

# observant

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Illustration: Shutterstock

## COULD TRUMP BE CALLED A FASCIST?

Or would that be going too far? Observant asked historian Pablo del Hierro, who specializes in the history of (neo)fascism

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## SEX SOUNDS BLEEDING THROUGH THE THIN WALL OF YOUR STUDENT ROOM

"Talk about it, lingering frustration will only ruin the atmosphere in the house"

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Photo: Provincie Limburg

HOLLANDER LEARNS LIMBURGISH OUT OF LOVE FOR THE LANGUAGE

## "THIS IS THE COMMUNICATION PROVINCE OF THE NETHERLANDS"

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## editorial

## A personal interview that was deemed “too personal”

Sometimes I can only shake my head in disbelief. Take this situation: well before Christmas, a colleague asked a student if she'd like to be interviewed for our weekly series *Sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire*. In this series, we interview students and staff about their studies, work and private lives. We ask them all sorts of personal questions – about their struggles, their regrets, their proudest moments. In other words, it's a deeply personal interview. To make sure the interviewee understands what they're agreeing to, we always send them a link to previously published articles in the series.

The student immediately said yes, without any hesitation. The interview took place a few days later, and our photographer took a photo. Two weeks after that, we sent the interviewee the article so she could fact-check it before publication – standard practice for this kind of story. It usually comes back with no comments or one or two minor points. Job done, the journalist thinks.

But this time – and not for the first time – it was a different story. The interviewee thanked us for sending her the article but said she had changed her mind. She didn't want it published after all: “Too personal.” Huh? That's the whole point of the series, as we'd made clear from the outset. The interview itself left no room for misunderstanding, either. While fortunately rare, it does sometimes happen that people get cold feet when they see their story set down in writing. In these cases, we sit down with them to find out the root of the problem. It's often a specific passage they're worried about, typically because they're afraid of how others might interpret it. We're usually able to tweak things to put their mind at ease.

So, that was our plan: talk to the interviewee. But between Christmas and the first working week of January, we didn't hear back from her.

What now? That was the question at this week's editorial meeting. The article, already translated, is scheduled for publication next week. How could someone not realise that agreeing to such an interview is not a casual arrangement? A journalist, a photographer and a translator have all invested time and effort into the article. And of course the end result gets published on our website and in our newspaper – why else would we conduct interviews? As much as we enjoy meeting interesting people, we don't do it just for fun.

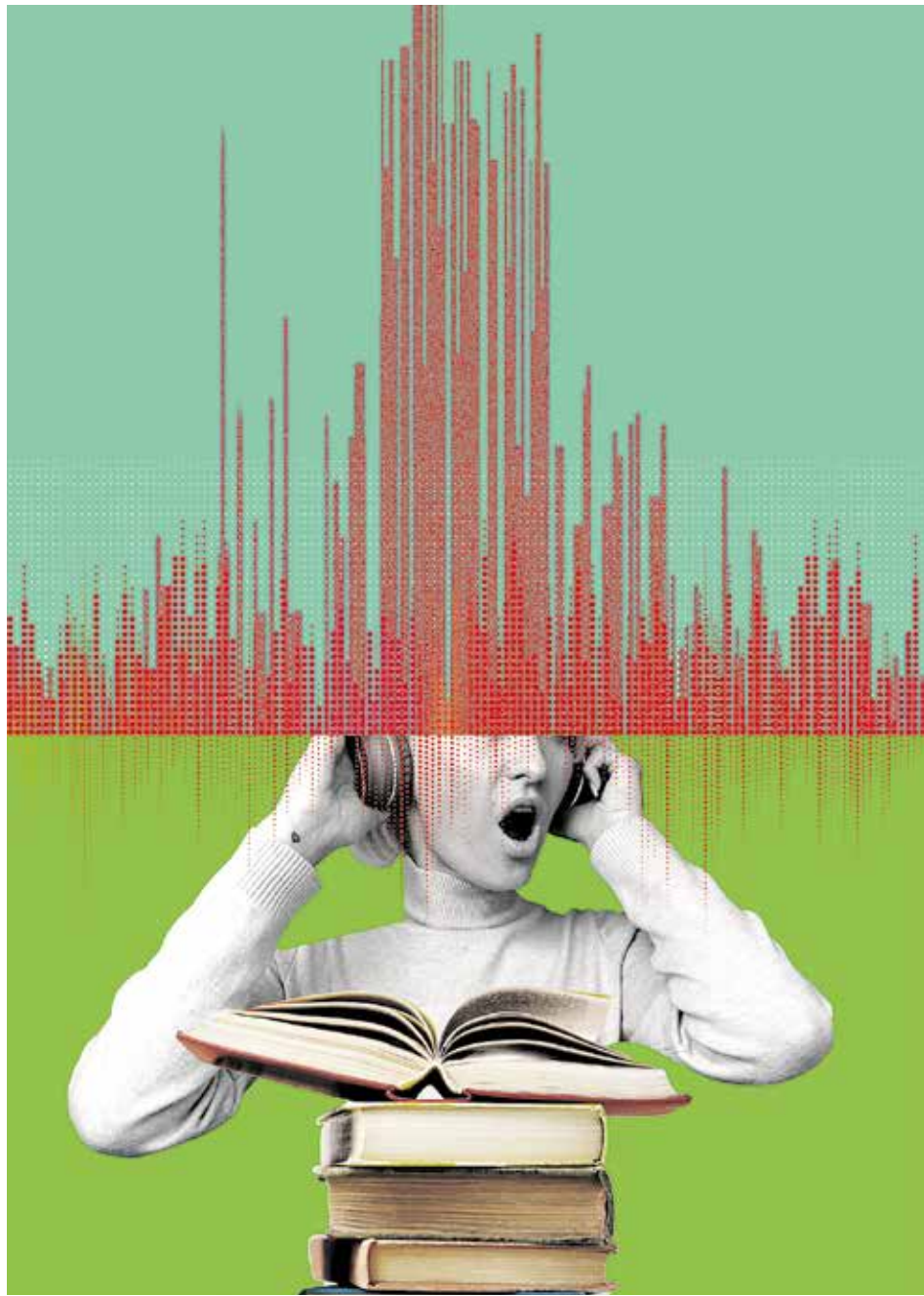
So, we sent the interviewee another email. This time, thankfully, she replied. I'm confident things will work out.

