

# observant

INDEPENDENT WEEKLY MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 45 / FEBRUARY 20, 2025 Nr 19

## POLARIZED GERMANY HEADS TO THE POLLS

"Maybe people don't want the most extreme, but a different solution"

P5



## AS SEEN ON TV: THE STUDENT LIAISON OFFICER

"I had just arrested a suspect, when someone asked if they could take a picture with me"

P6-7



## STUDENTS U-COUNCIL ANGRY

"Nobody knows that the tutor can see your online Canvas activity"

P3

## HELP, I'M SUPER JEALOUS

"Build your confidence – what makes you valuable?"

P2



## 'CHAD WITH THE COWBOY HAT'

"That's what they call it here. But I've lived in Oklahoma, and trust me – this isn't a cowboy hat"

P4



## editorial

## It may be tempting to bury your head in the sand

“My son doesn’t know what he wants to do”, a slightly concerned mother told me this week. She’s been taking him to one university open day after another. She wondered if studying journalism might be a good fit for him. I asked her if he’s interested in the news. Does he want to know what’s going on in the world? Is he curious?

We always tell our students that, as a journalist, you need to know what’s happening in the world. Not in exhaustive detail, of course, but you can’t just stare blankly if an interviewee starts talking about the upcoming elections in Germany, or about world leaders meeting in Munich last week. The person sitting opposite you needs to trust that you understand what they’re talking about.

I’ve followed the news closely for years – out of interest, but also because it’s part of my job, as it is for many others. How else can you do your work properly? A faculty or university council member, for example, needs to know what’s happening within their institution. Likewise, university administrators must stay informed about national developments, especially in education.

That said, for the first time in my professional life, I find myself wanting to change the channel or put down the newspaper when faced with yet another item on one of Donald Trump’s countless executive orders, whether on Ukraine, Gaza, Europe, Mexico or US science, like the article in *de Volkskrant* last weekend. It weighs on me and makes me feel unsettled. But while it may be tempting to bury your head in the sand for a while, ultimately, that’s not an option.

The topic also came up in our Monday morning meeting – no news avoiders here. My colleague CF has become a bit more selective, though; she doesn’t give all of Trump’s whims her full attention. Instead, she prefers to wait a day or two for the analyses to come in and explain their potential impact. Editor DV, who took a one-day break from the news over the weekend before diving back in, tends to approach the constant stream of updates with detached curiosity. “What’s happening in the world right now is historic”, he said, to nods of agreement.

Now, on to this week’s edition of *Observant*. We’ve decided to explore the latest US developments from the perspective of Maastricht University, speaking to academic staff who work together with colleagues in the US. Can they continue to do so, or are Trump’s executive orders getting in the way?

