

observant

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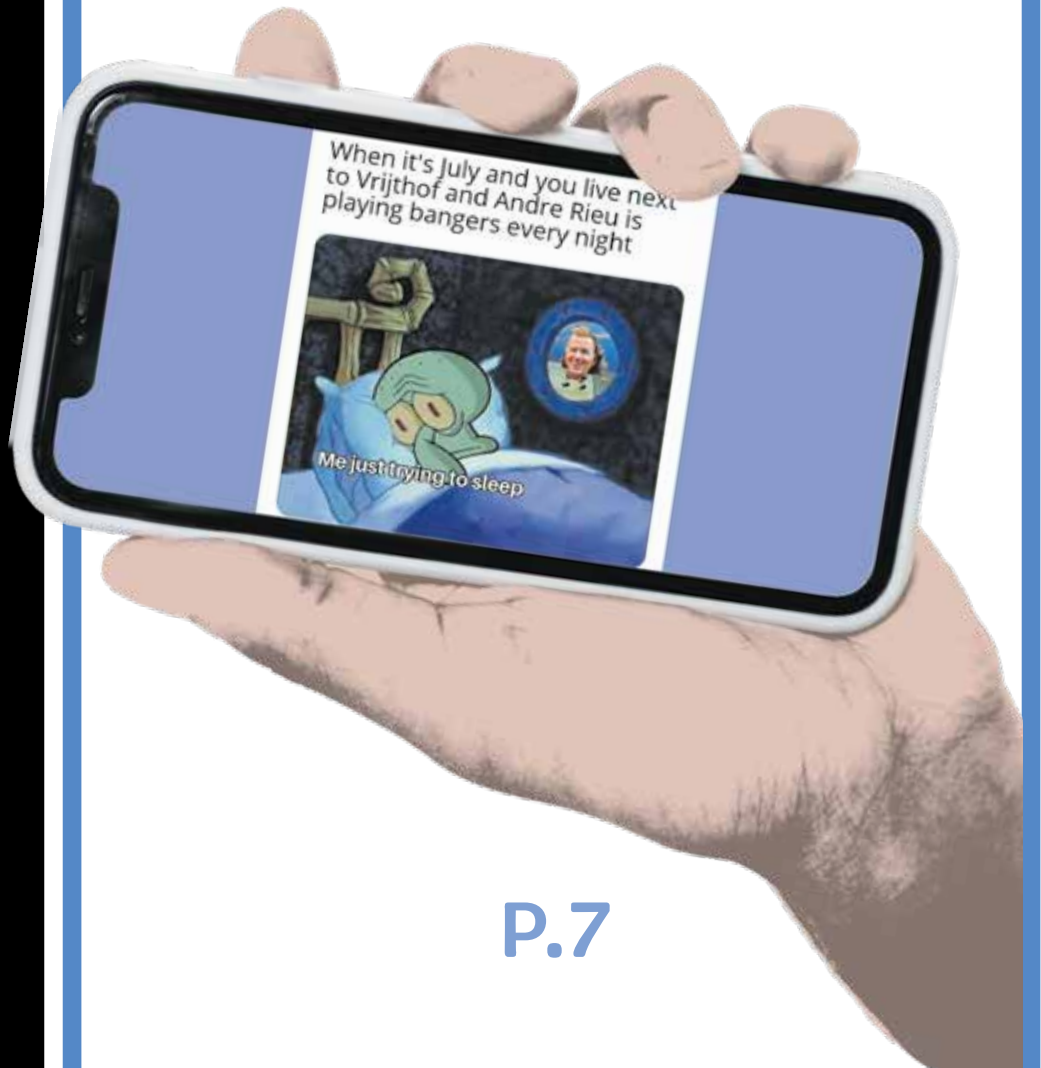
FHML PROFESSOR IN COURT:

UM maintains that there was a pattern of misconduct, the professor's lawyer denies abuse of power and sexual intimidation, he speaks of "a couple of incidents".

P.5

Memestricht

With his popular Instagram page Memestricht, law student Kevin Mousa became a well-known face. But there are drawbacks too: "I received messages from people who wrote that they would 'do me in' if they met.



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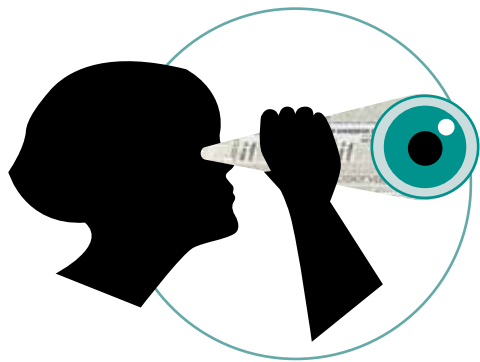


Spikeball, the hype flown over from America, also exists in Maastricht:

Often barefoot, with a ball and a small trampoline. The members of Cactus are fanatical and have a lot of fun.