Riki Janssen

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



## series everything you want to know about sex



Collage: Simone Golob

## “You can hear your housemate having sex? Talk to them about it”

**You and your housemate share ups and downs, a bathroom and a paper-thin wall. What if the person in the room next to yours gets into a relationship and you can hear them having sex while you're trying to study for an important exam? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte offers some advice.**

It might feel a bit awkward, but Dewitte strongly encourages students in this situation to talk to their housemate about it. “Lingering frustration will only ruin the atmosphere in the house.” But how do you broach the subject? “You could look for a natural opening – perhaps something you've read or seen on TV.” Humour can help, but think carefully about how it might be received. “Keep it respectful; this isn't the time for inappropriate jokes. You don't want to make your housemate feel self-conscious or think you disapprove of their relationship.”

The key is to express your feelings from your own perspective and not as a reproach to the other person, Dewitte says. “You could say something like, ‘I'm really happy for you that you've found someone, but sometimes I can hear you having sex when I'm trying to study, and it's distracting. Could we work out a solution so you two can enjoy yourselves but also be mindful of me? Maybe we could agree on quiet hours when I need to focus, or I could let you know when I'll be out?’” It's also helpful to add a positive message, for instance how you enjoy your living arrangement. “Let them know you're bringing this up because you value your relationship as housemates.” Or consider another tricky housemate situation: you are dating someone whose roommates do not respect your privacy at all.

Snide comments, ‘accidentally’ dropping in when you are in the room together, or even taking out the door of the room. You really like your new partner, but having sex in this house is a hard no for you. “This is about self-respect – both yours and your partner's”, says Dewitte. Setting boundaries can be challenging, particularly in the face of peer pressure. “It's natural

to want to fit in, especially if you've just moved to a new city. But it's important to stand up for yourself. Ignoring your own boundaries will only lead to long-term regret.” Dewitte suggests asking yourself an important question: do you even want to belong to a group of housemates who treat newcomers that way? “You might realise you're better off not fitting in with people like that.” And as for your partner? “Maybe they're not as great as you thought after all.”

Cleo Freriks

Marieke Dewitte is a clinical psychologist and sexologist at Maastricht University. In this weekly series, she answers questions about sex from students. If you have a question, you can submit it anonymously, scan the code