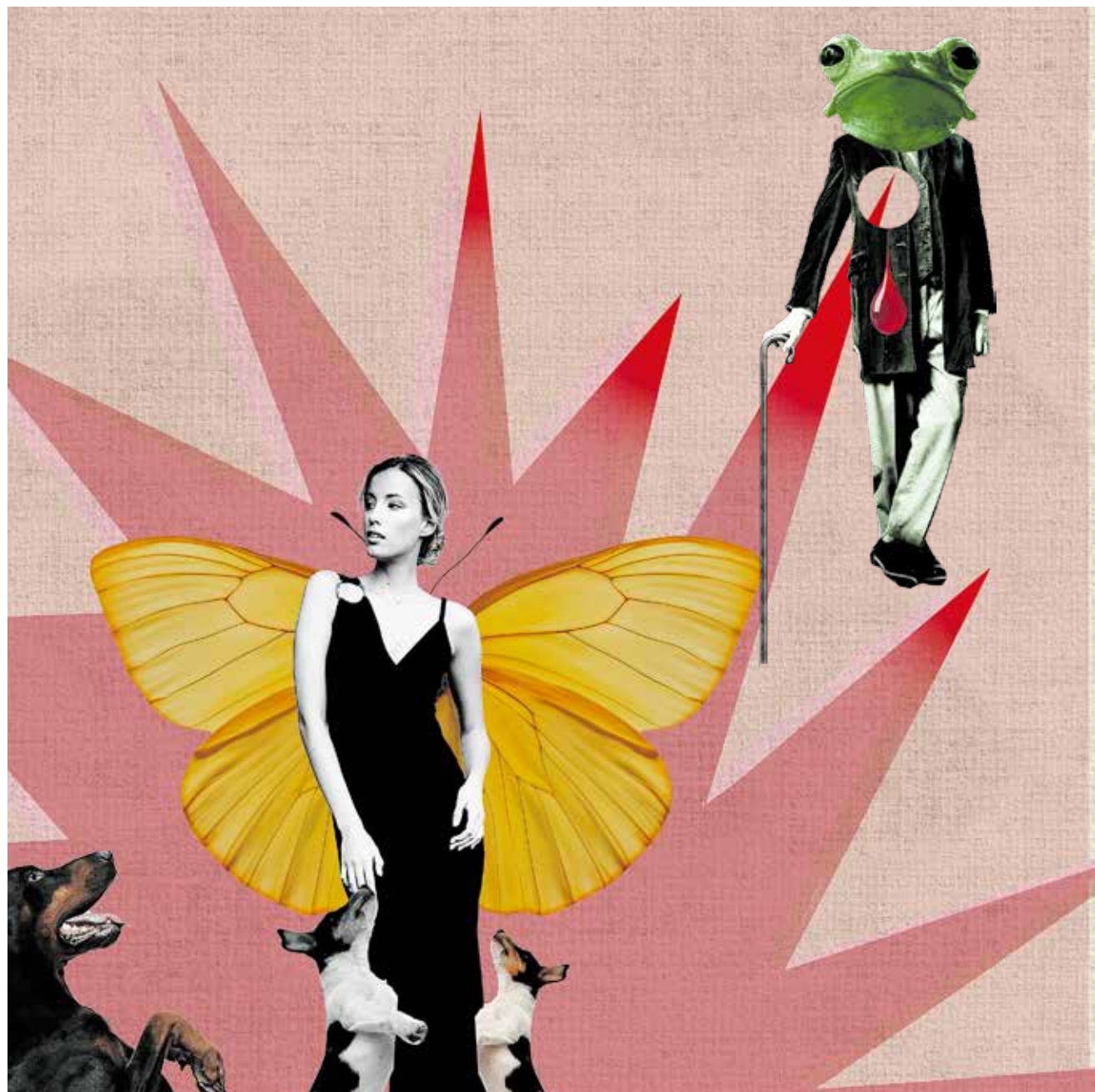
As for the mother’s son, he has no interest in the news. Probably best for him to pick a different degree, then.

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

## “Jealousy is a sign that you care about your partner”

**My girlfriend is fifteen years younger than me, and she gets a lot of attention from other men. Some ask her what she’s even doing with me. I get jealous sometimes, but mostly, I feel insecure. How should I deal with these feelings? UM sexologist Marieke Dewitte shares her thoughts.**

“It’s completely normal to feel jealous – it’s not automatically a bad thing. Jealousy is a sign that you care about your partner and your relationship. If you didn’t, you’d be indifferent, and that’s not what you want either, is it? Jealousy becomes problematic when it’s intense or when your behaviour is out of proportion to what is actually going on. That’s what we call pathological jealousy”, explains Dewitte. So it’s fine to feel a slight pang of jealousy when a flirty guy is hanging around your girlfriend at a party. “But if you often feel that way, it might have more to do with insecurity. Are you afraid of losing your partner? Could it be that you have attachment issues? Do you feel like you’re not good enough? Have past experiences made you more prone to jealousy? Maybe you’ve been cheated on by an ex, or felt rejected by your parents – those things can stay with you.” Start by reflecting on yourself, Dewitte advises. “Only then consider your partner’s role. Is she a big flirt herself? If so, why does she flirt with other people?” The keyword here, as in much of Dewitte’s advice, is communication. “Tell her that you’ve been feeling insecure. Try not to go on the attack or accuse her of provoking it. Instead, be vulnerable and emphasise that you’re just sharing how you feel. Give your partner the chance to be considerate of your feelings. If she’s aware of them, she may be better able to take them into account.” However, Dewitte warns, make sure that any agreements you make

are realistic and don’t make your partner feel restricted. “Don’t say things like ‘You’re not allowed to go out dancing anymore’ or ‘You’re no longer allowed to talk to other men at parties.’”

A relationship with a significant age gap comes with its own

set of insecurities, she adds. “The reality is that you’re fifteen years older. Maybe you’re not as fit or muscular as guys your girlfriend’s age. If that’s the case and it makes you feel uncomfortable, you can work on it. Take care of yourself – stay active, keep in shape and look after your mental health. It’s not just about how you look, but also about how resilient you feel. Build your confidence – what makes you valuable? What are your strengths?”