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Riki Janssen

Even before this week's editorial meeting started, it was already the talk of the office – the sudden resignation of the Rector Magnificus of Radboud University Nijmegen, just weeks before his retirement. It came after the newspaper *De Gelderlander* revealed an incident of misconduct that took place in 2017, when he had just been appointed rector. A female employee accused him of making two remarks that could be seen as sexually intimidating, as determined by an external committee. The university gave the rector an official warning, but didn't make it public at the time. The matter came to light last week, and our Radboud University counterpart *VOX* and *De Gelderlander* were flooded with responses. Two former Radboud University deans wrote an opinion piece accusing the media of character assassination based on an old case. Dozens of university employees reacted furiously, accusing the former deans of issuing an intimidating statement and interfering with an open discussion about

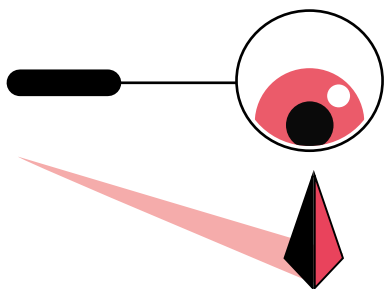
editorial

And the rector of Nijmegen resigned

personal safety at Radboud University. Here at the office, the situation raised a lot of questions. Is it fair that the two former deans accused the media of character assassination for bringing an internal matter out in the open years after the fact? How can you ever form a proper opinion on a #MeToo case when you don't know all the details? What were the two remarks the committee determined "could be seen" as sexually intimidating (implying that they could also be seen as *not* intimidating)? And how did the university treat the victim? Radboud University says the case was handled properly, but the reports in *De Gelderlander* show that the victim disagrees. Also: should we give people a second chance, even in #MeToo cases? Why hasn't the Radboud University Supervisory Board stepped up to acknowledge that the incident should have been brought out in the open immediately after the warning was given six years ago? In our discussion following each ques-

tion, I found myself constantly shifting perspectives. Almost every nuanced contribution made me go, "There's a point there." And I wasn't the only one, I found out the next day, when the topic came up at the coffee machine again. We haven't heard the last of this matter, but we had to move on. With our deadline approaching, it was time to talk through our list of articles for this week. We dwelled a bit longer on a case that was heard last week, involving an FHML professor who was fired earlier this year after a committee found him guilty of sexual misconduct. Another #MeToo case. And yes, we'll report on it again. It's striking how differently the parties speak about the same case – what the university calls "misconduct", the former professor's lawyer describes as "a few incidents" and "mutual kissing".

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



splinters

A funny incident, a striking piece of news, something interesting that happened elsewhere in the country: it is in this column. Contributions: Peter Doorakkers, Lotte van de Loo, Simon Wirtz

Research couple

It doesn't happen very often that two PhD students do a PhD on a single joint thesis, but sister newspaper *Mare* in Leiden was able to discover an even rarer example: Colombian artist Jully Acuña Suarez and Portuguese archaeologist Marcelo Marques Miranda are also outside of academia a couple.

On 20 September, they both received their PhD degrees on their joint research into the Kamëntšá, an indigenous community in Acuña Suarez' homeland. One after the other, each in their own session, they defended their six-hundred-page dissertation, as thick as a fist.

Working together "was sometimes tough," says Marques Miranda to *Mare*. "We have different working rhythms. I like to write, Jully prefers to speak. But we have the same ideas and so got through it together." Fieldwork went smoother, exactly because they were together, Acuña Suarez adds: "We had to keep in contact with a lot of different people in that community and that was easier to do with two people."

Running in Randwyck

Employees and students in Randwyck should not be too surprised next week if they see a crowd of runners passing by, as the first Maastricht Campus Run will be held on Thursday 12 October. The five-kilometre route has been set out past, but also through various buildings in Randwyck, including Brightlands Health Campus companies (such as Medtronic), university buildings and MECC, to subsequently end with an after-party on the square next to Bar Bistro SAAM.

Running fast to achieve the best time is not necessary. "It is not a competition," the organisers state, "it's a fun run." The main objective is to collect money for the 'McDonald Huis Maastricht'. And what is 'fun' about the 'run'? "Thirst can be quenched along the way, and there are festive surprises at different locations."

Not a fan of running? Walking is fine too. By now, more than two hundred participants have signed up with the organisation; from students to employees from various companies. For those who are interested: you can still register on the www.campusrunmaastricht.nl website. The starting shot will be given by alderman Hubert Mackus (economics, sports).



The city wall puzzle

No, in this case it wasn't French cannons, as UM students and employees who have not been in Maastricht for very long could suspect. The broken piece of the 16th-century city wall in the Maastricht city park was ruined by instability. It collapsed four-and-a-half years ago.

Now it is finally time for action. The alderman responsible, Frans Bastiaens, informed the city council last week that the wall will be rebuilt starting in October. This is no easy feat: not only will the soil surrounding the wall need to be removed, but the water – including fish and tortoises – in the pond in front will also have to be temporarily removed. The fish will make new friends in the river Maas, the tortoises will be rehomed at a shelter.

As this concerns a historic structure, the restoration itself is also complicated. Every piece of stone that crumbled off will be numbered and temporarily stored in the empty pond. The wall will be rebuilt like a puzzle after the winter.

"It will look exactly the same as before the collapse," the alderman recently said to *De Limburger*. Six million euro has been budgeted for the project, although expectations are that it may very well turn out more expensive in the end. The wall should be completed by the end of 2024.



“Change never comes about without struggle” Still a lot of questions about renewed bachelor’s of Psychology

The renewed bachelor’s programme of Psychology is scheduled to start next academic year. There will be considerable changes, such as the test methods and the role of mentors. It appears that both lecturers and students still have quite a few questions and concerns.

No longer being judged on a number of “high-stake” exams in MECC, but an assessment on your learning progress throughout the year. That is the point of departure for new Psychology students from the next academic year. Marks are no longer the focal point, but feedback, self-management and reflection. This will all be recorded in a portfolio; at the end of the year, a committee assesses whether students have made sufficient progress.

In addition to students being able to choose from multiple specialisations (the Maastricht study programme was the only one in the Netherlands not to have this option), the so-called programme-based testing is one of the greatest changes in the updated bachelor. It fits in with the new ‘testing culture’ that UM wants to introduce across the university. A similar system was already introduced last year at the bachelor’s of Medicine.