## Two million suspicious events detected on UM network annually

# Cyberattack on Eindhoven University of Technology: could it happen again in Maastricht?

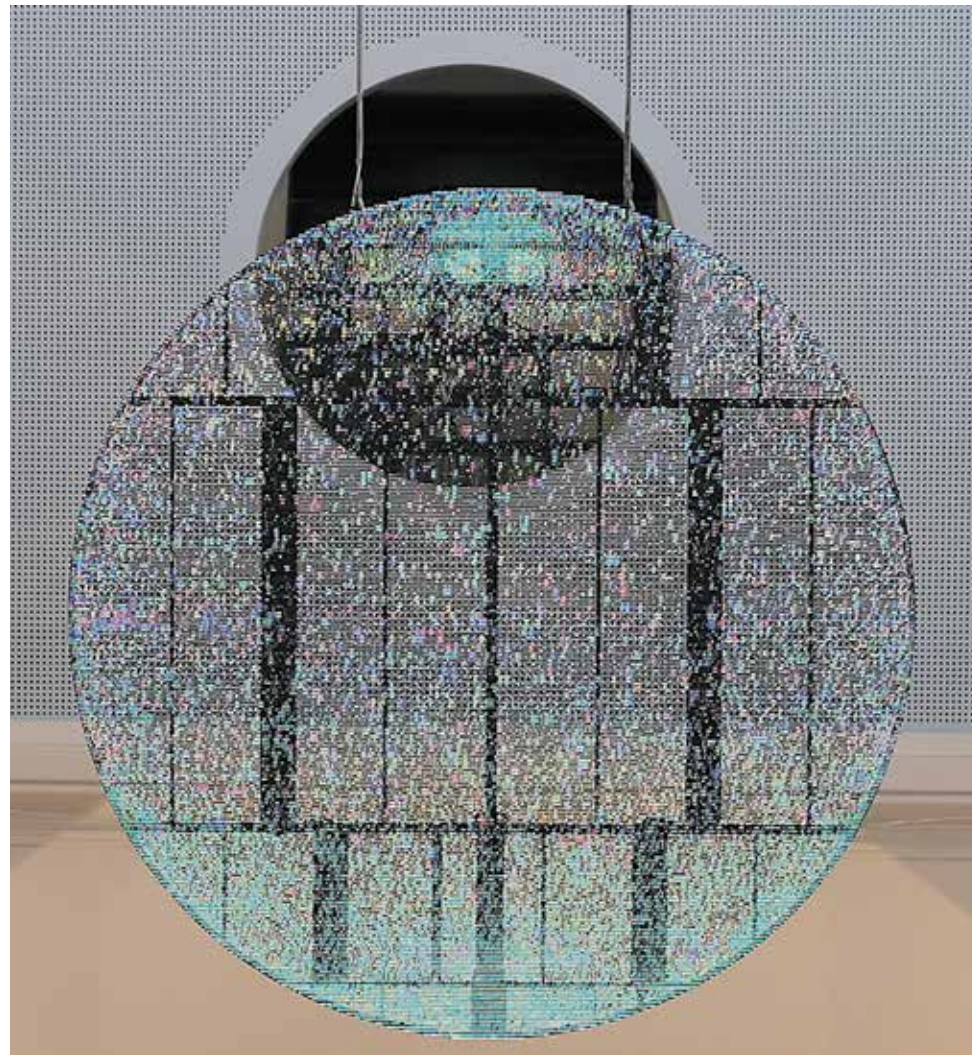
*Another Dutch university has fallen victim to a large-scale cyberattack. Since last weekend, teaching at Eindhoven University of Technology (TU/e) has been suspended. A similar incident occurred at Maastricht University in late 2019, when cybercriminals demanded – and successfully received – ransom. UM paid €200,000 in Bitcoin to regain access to its servers. Could something like this happen again in Maastricht?*

The possibility can't be ruled out, says Jacques Beursgens, director of the ICT Service Centre. "The world of cybersecurity is like an arms race", he explains. "Hackers are constantly looking for new ways to bypass organisations' security systems." And even the best security is only as strong as its weakest link – the individual user of a laptop or PC. "If a user accidentally clicks on a dodgy link or downloads malicious software, you can only hope your security system will intervene in time."

According to Beursgens, UM's security system has been significantly improved since the cyber-attack. "December 2019 was a reality check in that sense; a lot has changed since then." The university has hired additional IT staff, its network is now monitored 24/7, more sophisticated detection software has been installed on laptops and PCs, and staff are now required to use two-factor authentication (a password and a numerical code) when logging in.

How often is this improved security system put to the test? According to Beursgens, more than two million "alerts" of potentially dangerous incidents are recorded each year. "Not all of these are cyberattacks. They include websites attempting to install software without permission, suspicious network activity and malware downloads. And, more recently, CEO fraud" – scam emails where fraudsters impersonate a higher-ranking person to trick UM employees into transferring money.

Each year, UM's cybersecurity team thoroughly investigates around seventy incidents, says Beursgens. On two or three occasions, active measures are required: "This could involve isolating a computer or disabling an account because the user has downloaded malicious software, for example."



Artwork *Eternal Blue*, at the Minderbroedersberg, as a reminder of the cyberattack Photo: *Observant*

There have been further cyberattacks since the 2019 incident, Beursgens reveals, but he declines to specify how many. "All attempts have been repelled."