Also, it’s inevitable that people will judge you. If you accompany your much younger girlfriend to a party, there will be other partygoers who think you’re too old for her. But people will always have something to say, Dewitte points out, even if you do date people your own age. “Above all, do what feels right for the two of you, not what’s expected of you.”

Wendy Degens

Marieke Dewitte is a clinical psychologist and sexologist at Maastricht University. In this weekly series, she answers questions about sex from students.

## Student members U-Council are concerned and want transparency “Every student should be aware that a tutor can view all kinds of online activity on Canvas”

*How often does my student log in to Canvas or PebblePad? How long are they there for? Did they download the course reader? And look at the assignment? The fact that a tutor can see all these details in Canvas came as news to student members of the various councils. “We’re shocked. Why is the university not transparent about this?”*

“We asked around, only students who were also

tutors knew that a lecturer has access to all that data.” At the most recent committee meeting of the University Council, student members Bram van den Berkmortel (LEX-Motus) and Mila van Boxtel (Dope) expressed their concerns also on behalf of members of the various faculty councils: what online activities can a lecturer see, who has access to this information, what happens to this data, can it be used to compose a participation grade, and could a

student submit a formal objection against this procedure?

Only the tutor can see which pages a student has visited, how long for, whether assignments were downloaded and submitted on time. The tutor also only has access to the data for their own group. According to a memo from the University Library (the UL maintains the

*Continue on page 8*



You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone

“

Watching the new Trump administration take a sledgehammer to the international order reminds me of the old Joni Mitchell song. Only it's not paradise being paved over, but rather all the United States' international alliances and commitments. And while it's not a parking lot being put up, the plan is for something infinitely more sterile and depressing: Ukrainian territory ceded to Russia in the name of 'peace', a Gazan 'riviera' given up to foreign property developers, and the smouldering ruins of forests let down by intransigence on climate change.

In the policy area I know most about, international development, the picture is just as bleak. By dismantling the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the new US regime would roll back decades of progress in HIV prevention in sub-Saharan Africa and halt humanitarian assistance in conflict zones around the world—to name only two examples.

The lion's share of the blame belongs to Trump, Musk and the rag-tag band of men whose careers depend on catering to them and their egos. And some undoubtedly goes to his voters, although I suspect they'll soon pay their own steep price. But it's important to look also at how some of the United States' fiercest critics have made the decline in the country's multilateral engagement easier than it should have been.

Some might already have raised their eyebrows at my first sentence and asked “what international order?” During the US election campaign, one often heard the sentiment that the outcome would barely make a difference to a world accustomed to a century of American hegemony. I've seen some academics, virtually overnight, go from attacking Western development aid to lamenting its decline. Because it's not only US aid budgets being cut: last year our Dutch governing coalition announced annual cuts of €2.4 billion to this sector. Development aid (like all systems) can too often be corrupt, inefficient and hypocritical. It is certainly no paradise. But it's made a positive difference to the lives of billions, as we'll learn to our detriment if we let it slip away. If we let them turn the world into their parking lot.

”

*Elsje Fourie,  
associate professor of Globalisation &  
Development Studies*

## Language Centre “has no choice” but to raise rates considerably Costs for language courses nearly doubled; cause for concern for programmes



*Students taking a Dutch course at the UM Language Centre Photo: Joey Roberts*

*A number of bachelor programmes at Maastricht University has a compulsory language learning requirement – either Dutch or another foreign language – but is that still feasible? There are doubts about the financial feasibility now the UM Language Centre has nearly doubled its rates over the course of a few years.*

As part of the bachelor programmes European Studies and Global Studies at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASoS), students can gain course credits by taking a course in a foreign language of their choice. Internationals might choose Dutch, but other options like Portuguese, Arabic or German are also available. In September, the Language Centre, which provides those courses, raised the rate it charges to the programme to €475 per student. That is an increase of more than 40 per cent compared to the €330 it charged last year. And compared to the rates in 2022 – €265 for Dutch and €295 for other languages – that has almost doubled.

Ilja Schreinemakers, director of the Language Centre, said they had no choice. “The costs have risen significantly over the last few years due in part to inflation and a lack of teachers. We were able to keep the rates artificially low for a long

time, but that is now really no longer viable. Besides, compared to other universities, our courses are still on the cheaper side.”