Nevertheless, some critical questions were asked during the latest meeting of the faculty council, two weeks ago, and during a ‘Town Hall meeting’ for lecturers last week. One thing concerned the role of mentors, who will

become much more important, in particular in first year. Acting as ‘coaches’, they will supervise a fixed group of twelve students intensely for a whole year, but at the same time also act as one of their tutors.

Council members on behalf of the academic staff expressed their concern that these might be conflicting tasks. “On the one hand, you are trying to help someone, but on the other hand, you also have to assess them. If you establish a personal relationship, it makes it more difficult to have to say ‘this is not good enough.’” Moreover: working intensively with the same group for a whole year, will that not cause friction, student members wondered. “At the moment, during tutorials you always have students who take the easy route, or ‘hide’, one of them said.

Other worries included: will the opportunity for fraud using AI not increase if supervised exams lose importance and there are more reports and presentations? How can you continue to stimulate students who perform better as a result of the competition for a high grade? What are the consequences of not having an average grade when you want to do a master’s elsewhere?

Yes, discussions about issues like these will undoubtedly be needed, Herco Fonteijn, coordinator of the bachelor’s of Psychology, states in a telephone interview. “We will be asking both students and lecturers for some-

thing quite different. These kinds of changes do not come about without struggle, higher education is, after all, rather conservative. But they are necessary. The new approach fits in well with competences that psychology students must learn: self-regulation, resilience, dealing with feedback.”

The new role is also better for lecturers, he says. “Instead of checking four hundred exams, you now discuss the results elaborately with a small group of students. I can imagine that this is more rewarding work. Moreover, checking assignments these days takes up an unreasonable amount of time. That should be reduced.” But is this not a masked cutback in teaching hours, as was asked during the Town Hall meeting? Fonteijn: “No, you can’t say that. The hours will stay practically the same. The main idea is that they don’t increase and that there is more flexibility. Also, lecturers who do not become mentors, will most likely lose teaching time in the bachelor’s, but could, for example, teach more in the master’s.”

The faculty council will discuss the matter further next week, and the new education plan will be voted on later this year. Also, this was definitely not the last Town Hall meeting on the subject, dean Harald Merckelbach assured those present during the meeting.

Dennis Vaendel



What is allowed in saving the planet?

“

Two weeks ago, the German climate activist group “The Last Generation” made headlines by spray-painting the iconic Brandenburg Tor in Berlin a striking shade of bright orange. While this act had minimal impact on daily life, it still managed to provoke controversy and public outrage.

It appears that climate activists are steadily accumulating a blacklist of “don’ts” in their battle against the planet’s destruction. Street blockades? Nope, as they target the wrong people and inconvenience commuters just trying to make it to work. Throwing soup at paintings protected by glass? Definitely not, as defacing artworks is an attack on beauty itself. Seemingly, the only option left is a form of protest that avoids disrupting anyone’s daily routines. But nondisruptive forms of activism like the Fridays for Future marches lost their grip on the headlines long ago and it’s precisely this attention-grabbing challenge that groups like the Last Generation are taking on.

Things like soup-throwing or even gluing yourself to the street will likely not change the minds of climate sceptics or reach broad public support, but they definitely make more people notice the issue and get it on the news. This is important because the press might not make you think a certain way, but it makes you think about what it’s showing you.

Yet, Germany and other European governments are cracking down harder on these peaceful climate actions, by handing out high fines and even making protests illegal. This has gone so far that it caught the attention of rights groups like the United Nations and the Council of Europe, who are concerned that these extreme measures are upsetting the balance between environmental activism and people’s rights. While some protests might cause inconvenience in people’s daily lives, that shouldn’t automatically make them illegal.

Fighting climate change is a collective societal effort that is impossible without dialogue, understanding, and collaboration. Repression, punishment, and stigmatization only drive us further apart. Governments must uphold their responsibility to safeguard freedom of speech, reevaluate their strategies, prioritize dialogue over repression, and join forces with activists to confront the pressing climate crisis, which impacts countless lives, far beyond the reach of any soup-throwing protest.

Line-Marie Eichhorst,
student at UCM

Clothing swap at FPN: “Sustainable, and you save money too”



Clothing swap UNS40 Photo: Joey Roberts

A remarkable sight on the ‘education square’ in UNS40 Wednesday morning: among the students working behind their laptops is a number of racks filled with shirts, trousers and hoodies. Staff and students can swap clothes there this Wednesday and Thursday: exchange an item of clothing you no longer wear (but is still in good condition) for someone else’s ‘discard’.

An initiative of the Green Team at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience’s (FPN), founded by students last year, which - by now, together with staff members - is working towards a more sustainable faculty. “Before the summer, we also held a clothing swap, which was a great success then,” says psychology student Amelie Schleifer, a member of the team,

sitting at a table next to the clothing racks. “This academic year, we want to do it monthly. Hopefully then people will buy clothes less often, but get something ‘new’ here. More sustainable, and you save money too.”

Clothes not exchanged will be donated to a (yet to be determined) charity.

DV

series: **societal impact of research**

New primary care approach gaining traction

In today's world, the societal impact of research findings seems more important than getting published in an academic journal like *Nature* or *The Lancet*. What impact has research at UM achieved in recent years? This week: **how a UM pilot study in seven general practices grew into a movement involving over a hundred practices.**



Rowan Smeets Photo: Ellen Oosterhof

Over the past decade, five hundred General Practitioners (GPs) in the Netherlands under the age of 50 quit their practice. 2021 alone saw 101 GPs under 50 quit, according to a survey conducted by the Dutch General Practitioner's Association (LHV). Despite GP assistants taking on more responsibilities, including mental health and diabetes care, 75 percent of GPs are still faced with heavy workloads. This is due to worker shortages, especially in more remote areas of the country, but also because of the ageing population. People are living to older ages, staying in their own homes longer, and increasingly using primary care services. In an effort to reduce GP workload, researcher Rowan Smeets and colleagues

developed TARGET, a new approach and vision for general practice. Commissioned by primary care group Zorggroep Drenthe, the programme began as a pilot study involving seven general practices in Drenthe. Since then, it has spread across the province like wildfire. Today, 119 practices have implemented the programme. And there is growing interest in other parts of the Netherlands.