Part of the ransom UM paid in cryptocurrency was recovered in early 2020. Due to a rise in Bitcoin's value, the recovered amount was reportedly worth half a million euros. Beursgens, however, dismisses any notion of "profit". He points out that the costs of the cyberattack and its aftermath are "dozens of times higher each year", noting that UM spends "over €1 million annually" on cybersecurity.

There has been no news regarding the emergency fund for students, which UM previously said would benefit from the extra money recovered.

The TU Eindhoven has postponed the exams that were scheduled for the week of January 20. Hopefully, teaching can resume that week. It is not yet clear whether the cyberattack has caused damage comparable to the 2019 Maastricht incident or who is behind the attack on TU/e.

*Peter Doorackers*

## About Recognition and Rewards for support staff

# "Listen to the employees, take their points seriously"

*"Some members of staff just want to do their job, they don't feel the need to continue rising to a 'higher' position." But if any member of support staff does want to take the next step on the career ladder, they often don't know what their options are.*

While the Recognition and Rewards project (see box on page 8) likely sounds familiar to most academic staff, for support staff, it is almost entirely unexplored terrain. A good reason for a committee of the University Council to have a brainstorm session last Wednesday afternoon with members of the various faculty boards, as well as Vice-president of the Executive Board Jan-Tjtte Meindersma, and HR Director Nieke

Guillory.

One thing was soon clear to the eleven people present: the career path for academics is very clear, from PhD researcher to professor – although not everybody will necessarily ultimately earn the title of professor. The situation is very different for support staff: there are myriad different positions (like catering, IT, receptionist, management assistant, director, or policy officer) which all differ too much from each other to neatly allow for a one-size-fits-all approach.

Not to mention, said some of the council members, that not everyone wants to change jobs. "I just want to do my job well, I don't need to progress", is something they hear frequently.

Recognition and Rewards is more than just bonuses and the path to a 'higher' position, it's also about the little things, said one of board members for the Faculty of Law. "There are Law Talks for researchers to help them keep up to date on each other's work. We would like the same for support staff, so that they can see what their colleagues in the same building are working on."

### Take it seriously

There is still a lot of work to be done, he realised, but "the most important thing is that the staff are heard, that their points are taken seriously".

*Read more on page 8*



## What not to do with colleagues

“

We've survived the dark days of December and the festive season. I enjoy sparkly lights, dressing up, engaging in small talk with colleagues, and drinking cheap wine. For introverts, misanthropes and recovering alcoholics, all those receptions and parties must be overwhelming.

In 2001, I was invited to speak at a conference in Finland. There was a lively discussion following my talk, but my allotted time was up. The chair told the audience that they could pose their remaining questions to me later that evening – in the sauna. A very urbane Frenchman and a much older Englishman from Newcastle were the only other foreigners present. The programme sent prior to the conference didn't mention saunas, so this came as quite a surprise to us, but not to the Finns. The conference dinner was indeed held in a sauna, with food and drinks but no clothes. Bathrobes were provided for those moments when we weren't actually in the sauna or the cold plunge pool.

One advantage of getting older is that my line manager and HR have decided it would be a waste of my time and their money to send me to leadership courses, for which I am very grateful. In my time, I have sat in circles, facing in and out, been blindfolded to promote trust, and done more with flip-charts, post-its and random pictures than should be legal. I've managed to avoid 'serious lego' discussed by *Observant*-columnist Katleen Gabriels last September, and going to the zoo, described in my 2019 column about UM's inter-species personnel policy. More recently, members of a research team I work with thought paintballing would be good for our morale. All were aged 25-45, most were men. Apart from the warmongering, this is not an activity suitable for women in their 60s (me) nor anyone averse to physical activity (also me).

Three rules of thumb: Don't organise activities that require colleagues to be naked. Don't do anything with colleagues that would be more fun with someone under the age of 10. Don't engage in anything that simulates or promotes violence – the world is harsh enough.

”

*Sally Wyatt,  
professor of Digital Cultures, FASoS*

## series sing, fight, cry, pray, laugh, work and admire

Martin Srića (Salzburg, Austria, 1998, Croatian nationality)

/ master's student of International Business

/ relationship status: single

/ lives in Maastricht



Photo: Joey Roberts

“

I feel uncomfortable in groups, surrounded by too many people and too much noise

”

**The best advice I ever received...** came from a childhood friend who's been living in Brussels for a few years. When I moved to Maastricht earlier this year, he advised me to stay open to meeting people and explore as much as I could. I enjoy visiting museums and art galleries, and the Netherlands has no shortage of them. The best museum I've ever been to is the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. In the Netherlands it's the Rijksmuseum, although I still need to visit the Van Gogh Museum. I'm looking forward to it.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?**

[Grins] Graduated...? I'm still not sure what path to take – one of the reasons why I chose to study International Business is because it leaves a lot of options open. I don't want to set career goals for myself, either. Achieving them might feel good, but then what? Life isn't about chasing goals; it's about finding a peaceful place where you can be happy with the people you love. To me, that's what success looks like. Whether that's here, back in Croatia or somewhere else, I don't know yet. I wouldn't mind moving to another country again. I miss my family and friends, but living abroad is an incredible experience. It's changed the way I see people; I've become more understanding.

