need for warm blankets (to be used at low



Collection takes place every day between 09:00 and 18:30 in the parking lot behind the building at Duboisdomein 30 (accessible by car via Leidenlaan). A list of required items can be found on the UM website. To speed up the sorting process, it helps to sort the goods yourself and to write on the outside of the box which products and how many pieces it contains.

Photo: Joey Roberts

temperatures), baby food, diapers and powder, directly consumable food (such as cereal bars) and medical products (bandages, first aid kits). There is no need for clothes and toys.

Connections

The dire situation in Poland, where more than one million Ukrainian refugees currently reside, made it difficult for the two initiators to sit still. “The stories of friends and family at home do not leave you untouched,” says Van Vugt. “In addition,

some Ukrainian friends I grew up with left to fight for their country. That does make you think. It feels wrong to do nothing at all.”

With their connections in Poland, the two hope to make a difference. Through the family business of one of them, the collected goods will be taken to the Polish capital Warsaw. A local intermediary then arranges for distribution at various border crossings and possibly further into Ukraine, “to the places where the help is most needed at that time”, according to Van Vugt.

“That can also be in smaller cities, which larger aid organizations sometimes pay less attention to.”

How long will they keep doing that? “As long as it is necessary. Although we are now looking for organizations that can take over part of the logistics from us, so that we will also have some time left over for our studies in the near future.”

Dennis Vaendel

Quantifying balance

In 1910, the book *The World in 100 Years* was a German bestseller in which philosophers, writers, and scientists predicted what life would be like in the year 2010. Schiller’s great-grandson, Alexander von Gleichen-Rußwurm, imagined that by then, everyone’s day is divided into four parts: six hours for sleep, six for work, six for free time, and six for being a good citizen – including volunteering, and lifelong education. He was convinced that with automation, humans would be free to use their time towards a more holistically balanced and



healthy society.

Comparing this ideal to our reality today, only one element rings true: the six hours of sleep. How we spend our working hours is far from the author’s ideal. For example, this week a year ago, I spent 43 percent of my time on research (compared to 40 percent in my contract), 16 percent (of 20) on teaching, 33 percent (of 40) on educational development, as well as 8 percent on other service (not included in my contract), covering 28 meetings in four days, and a mountain of emails. On paper, this looks like a reasonable balance. However, that week I worked 57 hours instead of 38.

I am sharing these numbers because I know I am not the only one – all my colleagues work overtime to meet the demands placed on us.

We are passionate about our work: we want the best for our students, we want to contribute with our research, and we want to be good UM citizens. This makes it not a personal, but a systemic, a cultural problem. We experience both, limited norm hours for teaching and an increasingly long academic year on one hand, along with discussions on sustainable employment and wellbeing on the other. And while we are busy quantifying how we should spend our time; it seems we have lost sight of the goal – a more holistic and healthy balance at work.

Therese Grohnert is assistant professor at the School of Business and Economics

This column reflects the personal views of the author

series leadership styles at UM



Photo: Joey Roberts

Margriet Schreuders, director of the SSC:
 “Just because I’m the director doesn’t necessarily mean that my opinion matters more”

Margriet Schreuders (43), who has been the director of the Student Services Centre (SSC) for a little over a year now, has wanted to make the world a better place since she was a young girl. She was on the student council of her secondary school in Oosterhout, North Brabant, raising money for children of parents with HIV to visit the *Efteling* theme park one day each year. She was politically active from an early age, represented the Dutch green party GroenLinks on the Naarden Municipal Council, and, as a member of the management team of the *Postcode Loterij* lottery (by law, 50 per cent of its revenue must be donated to charity), distributed millions to organisations such as Friends of the Earth Netherlands, *Oxfam Novib*, *Amnesty*, and the Dutch animal rescue foundation *Stichting Dierenlot*. She wants to make the world a better place even in her position as the director of the SSC. She chuckles. “I don’t mean to sound pompous. Sometimes it involves very small steps,

like making our training courses and workshops on student resilience more accessible. But all of that is easier when you’re the one in charge of a group.” That was the question: why do you want to be the one in charge? She has been in leadership positions for over ten years, first at *Postcode Loterij* and now as the director of the SSC. At the former – much smaller – organisation, she emerged from the group and was still in direct contact with the charities even as a manager. That’s different now. The SSC is much larger, with about 450 employees in areas ranging from sports and mental health care to summer school and from enrolment to MECC exams.