Addiction

What does TARGET entail? It may sound strange, but GPs first need to ask themselves who

“Our research shows that 6 per cent of attenders use 23 per cent of all GP care”

exactly their patients are – how much care they use, how often they contact the practice, and how often they come in for a consultation. To gain insight into their patient population, GPs can use UM-developed software that analyses their patient database. “Our research shows that 6 per cent of attenders use 23 per cent of all GP care”,

says Smeets. “Two-thirds of this 6 per cent have long-term conditions like diabetes or COPD. To our surprise, the remaining one-third turned out to consist of people aged 50 or younger. They struggle primarily with mental health problems such as burnout.”

After identifying their “frequent attenders”, GPs sit down with patients whose frequent attendance cannot be readily explained by, say, a progressive disease or another condition that requires regular monitoring. These in-depth conversations with patients may reveal that they have something entirely different going on, says Smeets. “Some are in debt; others are struggling with addiction. They might be better served by support from local authorities or addiction services. This reduces GP workload. It's crucial for GPs to have an extensive network of support workers in other disciplines. Some practices have appointed a network coordinator for this purpose.”

Autonomy

The approach frees up time for patients with complex healthcare needs. But there's even more to gain by easing standardised guidelines. “According to national guidelines, patients with diabetes have to come in for a check-up four times per year. This makes sense for patients who don't have their diabetes under control yet. But an annual check-up may be sufficient for patients who eat well, are active and are on the right medication. The health insurance company Zilveren Kruis, a participant in the TARGET programme, is giving GPs more freedom and autonomy to organise their services as they see fit.” Many of these check-ups could also be conducted through video calls or home monitoring. “eHealth offers a lot of opportunities in this regard.” But the key question is: can GP workload be reduced? “It's not easy”, says Smeets, “especially in a time when the number of patients with complex care needs is increasing and there is a shortage of healthcare workers. TARGET gave some GPs more time for their patients, but not others. We have an evaluation of the programme coming up. Our main goal is to increase job satisfaction, which significantly reduces subjective workload. We've found that GPs mainly appreciate increased autonomy, reduced administrative burdens, and feeling like their work is meaningful.”

Limburg

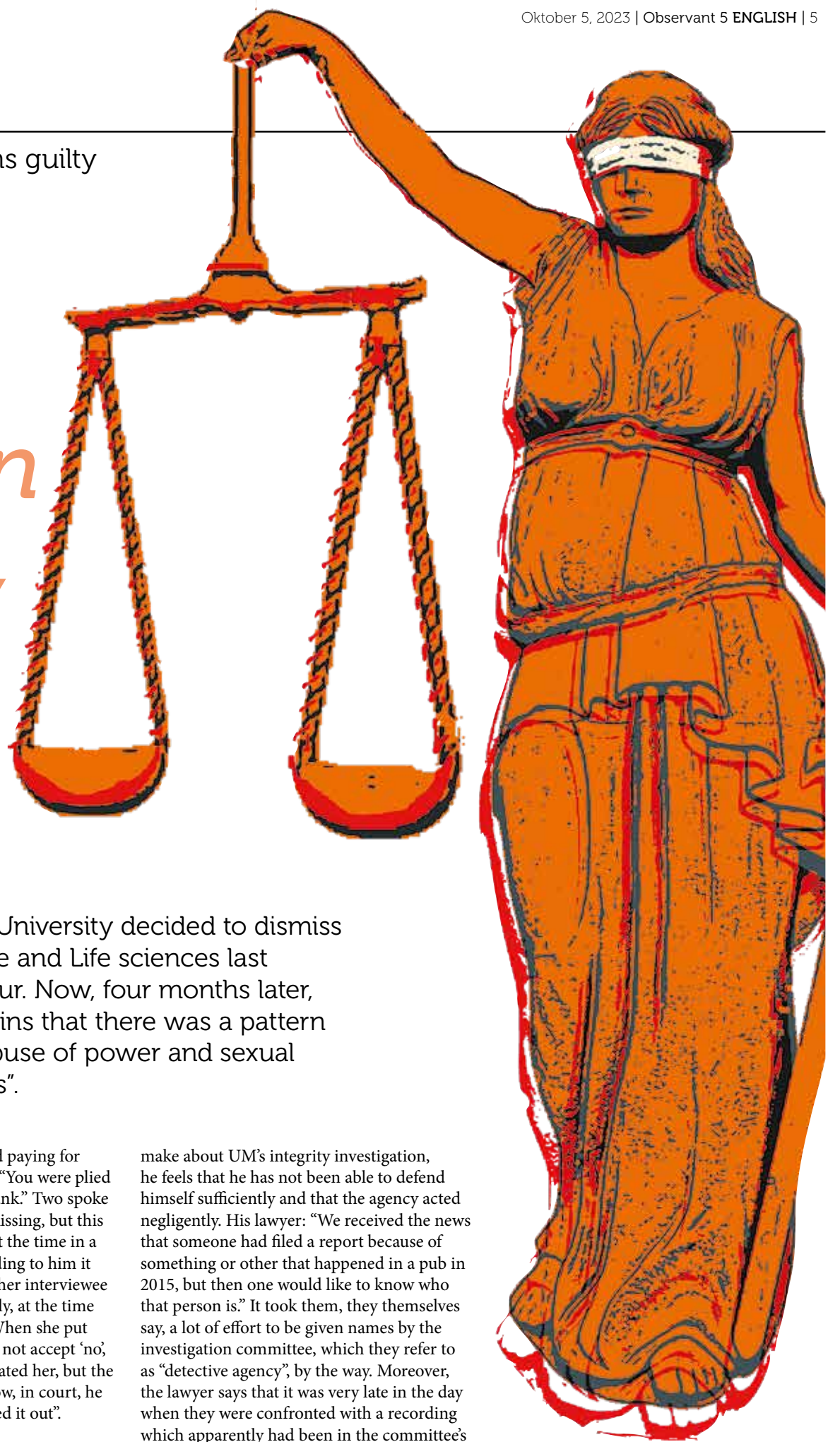
Rowan Smeets and her colleagues are getting weekly inquiries about TARGET from GPs, health insurers and medical specialists. “The Council of Public Health & Society (RVS) has called the project a role model for others, and Zilveren Kruis is considering implementing the approach beyond Drenthe. There is already a great deal of interest from other provinces, including Limburg, which is home to a large population of older adults. TARGET could be a great fit here.”