**Love is complicated.** Love should be as simple as possible. Right now, I'm mostly focused on my studies and not looking for a relationship. But if I were, I'd want one with someone who can also be my best friend. Someone who understands me, cares about me and is there for me.

**Classical music is boring.** No, not at all! I listen to all kinds of music, from Bach to traditional Croatian songs, and I love a lot of composers. One of my favourites is Bedřich Smetana – his *Vltava* is my favourite piece. It's about a river, the Moldau. Rivers fascinate me. Near Zagreb, where I grew up, there were only streams. The first time I saw the Meuse, its sheer size and power left me in awe. Sometimes it's lively and chaotic; other times it's so calm that you have to throw a stone into it just to hear it's still there. Running water has a calming effect on me. I love sitting on the riverbank with my morning coffee.

**When I look in the mirror, I see...** a dreamer. I've always been more of a thinker than a doer, and a bit quieter than most children, though I had plenty of friends. I often feel uncomfortable in groups, like I'm surrounded by too many people and too much noise. To overcome that feeling of

being trapped, I deliberately put myself in those situations, like during INKOM. [Laughs] "Fake it till you make it" works, to a point.

**This is a must-read book.** Do I have to pick just one? I've just finished Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The protagonist is a young man with the world at his feet, but he does terrible things and becomes increasingly trapped within himself. It made me think. I read it as a warning. I want to stay as open as possible; it makes life simpler and probably happier.

**Series or films?** Miniseries. *Band of Brothers*, about an American paratrooper unit in the Second World War, is brilliant. It's amazing how it makes you feel what those soldiers went through. It really moved me. The takeaway? War is hell.

**What do your friends find annoying about you?** My jokes; I often play jokes on them. What I find annoying in others is indecisiveness.

Like when people ahead of you in a queue take fifteen minutes to decide between an espresso or a latte... just make up your mind already! But maybe I'm being too harsh. I certainly took my time making up my mind about what to study. After secondary school in Croatia, I spent a semester studying civil engineering, then two years studying medicine. Neither was a good fit for me – I'm not the type to sit and study for hours on end. After that, I did a bachelor's in International Business at the Croatian branch of an American university. I figured studying in English would be a smart move, and the programme offered smaller class sizes and a more practical approach compared to traditional Croatian universities.

**When I open my eyes in the morning...**

the first thing I do is check my phone and light a cigarette. Yes, I know it's bad for you, but you'd be surprised how many students smoke, even though it's so expensive here in the Netherlands. After that, I stay in bed for another twenty minutes.

Peter Doorakkers

Weekly personal interview with a student or employee

To what extent can politicians like Trump and Wilders be called fascists?

# “Right-wing extremism has found the right formula”

Will one of the most powerful countries on Earth be led by a fascist from next week? Or would that be going too far? *Observant* asked historian Pablo del Hierro, associate professor at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), who specialises in the history of fascism and neo-fascism.

Let's not beat about the bush: is Donald Trump, the man who will be inaugurated as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States on Monday, a fascist? It wasn't just political opponents such as Kamala Harris who labelled him that, referring amongst other things to him openly flirting with anti-democratic and nationalist ideas, some academics did too. “However, that mostly happened before the first time Trump was elected in 2016, driven by political motivation, in the hope to damage his chances and warn voters,” says Del Hierro. “A strategy that failed, by the way. The word ‘fascist’ resonates much less in the United States than it does in Europe, where fascism was born and where it is more firmly lodged in our collective memory. Although you can see that weakening among younger generations here, too. And if we label everybody a fascist, from Trump to Putin, from Wilders to Orbán, the word starts to lose its meaning.”

Del Hierro is also reluctant academically to label Trump and his movement, Trumpism, as fascist. “Yes, there are similarities with fascists like Mussolini, Hitler, and Franco. But I think there are also differences. Fascists were concentrated in a single party, a huge organisation with memberships and paramilitary groups. You don't see that type of mobilisation anymore. People are more concerned with changing politics from within. Furthermore, the revolutionary rhetoric is missing. It's always about a new movement or a new wave, never about revolution. The antisemitism has also lessened, for example, Trump supports Israel unconditionally.”