It’s OK to make mistakes

Schreuders isn’t a “manager-knows-best” kind of leader, she says. She respects the professionalism of her people and relies on their expertise. “I’m curious, I want to know a lot about things, so I ask my team questions: why

should we do this? How did you come to that conclusion? What if plan A doesn’t work? I want to enable people to make the best possible use of their knowledge and skills. It’s OK to make mistakes – that goes for everyone, including me. Just because I’m the director doesn’t necessarily mean that my opinion matters more. But I am the one who ultimately makes the decision, based on the advice of others.”

Disagreement

She isn’t afraid of people disagreeing with her. In fact, “It’s imperative. It can be bloody inconvenient, but I can only do my job if people feel comfortable speaking up to me. That requires mutual trust and a workplace culture where people feel comfortable speaking their minds.” Did she manage to create such a culture over the last year? “Yes, I think so. I recently asked my management team to evaluate me now that I’ve been here for a year.

Not on a form, but in a meeting. They feel comfortable doing so.”

Compassion

She previously attended a leadership programme at Moonen & Partners in Amsterdam. It taught her a lot. For example, that it pays off to be well prepared for meetings: it builds trust with the person sitting across from you. But also that she can only be the kind of leader she wants to be if she acts according to her core values: her curiosity, first of all, but also showing compassion when someone is having a difficult time. “It’s about identifying the problem and figuring out together how to solve it. The trap is that you take on a caring role and become like a parent to someone, creating a dependency relationship. You should always enter the conversation in total equality, even if you’re the manager.” She also highly values integrity. “The rules apply to everyone, including me.” And manager or not, she can’t do without humour. “It’s so important to have fun at work and laugh together every day.”

It never stops

What is the hardest thing about being in a leadership position? She doesn’t have to think about her answer. “It never stops. You can never say, ‘I’m not the director this week.’ It would be nice to switch it off sometimes. I try to, on holidays and on the weekends, but in my work I sometimes have to deal with emergency situations – a fire in a student house, or a student committing suicide. If something like that happens, I have to be there. That’s why I also check my email on Saturdays and Sundays. It’s not like I never relax, though. I exercise for half an hour every day and I spend half an hour reading every morning before getting to work.” She also has her family, her husband and three children, to ensure that work is not always her number one priority.

President of the Waorani

Who is her role model? She laughs. “I have two.” One of them is Boudewijn Poelmann, her former boss at (and one of the founders of) *Postcode Loterij* (“a radical free thinker, inspiring, gives people space, asks such good questions that conversations sometimes take a completely different turn: ‘Oh, if you look at it *that way*...’”). The other is Nemonte Nemquino, an environmental activist and the first female president of the Waorani of Pastaza, an Indigenous people from the Amazonian region of Ecuador. “I met her three years ago in Ecuador. Her people are threatened by mining, deforestation and toxic waste dumping. They usually protect themselves with spears, but Nemonte fights with words. She studied law, gathered evidence against the mining companies, took them to court in Quito, and won. I admire her courage, perseverance and effectiveness. She has since taken her fight to the global stage, sharing her knowledge with other tribes.”

Riki Janssen

The university is changing. The Recognition & Rewards programme is not just about creating room for academics to choose a career path that suits them (e.g. with a focus on education, research, patient care, or a combination), but also about ending the academic rat race: fighting for grants, the pressure to publish, the obsession with citation metrics. Also, the academic world – from teachers to policy officials and management assistants – must become

more diverse and inclusive; almost everyone will work from home more than before; and the topic of work pressure, along with the related concepts of work-life balance and sustainable employability, is everywhere. Just like lifelong learning. All

this will require new leadership styles, says Maastricht University, which launched the Leadership Academy at the end of January 2022. Leadership is not just for heads of departments, deans and service centre directors: it’s everyone’s business. Every

employee will need to take responsibility at some point, whether it’s about their own research, dealing with a conflict within their team, or organising an event. In the coming years, all employees will have the opportunity to participate in the Leadership Academy through workshops, training courses and coaching sessions on topics ranging from developing personal leadership to management training. The courses are currently being developed.