Maurice Timmermans

background

Dismissal case of professor whom UM deems guilty of sexually unacceptable behaviour

Judge:
 “Why do you, as someone in your position, put yourself in such situations?”



After an independent investigation, Maastricht University decided to dismiss a professor from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life sciences last May because of sexually unacceptable behaviour. Now, four months later, both parties stand before the judge. UM maintains that there was a pattern of misconduct, the professor’s lawyer denies abuse of power and sexual intimidation, he speaks of “a couple of incidents”.

Is there sufficient evidence for a dismissal and were there serious reprehensible actions? That is what the judge must deliberate upon. The session in the Maastricht court took place last Thursday. UM’s lawyer sums up the findings: a sexual relationship with a subordinate, undesired kissing and touching breasts, asking students to stay at his house overnight, drugs and alcohol abuse. Apparently “he allowed students to come to his house until deep into the night. UM feels that in these incidents it is irrelevant who started the kissing. The question is: ‘How do you get caught up in this, considering your role and position at the university; were there really no other alternatives to you asking the student to stay the night at your place. You could also have thought: ‘I will arrange a taxi for her.’” Terms such as abuse of power and sexual intimidation are used. The UM’s lawyers believes it doesn’t matter whether the victims are 18 or 29. “He did not act as a good employee should. UM should be a safe haven for all employees, this accounts against him seriously.”

Going out with them

Reports of undesirable behaviour were made to Maastricht University about a year ago. After an independent investigation by the agency Partners in Integriteit, UM decided to dismiss the professor. During the investigation “more cases of sexually unacceptable behaviour came to light,” the university stated in a message on the intranet on 8 May. The precise facts, when and with whom as well as where something happened, were not being discussed in court. *Observant* spoke in detail with four people back in May (most of whom were former students, who later went on the work with the professor). “Actually, all women felt uneasy with him,” one of the interviewees said. “He went out with us, acted

like he was one of us. He liked paying for rounds.” Another one added: “You were plied with drink until you were drunk.” Two spoke of obtrusive and unsolicited kissing, but this was denied by the professor at the time in a reaction to *Observant*. According to him it was “never unsolicited”. Another interviewee arranged to meet him regularly, at the time it was with mutual consent. When she put an end to it, the professor did not accept ‘no’, she said. He allegedly intimidated her, but the professor denies this. Even now, in court, he says: “I thought we had worked it out.”

Schoolkids

The professor’s lawyer says that his client is “deeply troubled” by the case and sympathises with the reporters, but that UM should not pretend that the man has been in the wrong all his academic career: “A couple of incidents out of thousands of professional relations with students and colleagues.” There was never any sexual intimidation as far as he is concerned, “it depends on whether something was desired or undesired; my client shows that it was desired”. The professor should have reported the relationship with a subordinate, but this cannot lead to a dismissal. His lawyer thinks “as a man, it is difficult to understand the psyche of women in cases like these. They are adults, there are rules, confidential advisors, et cetera, why was no use made of those options?” He insisted on this earlier: “Why did they remain quiet for years? They are not schoolkids, they can discuss this behaviour, can’t they?” A little later, the lawyer corrects himself: “As far as the psyche is concerned, it was rather unfortunately worded, I mean that I am not allowed to have an opinion on that.”

Detective agency

The professor has quite a few comments to

make about UM’s integrity investigation, he feels that he has not been able to defend himself sufficiently and that the agency acted negligently. His lawyer: “We received the news that someone had filed a report because of something or other that happened in a pub in 2015, but then one would like to know who that person is.” It took them, they themselves say, a lot of effort to be given names by the investigation committee, which they refer to as “detective agency”, by the way. Moreover, the lawyer says that it was very late in the day when they were confronted with a recording which apparently had been in the committee’s possession for months. What is on the tape, is not being said, but *Observant* previously heard that on it he admits to having sexually assaulted women working at UM.

Exemplary role

UM has no doubts: the professor put himself in a position “in which a scientist with a public and exemplary role should never have been. The impact on those involved is tremendous. You would have expected him to act differently, as a teacher, as someone in charge.” The judge intervenes only a few times, she wants to know from the professor why he put himself, “with your position, in such situations”?

He answers himself: Yes, he invited students out for a drink, but “I am not the only one who arranged to have drinks”. For two, three years, he went out for drinks every now and again, “not very often, but it was fun, and twice that resulted in kissing, mutual”. The judge: “But then you became a professor, what does that mean? That you no longer have drinks with students, get drunk or stay up really late (...)? You can no longer do that as a professor and as an associate professor you can?”