These are characteristics that apply to many other right-wing parties in Europe and South America. “It is very clearly a worldwide phenomenon,” says Del Hierro. “It is often labelled the ‘New Right’ or simply ‘far right’. While the term fascism may have disappeared, the current movement is a derivative of it, the historian says. “After the Second World War, fascism gradually evolved into neo-fascism. Proponents of the latter maintained that the fight should be taken to the streets, using bombs and coup d'états. But that strategy failed. Gradually, in the 1970s and 80s, the realisation grew: we have to win the voters' trust.”

## Front National

According to Del Hierro, the foundation of French political party Front National (since renamed Rassemblement National) by Jean-Marie le Pen in 1972 is a perfect example of this.

“Their tactic, devised by French philosopher Alain de Benoist, was ‘de-demonisation’, making their ideas mainstream, deliberately not using the word fascism.” The results of that can now clearly be seen, although it took a long time. “More research is needed to understand how it was achieved. For example, what was the influence of the end of the Cold War? I think that after the loss of communism as a significant threat, people had to find a new enemy, which mainly became Islam.”

What history has shown us, in Del Hierro's opinion, is that the image of far-right politicians as less intelligent, incompetent and isolated is wrong. “There are clever strategies behind it and they've shown themselves to be very adept at adapting. If a strategy doesn't work, they can easily drop it. They're very pragmatic and opportunistic. Nobody talks about leaving the European Union anymore, now that it's clear that Brexit hasn't worked out as they had hoped. Instead, politicians like Viktor Orbán and Georgia Meloni are now talking about changing Europe from within and there is more collaboration between right-wing parties in Europe.”

After this “long process of trial and error”, the far right now has the wind in its sails, with successful elections in Europe and America. “They've found the right formula, whereas traditional



Marine le Pen, leader Front National Photo: Shutterstock

parties don't really know how to deal with it. That formula is being applied in different countries in different ways, but they're after roughly the same results. It's an evolved, altered version of fascism. They long for a homogenous, nationalist society without ethnic or cultural diversity. Although they do believe in economic diversity, in a class system. They think it will return them to some mythical past which never really existed.”

Hollowing out democracy is also on their wish list. “The far right is not keen on liberal democracy. They don't want drawn-out processes, they prefer quick decisions, no negotiations or system of checks and balances. They would prefer a more authoritarian democracy in which the separation of power is blurred, with less power for parliament and the judiciary. Very little pluralism, no protests. Trump is fairly open about it, I think he would partly like to follow the example of Orbán in Hungary. It's illuminating that a tech entrepreneur like Elon Musk is going to advise him on government efficiency. After all, corporations are more efficient than governments, because ultimately the boss is the one in charge.”

## Right direction

The budget cuts to universities and limiting the number of international students in the Netherlands should also be seen in that light, says Del Hierro. “Of course there are other factors at play, but it is heading in the direction the far right wants. They don't want diversity, they don't want critical thinkers.

They feel that universities should train people to be apolitical workers. There's a reason that the social sciences and humanities are being hit the hardest.”

## Brace yourself

How effective politicians like Trump are going to be in realising their ideas is a question of time, says Del Hierro. “Historians are bad at predictions, but I would say, brace yourself. There are countries where they will attempt it more slowly, more carefully, but there are places – like the United States – where it might be a lot quicker.” What can other parties do to stop it? “Historically, radical parties are more successful when other parties fail to clearly distance themselves from their positions. So it is important for centre-right parties to be very careful about embracing extreme right-wing policies. And this applies to all parties: don't just focus on demonising political opponents, instead offer hopeful alternatives and take the fears and concerns of your electorate – which the far right often masterfully capitalises on – seriously. But it isn't just the responsibility of politicians. The importance of liberal democracy should be emphasised in the wider public discourse through demonstrations, books, movies. The demonstrations against the education cuts were hopefully merely the beginning.”

Legal philosopher Eric van de Luijtgarden on learning Limburgish as a non-local

# “Limburgish is a language of the heart”

“If you’re a ‘Hollander’ in Limburg, turn down your volume from a ten to a five. Lower your voice and go up in pitch at the end of a sentence like you’re asking a question, and you’re already halfway there.” Well, not quite halfway. Speaking Limburgish is no easy task, as Eric van de Luijtgarden (1963), legal philosopher and endowed professor at the Faculty of Law, can attest. He completed a beginner’s course in Limburgish last autumn. This week, he’s starting the next level.