Leadership Academy

Russians at the UM on the war in Ukraine

“The situation is so extreme, I now have to publicly take a position”



Photo: Katie Godowski, Pexels

It is Monday evening and on the other side of the Zoom connection, a young Russian UM student appears. She would agree to the interview on condition that it could be anonymous. Her “gut feeling” tells her that is the wiser thing to do. She has been feeling horrible for days, is visibly affected. “Two weeks ago, I was an ordinary student, now I am almost only dealing with the war. I am sleeping somewhat better now, but I am still compulsively checking my phone every fifteen minutes for the latest news.”

She awakens every day with the hope that the violence has finally stopped. Her grandfather and grandmother are Ukrainian and the country was her holiday destination for years during the summer. “Grandfather died some time ago and grandmother has lived in Russia for years, but every Russian has ties with Ukraine. I can’t imagine how awful it is for them. Because of the Russian government’s attack, our brotherly connection has been destroyed.”

Her family and friends in Russia agree: “The war is wrong.” Some of them dare to actively

speak out against it, others fear, for example, that they will be suspended from the university. They get their information from the social media platform Telegram, a kind of WhatsApp, where (international) independent media also have accounts.

The Russian government, not the Russians

A prison sentence of at least three years is what Russians risk when they speak negatively about the war in Ukraine, even if they only refer to it as being a ‘war’. Still, the student and two Russian UM employees quickly said “yes” to the request for an interview.

“A line has now truly been crossed,” says Alexander Vostroknutov, associate professor of Economics. “This situation is so extreme. I feel that I now have to take a position to inform the Ukrainians and the rest of the world that it is not the Russian people but the Russian government that is responsible for what is happening there now.” It is the first time in his life that Vostroknutov speaks openly against the Russian regime.

Also, becoming involved with politics is something that a lot of Russians won’t easily do, says Alena Kamenshchikova, assistant professor of Social Sciences. Either because they are afraid or simply because they don’t know how. “Anyone who speaks out or demonstrates – often those in their twenties, thirties and forties – are beaten by the police or arrested and imprisoned. Those who are in their fifties and sixties grew up in the Soviet Union and later lived under Putin’s regime. They have no idea how to become active in the public debate.”

Too emotional

Her parents, both in their sixties, belong to that generation. “They don’t support the war, but they are not actively against it either. They just continue on with daily life.” Kamenshchikova finds this difficult. “I am really close to my mother, but I haven’t spoken to her in

two weeks. I am too emotional to have that conversation.”

She is not angry about it. “They don’t know any better. They live in the middle of Siberia and for twenty years, they have heard the same thing on television. That is their only source of information. Putin’s propaganda machine is very dangerous.” Vostroknutov agrees: “Independent media are very important for a country to function properly. If you hear the same story year in, year out, you eventually start to believe it.” When Vostroknutov tells Russians who hold on to the propaganda what is really happening, the ball is just put back in his court. “It is in the West where they have propaganda; they then say. There is practically no fighting against it.”

Russian world

“The world broke two weeks ago,” says Kamenshchikova. Before this, she thought that the Putin government was an oligarchy, a club of rich men that are mainly looking for more corruption for even greater financial gains. “But when you listen to Putin’s speeches lately and see what he is doing, it seems like there is a whole ideology behind it. ‘A Russian world, denationalisation of Ukraine.’ I am afraid. What does the future of Europe look like with this man in power?”

Sweet messages

The majority of the world condemns Putin’s war. ‘The Russian’ is not looking good. Do they have any trouble in that regard in Maastricht? “No,” all say. Vostroknutov: “I feel very supported by my colleagues and by the UM. They send sweet messages. I get the feeling that people in the Netherlands know that this is not our war and that my heart is with the Ukrainians.”

background



Photo: Joey Roberts

FASoS meeting on the war in Ukraine

“Confrontation with NATO is Russia’s biggest fear”

“My biggest fear is that in a few weeks the war in Ukraine will become normal for the rest of the world. The air above them remains safe, they can visit family and friends and go to work. And every now and then they will ask: how is that going?” Ganna Bazilo, an Ukrainian alumna of Maastricht University, is speaking at a meeting about the Russian invasion. On Tuesday evening she addressed the full Turnzaal at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences via a video link.