“I became head of the department, it became more serious, you have more responsibility.” As far as the relationship with a subordinate is concerned, the judge asks: “Did you not think: ‘I shouldn’t do this?’”

The professor: “Yes, we did say that to each other. We have known each other for six years, we had good fun, could talk really well.”

“And then suddenly you are no longer a professor?” the judge says to him.

“It was private.”

His lawyer emphasises that such a relationship is not prohibited.

Reassignment

UM demands dismissal, without transitional employment allowance. UM is against reappointment within the university, at the Faculty of Psychology, for example, at “a lower level”, as the professor’s lawyer suggests. “He would still need access to the FHML labs for his work, so he would still be on the premises there.”

The verdict will be given in four weeks’ time.

reportage



Training session of Cactus Photo: Joey Roberts

"I had never heard of it, now I play it every day"

It is a dreary Thursday evening. Still, a dozen or so members of spikeball association Cactus have gathered on the sports field. Some wear shoes with spikes, others are on bare feet. The training session starts with a short warming up; running around a small circuit. After that, the nets are pulled taut over a small round structure, which looks a bit like a trampoline. The members position themselves across the field. The game begins.

The game

Spikeball, also called Roundnet, came over from the United States. It is getting quite popular in the Netherlands too. The Maastricht student association has existed for about four years. Yuan Tjiam (31) has been their trainer for a year now, the only non-student among the students, and at the same time 'captain' of the 'barefoot club'. Do your feet not slip easily? "On wet grass like today, yes, but I personally feel as if I am more agile this way." He enthusiastically waits to start. "Everyone is too late, because it is raining. They are wimps," he says laughing. As more members start to arrive, the others have already begun.

just hit it onto the net, you use your whole body to stop it," says Tjiam.

Team spirit

Whereas Tjiam is in charge of the training, 21-year-old Nicolas Manneback (bachelor's of European Studies) is their chairman, responsible for everything else; from tournaments to barbecues. He set up a group app with all the members at the beginning of this year. "When we are not training, we can still play with the gear, which you then borrow from the club. If someone is in the mood to play, they just need to send a message to the group. There are always people who fancy a game." Man-

neback believes that team spirit is important too. "There is plenty of that here. Everyone is friendly, which comes in handy during games, because there is no referee. So, you have to work it out together. It works most of the time." In addition, the teams also have to decide when the game is over. Sometimes, it is when the first team has gained 15 points, at other times, the game runs up to 21 points.

Various levels

The levels within the group vary greatly. Manneback himself only started a year ago with no prior knowledge of the game. "A friend invited me to come and join in. I had never heard of it before, now I play it every day." According to him, it is a game that you can get good at quickly. "I was not all that great when I started, but within two months, I had gotten to grips with it." How does that work in a team with varying levels? Trainer Tjiam has come up with a solution for that; "The players are divided into levels. As there are four nets, there are four levels. When a team wins, it can pass on to the next net and hence to a higher level." Those who think that this is just a game, would be wrong. Competitions are organised at both national and international levels. Last year, for example, there was one in Prague.

Women

What about the men-to-women ratio? The association has about twenty members, including five women. One of them is 21-year-old UCM student Elena Theile, who is the only female playing this evening among all that testosterone. "It makes no difference to me that there are more men. I don't feel less than them." Theile didn't know the sport before either. "I used to play tennis, but after Covid I wanted to try something else. I saw Spikeball on the UM Sport's website. It seemed like fun." That expectation proved right, because even though everyone is fanatical, Theile says that during training sessions it is still about one thing: having fun.

Lotte van de Loo

Facts:

1 Inventor: American Jeff Knurek, in 1989. A combination of volleyball and badminton skills

2 Two against two

3 Principle: At the beginning of the game, team A serves the ball from the serving circle by hitting it onto the net in one move. Team B may then touch the ball up to three times before it has to be hit onto the net again. Then it's up to team A again (a maximum of three contacts).

4 After serving, there are no restrictions. Everyone can move around the net.

5 Players who do not have the ball, may not get in the way.

6 The entire body can be used to touch the ball.

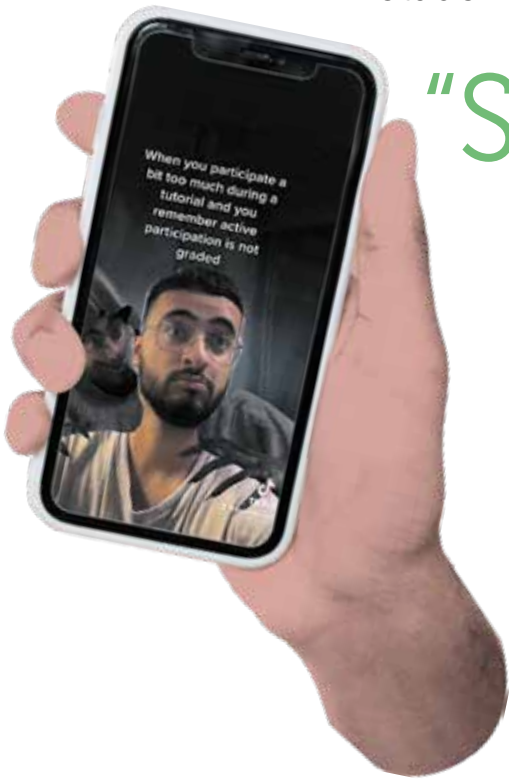
7 Points: You score when you hit the ball onto the net in such a way that the other team can no longer catch it and the ball lands on the ground.

8 Game ends: with 15 or 21 points

In this series, *Observant* puts the spotlights on student sports associations. This time – instead of familiar sports such as football, tennis and (field) hockey – we will focus on lesser-known sports, such as spikeball, lacrosse, ultimate frisbee, and Gaelic games. We will speak to both the sporters and their trainers.