**Text:** Wendy Degens **Illustration:** Bas van der Schot

**A**t the beginning of the interview, Van de Luijtgarden places a thick coursebook on the table. Leafing through it, the reporter – a Limburger herself – is intimidated by the pages upon pages of verbs, vocabulary and listening exercises. There’s a strong emphasis on phonetics, speech sounds like *ao* (as in *waord*, word) and *ae* (as in *maedje*, girl). Then again, this focus makes sense: Limburgish is a phonetic language.

For those raised in households where the local dialect was spoken at the dinner table, speaking Limburgish comes as naturally as speaking Dutch. Writing it, however, is a different story; it’s not something you’re taught. Anyone trying to master this skill, particularly non-locals, must surely either have a bit of a screw loose or be madly in love with the language and the province. For Van de Luijtgarden, it’s the latter. That said, he admits to having once “almost compulsively” taught himself Russian: “Every morning for thirty minutes, using an app.” So it’s entirely possible he’s also got a bit of a screw loose. “I’m like a parrot – I love exploring new languages. If I hear people speaking Chinese on TV, for example, I want to know what they’re saying. I’ll repeat the words if I can, to get a feel for them.”

## Mothers-in-law

Born in Maarsse, Utrecht, to parents from Brabant, and raised in Friesland, Van de Luijtgarden moved from Zeist, Utrecht, to the Limburg village of Geleen a few years ago. Interacting with his neighbours, the baker, the butcher and other locals, he soon found himself eager to learn the language. He enrolled in the “immensely helpful” beginner’s course *Leef Limburgs*, ‘t

*Smaalste Stökske* – the name is a reference to the village of Echt in the narrowest part (*smaalste stökske*) of the province, where he attended eight lessons last autumn. Similar courses in Limburgish as a second language have since been introduced in cities like Heerlen and Maastricht. “The method is traditional – classroom teaching, reading words aloud, guessing meanings – but it’s brilliant, and the teachers are very professional. They also pay attention to local culture, literature and history.” The same course was previously taken by none other than Emile Roemer, the governor of Limburg. And while the course mate-

rial focuses on the dialect spoken in the course region, other Limburgish dialects are also covered. After all, there’s no single Limburgish language. The dialect in Venlo differs from those spoken in Kerkrade, Maastricht, Weert or Echt. “Still, with a few exceptions, they’re usually mutually intelligible. That’s never been much of a problem for me. It’s essentially Dutch with an accent.” He adds, more poetically, “It’s a language of the heart.” However, his class included a group of Randstad natives, mostly from Amsterdam, who couldn’t get the hang of listening and understanding, let alone speaking or writing. Of the thirty

participants, about twenty completed the course, including several “women enrolled by their Limburgish mothers-in-law”.

## Fibre internet

Perhaps unexpectedly, this interview wasn’t conducted in Limburgish. The reporter and Van de Luijtgarden have known each other for some time and always speak Dutch together. Switching languages feels too awkward. “It’s the same with my Limburgish colleagues and friends. They actually tell me I sound a bit silly when I speak Limburgish. ‘You sound like the village priest’, they’ll say.” Does he

## Limburgs Corpus

The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (under the leadership of Leonie Cornips, professor of Language Culture in Limburg) is working on developing a central, publicly accessible repository for Limburg’s cultural and linguistic materials, including local literature, dialect dictionaries and playscripts. This comprehensive database, the Limburgs Corpus, aims to facilitate the preservation, research and accessibility of the language and its many dialects.



There's no single Limburgish language; all regions have their own dialect. Mestreechs differs from those spoken in Kerkrade, Maastricht, Weert or Echt

have anyone to practise with? His partner isn't from here, so he can't practise at home either. For now, he relies on the local baker, though they can immediately tell he's "neet van hie" – not from here. People from outside the province often ask Van de Luijtgarden when he plans to leave Limburg. He resents the common view among Randstad residents that Limburg is a "backward appendage" of the Netherlands – fine for a weekend of cycling or shopping, but little else. "People like to joke that we eat *vlaai* all day long, or ask if I can even understand the locals. When I'm in a Teams meeting with colleagues in the west and my internet glitches, someone will inevitably quip, 'You lot probably don't have fibre yet!'" At the same time, he hopes that Limburgers will shake off the idea that they're somehow less important. "Limburg is the

communication province of the Netherlands. Dutch directness shocks people both here and in the rest of the world. Yes is yes, no is no, and it's all said at full volume. People here sound softer, friendlier. There are call centres in the west that purposely hire people from Limburg to handle tricky cases. It has a de-escalating effect." So, he argues, "If you want to learn international business communication, don't head to Amsterdam. Come here instead, because the way it's done here – making friends before getting down to business – is how it's done in the rest of the world."