Bazilo was in Ireland when Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, visiting relatives. Her parents are still in her hometown of Kiev. “For the past ten days I have hardly eaten or slept, always waiting for a message from them. The people there remain calm, because they don’t know what else to do. I know you all saw people who tried to get away being killed by the Russians. People are afraid to stay and afraid to leave.”

With bitter irony she thinks back to the motivation letter she wrote to be admitted to the master’s in European Studies. “I said that my biggest dream was that Ukraine would one day be admitted to the European Union. Now

my dream seems closer than ever, but at what prize?” Like the other Ukrainian speaker this evening, Bazilo hopes NATO will change its mind about a no-fly zone over Ukraine. “The people in the shelters hardly follow international politics, they just want a chance not to die.”

Indecisive NATO

“Our image of NATO is that of a strong, determined organization, while the EU is often described as weak and indecisive. In recent weeks we have seen that it is exactly the other way around,” says compatriot and former fellow student Iulian Romanyshyn.

In recent months he has taught at the NATO Defense College in Rome, an international military academy. “The EU has taken unprecedented steps and measures never seen before, while NATO has been unable to agree on any action.”

The fact that the United States decided in early February to recall its soldiers, who were there to train the Ukrainian army as part of a NATO mission, was a fundamental mistake, according to Romanyshyn. “Confrontation with NATO is Russia’s greatest fear. The fact that direct military aid to Ukraine was immediately brushed off the table was music to the Kremlin’s ears. Because yes, maybe Putin, locked in his bunker, can no longer think rationally. But his generals can do that, they are well aware of the consequences for Russia. If the almighty Russian army is having so much trouble with the Ukrainian armed forces, imagine what the collective NATO forces could do.”

According to Romanyshyn, NATO must take a firm stance against Putin. “Scare him off, show that you’re willing to fight. Call his nuclear bluff.” He would like to see a no fly zone. “Not above the whole of Ukraine, that is no longer feasible, but for example above nuclear power plants and western Ukraine, where many people have fled. It is also unfortunate that up until now nothing has come of the neighboring countries’ plan to supply fighter jets.” Less direct confrontations would also help, according to Romanyshyn. “Doing nothing is not an option. This is a hybrid war, take Russia’s example. Think of cyber attacks on strategic targets such as their electricity network.”

Two blocks

Other speakers shed light on the situation from different academic perspectives. Thomas Conzelmann, professor of political science, highlights the geopolitical changes that have been initiated. “We see a return of thinking in

spheres of influence. Russia is looking at the other neighboring countries – which, because they are smaller and less powerful, will lose their independence and sovereignty. Russia is also strengthening ties with Central Asian countries. On the other hand, you see countries like Sweden, Finland and Austria considering NATO membership. My expectation and fear is that it will continue to polarize, two blocks across from each other.”

Propaganda

Mariëlle Wijermars, assistant professor in cybersecurity and politics, shows how Russia influences its own population. “Not only are they bombarded with propaganda, they have been told for years that the West is waging an information war against the Russian state. As a result, they are suspicious of all foreign sources.”

In addition, Russia has been creating obstacles for independent journalists. Last week, a law was passed making it illegal to distribute non-government-approved information about Ukraine. Anyone who does so could face up to fifteen years in prison. “That has triggered a mass exodus of both foreign and Russian journalists. It is now even more difficult for the Russian population to access independent sources. And it is more difficult for us to know what is going on in Russia.”

Despite everything, there are Russians who openly protest against the war. “The counter now stands at 13,750 detainees. This is often accompanied by a lot of violence. In addition, the population suffers from the sanctions. Various products such as sugar and grain are already being rationed. I know it is difficult, but I would like to ask everyone to look at this side too, to show solidarity with the Russian people.”

Minister Kaag speaks at Studio Europa on the cabinet's EU course

“The EU is at a crossroads: keep muddling along or change course”

A pandemic, a climate crisis, and on top of that a war on European soil. Thirty years after the Maastricht Treaty, European unity is more important than ever when tackling the crises, said Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister Sigrid Kaag (D66) last Tuesday in the Sint Janskerk, where she spoke at the invitation of Studio Europa. “The war in Ukraine has awoken us brutally.”