Student behind the popular Memestricht became a well-known face

“Some students feel everything is funny, except when it is about themselves”



Students who want to take a photograph with him, being recognised by professors: with his popular Instagram page *Memestricht* – which at its height had some twenty thousand followers – law student Kevin Mousa became a well-known face within UM the past few years. But there are drawbacks too: “I received messages from people who wrote that they would ‘do me in’ if they met me.”



Many university cities already had one: a popular page with memes – joking images and videos, where the humour is often in the repetition and identifiability – of local student life. Why hasn't Maastricht got one yet, Kevin Mousa (who was born in the Netherlands and grew up in Germany and France) wondered at the end of 2018. “As a fan of memes. I thought that was such a shame. So, I decided to create an Instagram page myself: *Memestricht*.” It was successful, because with more than 15 thousand followers, you can certainly say that the page has become a household word among Maastricht students. “At one point, there were even 18 thousand, but if you don't post anything in a busy period, the number quickly drops,” says Mousa. On the street and at the university, he is frequently recognised as ‘that guy from *Memestricht*’. “Especially by students, who sometimes even want to take a selfie with me. But every now and again, there are also lecturers who stare at me during a lecture and afterwards tell me that they sometimes

watch the memes.” Not that it is about the attention for him, says Mousa, he primarily wants to entertain people. “For the first couple of years, nobody even knew who was behind *Memestricht*. That was quite funny, sometimes I heard students around me speculating about who it could be.” The mystery ended in 2021 when he posted video clips in which he himself featured. “Such clips, in TikTok style, were becoming more and more popular at the time and I had so many ideas. So, I thought, no more anonymity.”

Stereotypes

By now, the page features hundreds of memes, often with thousands of likes and dozens of reactions. They are about expensive student rooms, studying at the University Library, or taking exams in MECC, but also about the Dutch weather, carnival, and André Rieu. “I get inspiration from the experiences I have at the university or in the city, or from friends' stories. As soon as I have an idea, I immediately sit at my laptop and post it.”

Sometimes the humour is in stereotypes, for example, that Belgians always talk too loudly in the University Library, or that only rich Germans study at SBE. “That sometimes takes some exploring: what do people like and what don't they like? Fortunately, the reactions are mostly positive and the very ones who are ridiculed can also laugh about it.”

Death threats

But not all jokes go down well. In spring of this year, a video clip about the Faculty of Arts and Social

Sciences (FASoS) caused a lot of commotion. In it, you can see Mousa being chased by a police car with flashing lights and the text “If you say ‘that's gay’ at FASoS”. Mousa: “In my mind, it was pretty innocent and clearly a joke about the ‘cancel culture’. But ironically, it was this meme that provoked vehement reactions. People sent me DMs (private messages via Instagram, ed.) in which they called me discriminating or xenophobic, or they said they were going to report me to the university, because I should be kicked out. There were even some death threats, people were going to ‘do me in’ if they met me on the street.” *Observant* couldn't see these messages; some of them, says Mousa, were removed afterwards by the senders and he deleted the rest himself, because he “didn't want to see them anymore.”

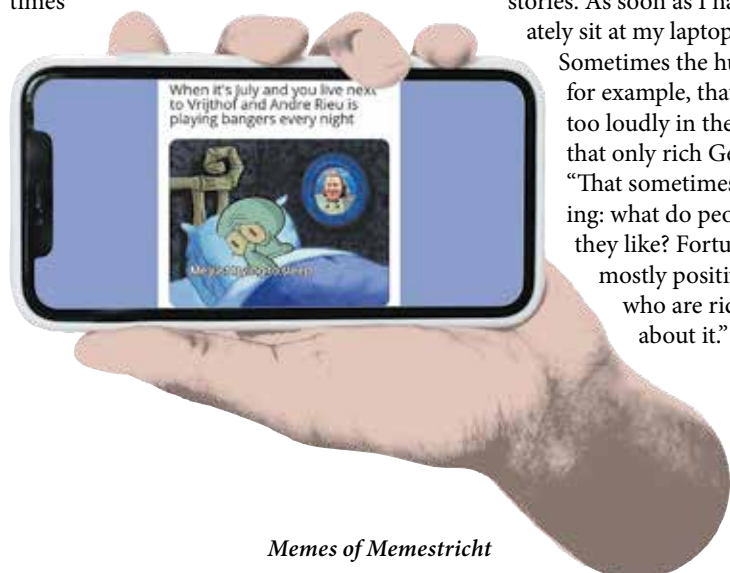
Drawing the line

“Sometimes, it is difficult to estimate beforehand when you are crossing a line. If there are a lot of negative reactions, I often delete a meme. It is not my intention to hurt people. But in this case, I drew a line. I thought ‘What is taking things too far: my meme or those reactions?’ Moreover, you can hate me, but then don't follow me. It was only a small number of people who were fiercely rude; there were also a lot of positive reactions. I received dozens of DMs from people who wrote that they supported me and that I shouldn't allow myself to be intimidated.” He never considered stopping. “I was troubled by it in the beginning, but I never had any regrets. I also noticed that people write all kinds of stuff online, but ‘in real life’ they dare

not say anything when they recognise me on the street. I decided that I had to learn to live with the fierce reactions on Instagram.” Even though they appear more and more, he says. “But only in specific cases, especially when it is about FASoS and University College Maastricht (UCM). The reactions are often from students who, based on their profile, would be very tolerant and great advocates of freedom of speech. But apparently that only applies when your opinions fit in with theirs. I try to make memes about all faculties, study programmes and nationalities. As long as it is about others, it is funny, but when it is about themselves, it is not funny anymore.”