### European status

The Province of Limburg aims for Limburgish to achieve a higher European status by 2030. Currently, the language falls under Part II of the European Char-

ter for Regional or Minority Languages. Frisian holds Part III status, allowing it to be used in public administration, courts and schools. This is what Limburg would like to achieve. But before the Province can submit an application to Brussels, various requirements must be met. These include for example introducing dialect education in primary schools and teaching Limburgish culture in secondary schools. A higher European status would be fantastic, says Van de Luijtgarden. "It could give local pride a tremendous boost." He is tangentially involved in the application process, specifically concerning legal matters (such as copyright) related to the *Leef Limburgs* teaching method he followed. In the future, this could potentially become the officially recognised method for teaching Limburgish as a second language. Not a bad thing to have on your CV.

## Zoervleisj and "enne" at UCM

About three quarters of its students are international students, making University College Maastricht (UCM) one of the most international programmes at UM. Yet there is still an interest in the language and culture of Limburg, as shown by the successful 'Limburg committee' that was established by the study association Universalis last autumn.

The first activities – including preparing the local dish *zuurvlees*, a lesson in Limburgish, and a lecture about the history and identity of the language (given in English) – drew in dozens of interested students, including international ones. That's rare for a new committee, says Universalis board member Iris Willems. "Especially when you consider that there are about thirty different committees within Universalis to choose from."

And it was someone from 'Holland', of all places, who came up with the idea: Jayden Larti from Drenthe (together with Ilan Feron from Limburg). "To be honest, I was surprised it didn't exist yet," says Larti. "It's important to me that I know something about where I live. I'm even starting a course in Limburgish next month. Apparently, a lot of students share that sentiment."

"French and German students were fascinated to discover that the origin of many Limburgish words lies in their native languages," adds committee chair Muun Ubbink. "And as a Limburger myself, I learnt a lot too. For example, why we're so hostile towards 'Hollanders', much more than, say, the people of Friesland. That came about during the Belgian Revolution." Words like *vlaai* and *zoervleisj* are now well-known to UCM students. Laughing, adding: "We're hoping the word 'enne' will be next, with all its many uses. We're also really hoping to do something with carnival soon."

DV

news

# “You don’t always feel included in the academic community”

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One member for the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life sciences agreed: “There is a lot of knowledge and experience among the support staff, it takes years to build up that sort of thing. But people often don’t recognise it. People retire and all that experience is lost.” One U-Council member responded: “Why don’t we make the replacement shadow the experienced retiree for a while, just like the current vice-president shadowed the previous vice-president, Nick Bos, for a few months? Surely that should be possible for support staff, too?” Now it can sometimes take months for the replacement to be appointed, so that the remaining staff have to shoulder the extra work, with all the consequences for workload that entails.

And another thing: “As a member of the support staff, you don’t always feel included in the academic community – we work hard, this place wouldn’t function without us, but still.

Sometimes we set ourselves apart from it, why did so few support staff go to the demonstration in The Hague, for example? But we’re also not always treated as if we’re part of the community.”

**No idea**

Whoever does want to progress professionally often has no idea what the possibilities are. Everybody agreed that more transparency is needed. The conversation will be part of the courses needed to progress. What is your boss says no? The HR director said that since November 2024, an employee can apply to take part in a course; permission from the supervisor is not required, although it should be discussed up front. And then there are the annual appraisals – or Personal Development Plans (POP) – where someone can express their desire to progress professionally. Guillory added that they are also not implemented everywhere.

“There is a policy, but not everybody sticks to it.”

**In two years**

Then, Vice-president Meindersma, who stated at the start of the meeting that he considers Recognition and Rewards of support staff one of his top priorities – in addition to cybersecurity, for example – asked, “what should we have achieved on this issue in two years?”

Make clear what the responsibilities of a particular job are, what the opportunities for promotion are, and what you have to do to achieve that new position, said one of the participants. And make sure that it’s supported by management, added another. It’s not the first this afternoon that the critical role of the supervisor was mentioned. Meindersma also mentioned it in his closing remarks: “R&R should be part of the DNA of a supervisor. Personal Development Plans are important, and

we have to help them have those conversations. They’re important for the employees.”

Riki Janssen

**What is Recognition and Rewards?**

Recognition and Rewards (R&R), is a national project – President Rianne Letschert was there at the beginning a few years ago – that aims to look more broadly at the work of researchers. Where before they were judged on the number of academic publications, now it is also possible to have a successful career if they’re good at education, patient care, or show excellent leadership skills. At the same time, it is supposed to put an end to the rat race – the endless fight for grants, publication pressure, and citation scores – that researchers face. It was always said to first be the turn of academic staff and then support staff.

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**Agenda academic ceremonies**

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