Indignation amongst members of Parliament last Tuesday afternoon: minister Sigrid Kaag appears to have preferred to give a speech at Studio Europa in Maastricht above the weekly question time in Parliament, where she is

expected to answer questions by the opposition. However, none of the commotion in The Hague is noticeable in the Sint Janskerk. In a speech lasting three quarters of an hour, Kaag goes into great detail about her vision on the new cabinet's EU course.

A subject that has been given a whole new connotation the past two weeks. “When I received the invitation for this speech, we thought that war in Europe was something that belonged to the past,” Kaag begins. “Peace had become something that we took for granted. Putin's attack in Ukraine, however, is a brutal wake-up call. The past few weeks, we have seen an unprecedented unity and decisiveness in Europe. We are now at a crossroads: will the EU simply continue to muddle along in the old manner of making compromises, or has it finally turned the page?”

Daunting task

Kaag's preference is clear: the future of the Netherlands lies in a more powerful and more effective Europe. Although she praises the EU for the stability and safety that it has brought its citizens, the Union is certainly not perfect. In order to be able to stand strong in an uncertain future – with the unpredictable consequences of war, pandemic and the climate crisis – the member states will have to deal with things differently. “A huge, maybe even daunting task, but it is crucial.” Moreover, one in which the present cabinet would like to take the lead, according to the minister. They want to seize the crisis to invest in the country's own defence and to

strengthen the collaboration between member states in this field. In addition, Kaag hopes that the Netherlands can take on a leadership role in the struggle against climate change. She also applauds the European Committee's intention to discontinue using Russian gas as quickly as possible. “I can't say it was a blessing in disguise, but aside from the geopolitical value, this also has advantages for the climate.”

Superpower

If Europe wants to continue playing an important, independent role on the geopolitical stage, then the EU must also maintain the position of economic superpower, Kaag states. That is why she argues for a stricter observance of the budgetary regulations in countries in the eurozone, with independent supervision and automatic sanctions. This would ensure a stronger financial and economic basis.

Despite the broader context of Kaag's story, one subject is dominant during the round of questions: Ukraine. “If the EU stands for peace, are we actually doing enough to protect the Ukrainian people,” panel chairman Segers wants to know. As with other questions, Kaag's safe and unsurprising answer follows line of the cabinet. In this instance: focus on de-escalation and prevent the NATO from becoming deeply entangled in the war. “That is an uncomfortable message, but there is no easy answer.”

Dennis Vaendel

War in Ukraine - What is the UM doing?

Maastricht University has created a special page on its website related to the war in Ukraine, with practical information (where do I go with which question), relief actions and expressions of support, among others from the UM's Executive Board, YUFE and the Universities of the Netherlands.

Students from the countries concerned who have questions or are in need of help, will first have to contact the student advisor, says spokesperson Koen Augustijn. “Depending on the question concerned, they will then be referred to the emergency fund or the psychologist for students or other facilities.”

The emergency fund, which was set up during the COVID-19 pandemic and where money was collected by the Universiteitsfonds Limburg/SWOL, was meant for students who were hardly able to survive because there were no jobs and government aid did not always provide a solution.

The fund was given a structural form in September, “the Executive Board really wanted that,” says Margriet Schreuders, director of the Student Services Centre. It was funded with “a central contribution”. Students who are in financial need can receive a one-time donation of up to 2,000 euro.

The same applies to Ukrainian or Russian students who can no longer pay their rents or tuition fees because of the war in Ukraine. The UM has a total of twelve Ukrainian, ten Belarusian and 78 Russian students. So far (Tuesday 8 March) one student has applied for the emergency fund, as far as Schreuders knows. “Most likely, students are dealing with other things first, letting everything that is happening sink in and see what the consequences are.”

Is a gift of 2,000 euro actually enough? A frozen bank account will stay that way for longer than a couple of weeks. “It is possible that the Ministry of Education will increase the amount that we as a university may give tax-free, but we are also looking into other possibilities. We are thinking of the Profileringsfonds, which is meant for students who can claim a contribution due to extraordinary circumstances.”

As far as assistance for the staff from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus is concerned, they can initially go to those in charge, the Staff Career Centre, or the Knowledge Centre for International Staff. Eleven people from Ukraine and 47 from Russia and Belarus work at the UM. Half of them do not have a regular employment contract, but a so-called hospitality agreement. These are people who, for example, give guest lectures every now and again.

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Sigrid Kaag and Mathieu Segers in conversation Still from Studio Europa livestream