Successor

At the moment, Mousa is busy with the final touches to his master's of European Law. Will he continue to make memes? He will, on TikTok, where he has another channel with video clips that not only focus on student life. But no longer for *Memestricht*, because he handed that page over to another student this summer. “Because I will most likely not be in Maastricht and at the university anymore.” His successor will remain anonymous (for the time being). “He also saw how fierce the reactions can be.”



Memes of Memestricht

news

Three-million-euro EU subsidy for Maastricht political scientists

Global collaboration must be revived

The Paris climate agreements don't seem to be getting off the ground, emerging economies are increasingly choosing their own course, and an international organisation like OSCE has largely come to a standstill. How can the EU revive global collaboration? Fourteen universities and a handful of think tanks, led by Maastricht political scientists, are going to look for answers. The EU set aside three million euro for this purpose last summer.

In December 2015, the Paris Agreement was presented, in which eventually 195 countries agreed to stop global warming. In the same year, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were put on paper, an equally impressive piece of global collaboration. But the mood changed in 2016 and global governance was miles away. In that year, Donald Trump came to power with his motto 'America first', Great Britain left the EU, and relations between the EU and China cooled, the latter country being classified as a threat for the first time. Together with other emerging economies (BRICS), including Russia and Brazil, China mapped out its own course. The group recently decided to admit six new countries, among them Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Then there is the growing number of populist leaders, who are not always eager to deal with global problems together with other parties. The same applied to Trump, but also to Brazilian president Bolsonaro, who took no heed of the worldwide criticism and deforested large parts of the rain forest. Hungarian prime-minister Orban also often throws a spanner in the works of the international motor, among others by refusing to put human rights in China up for discussion.

Covid virus

How can the EU help to reinvigorate global collaboration? How can you make the international order more efficient, more robust and more democratic? These are the leading questions for the international research project ENSURED, for which the EU has recently reserved three million Euro. Led by Maastricht University, the project group includes fourteen



Photo: Flickr/Digitalexander

universities, but also various think tanks and social organisations. Kick-off is on 1 November. The project consists of case studies from fifteen international organisations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), says co-ordinator Hylke Dijkstra, professor of International Security and Cooperation at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Those organisations suffer greatly due to the lack of global collaboration. Take the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), says Dijkstra. "The OSCE – with 57 participating states, from North America to Asia - sends observers to elections, but since the war in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus no longer allow this. The organisation has even largely come to a standstill. There is no budget for 2023, and the chairmanship for 2024 has not been determined."

The WHO is also going through hard times. "In 2020, the US and China clashed over the origin of the Covid virus and Trump refused to finance the WHO any longer. Nevertheless, the organisation continued to function well. That is remarkable, and it is why we will hold interviews with civil servants from various countries. Is it because of its structure, with regional offices operating independently from head office? What can other organisations learn from the WHO?"

Playing field

In addition, a total of thirty researchers will carry out quantitative analyses, in which they will take a closer look at all three hundred international organisations. "We also want to see what is one's best bet. The EU wants to

do everything at the same time, organisations must become more robust, more efficient, more democratic. But maybe you have to consider the pros and cons, accept the fact that an organisation is not up to scratch democratically, but that it is robust. We hope to provide recommendations in this field."

The research project is going to last three years. Will the findings then still be up-to-date, in a world that is changing at a tremendous pace? "We are not just looking forward, but we will also analyse the present state of affairs on the international playing field. So, even if the world looks different in three years' time, the findings will still be interesting. Maybe not in all cases for policymakers but it will be for scientists."

Maurice Timmermans

Agenda academic ceremonies Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6

5-10, 16.00 h Julia Reinold
6-10, 10.00 h Jurriaan Brekelmans
6-10, 14.00 h Dr. Kasper Dziurdz, inauguratie
6-10, 16.00 h Laila Hasmi
9-10, 10.00 h Mathew Francis
9-10, 16.00 h Samantha Pasca
10-10, 13.00 h Anna (Anique) M.J. van Oudheusden
11-10, 10.00 h Pichaporn Sutthavas
11-10, 13.00 h Abdulrahman B.O. Mohamed
11-10, 16.00 h Ronaldus M.J. Warnier
12-10, 16.00 h Simon Andreas Keek
13-10, 10.00 h Sara Zwier Kuiper
13-10, 13.00 h Saartje Straetemans
13-10, 16.00 h Prof. dr. Edwin C.M. Mariman, afscheidscollege
16-10, 13.00 h Cecilia Tetta
16-10, 16.00 h Radulfus J.S. van Mechelen
17-10, 10.00 h Anjusha Mathew
19-10, 13.00 h Ioannis G. Lempesis, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and University of Birmingham
20-10, 13.00 h Martijn Randolph Mons

20-10, 16.00 h Prof. dr. Richard P. Koopmans, afscheidscollege
23-10, 16.00 h Isis B.T. Joosten
24-10, 13.00 h Steffi Kohl
24-10, 16.00 h Miriam F. L. Fichtner
25-10, 16.00 h Lonnie Heijmans
26-10, 10.00 h Fatma Bashir Abulgasem Mokhtar
26-10, 13.00 h Luuk I.B. Heckman
26-10, 16.00 h Aline Mirella Elias Caldeira Dantas
27-10, 10.00 h Bart Johannes Hendrikus van Sloun
27-10, 13.00 h Jules Robin Olsthoorn
27-10, 16.30 h Dr. Federico De Martino, inauguratie
30-10, 10.00 h George-Mihai Irimescu, Double Doctoral Degree Maastricht University and Nicolae Titulescu University of Bucharest
30-10, 13.00 h Michelle Roanne Baggerman
30-10, 16.00 h Irene Moll
31-10, 13.00 h Adele Veronika Ruder
31-10, 16.00 h Ruud F.W. Franssen



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