Nonetheless, there are doubts at the European Studies bachelor programme whether the current rates are still affordable. “In light of the looming budget cuts [to higher education by the cabinet], the sharp increase in the Language Centre's tariffs must be carefully evaluated” is the conclusion reached in the financial section of the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) that was recently sent to the Faculty Council. Does that mean language courses might disappear from the curriculum next year? Programme Director Luana Russo was unwilling to rush to a decision. The situation is different for Global Studies, said Programme Director Michaella Vanore – that Bachelor's degree has a so-called BKKI label, which means that students pay higher tuition fees. “That provides the obligation and opportunity to provide additional elements such as language lessons.”

For the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, the cost of language lessons is one of the reasons to stop offering the English-language track of the Medicine programme, where students must take the Language Centre's Dutch course during their entire degree. The similar

increase in rates was also an issue there, but was not necessarily the final nail in the coffin, said Programme Coordinator Sylvia Heeneman. “The costs were already substantial.”

The timing of the increase is sensitive, now language lessons are in the spotlight. While the cabinet currently has no concrete plans to force international students to learn Dutch, some coalition parties have alluded to it in the past. In the EER for European Studies, it says that the current language course “could potentially serve as a foundation, if Dutch-language instruction for all students is implemented in the future”.

According to director of the Language Centre Schreinemakers, UM must urgently think about language learning in programmes and how much money it wishes to set aside for it. Both because of political plans and her own strategic plan. “That says we want to have an impact on the area and want to invest in global engagement. Doesn't that mean we should be incorporating neighbouring languages such as French and German, and world languages such as Spanish and Chinese, in more curricula not less? That means the university must find a different way of covering the costs.”

*Dennis Vaendel*

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

## “ People here know me as ‘Chad with the cowboy hat’ ”

**What is your earliest memory?** My father waking me up in the middle of the night to watch a lunar eclipse. I was barely three years old, but I still remember exactly where we stood in the garden. My father, a science enthusiast, explained everything to me. I don't know if I actually understood it at the time, but I remember asking lots of questions. That's where my love of astronomy began. As a child, I devoured my father's astronomy magazines and mostly used the binoculars I got for birdwatching to gaze at the sky. When I was a teenager, I borrowed money from my parents – I spent months working off the loan by mowing the lawn and doing the dishes – to buy a telescope to observe Halley's Comet.

**Becoming a teacher was always part of the plan.** To be honest, I never had a plan. My friends teased me when I decided to study astronomy: “What are you going to do with that?” But I just found it interesting. It stimulated my mind. There's so much to discover in the universe. I thought: I'll see where it takes me. My wife is in the military, so we've had to move every few years. She's the breadwinner. I've been lucky that there's always been an educational institution nearby where I could teach, including when we moved here in 2018 – our first time living outside the US.

**Where's the most beautiful place you've ever lived?** Washington State in the northwest. Salmon

leaping out of rivers, whales and orcas swimming off the coast in the Pacific... There are mountains and glaciers, but also temperate rainforests and deserts. I did a lot of hiking when we lived there.

**Any pets?** Besides our cat, I care for hundreds of mason and orchard bees. They lay their eggs in cardboard tubes I put out within a bee hotel, keeping things clean and free from harmful fungi for them. On warm winter days, I put the hotel in the fridge to prevent young bees from emerging before the flowers bloom. I started beekeeping in the US, but I couldn't bring my bees on the plane. In our new house, I found a few cocoons on the windowsill and carried on from there. Now there's a whole swarm. I love the buzzing in spring, and they pollinate everything in our garden, from tulips to the apple tree and everything in between.

**My hat is my signature look.** It's practical; it keeps the rain off my glasses. Plus, my hair is pretty wild. By now, everyone knows me by my hat. People here call me “Chad with the cowboy hat”. That's what they call it here. But I've lived in Oklahoma, and trust me – this isn't a cowboy hat. It's more like an Indiana Jones-style adventure hat.

**I feel most American when...** someone tells me I'm speaking very loudly, or when I get funny looks for wearing a Santa hat before 5 December. I'd also like to blame the

American educational system for my struggles with learning Dutch. In the US, you don't start learning a second language until far too late, so it never really becomes second nature.

**What's in your garage?** My first motorcycle – the one I learned to ride on when I was fifteen. When I went to university, my parents let me pick one of the two cars in the garage, but to their surprise, I went for the bike. I've taken it everywhere, even here, but it's not registered in Europe, so I can't ride it. Would I let my children ride motorbikes one day? Absolutely, despite the dangers. It teaches you to anticipate other road users' behaviour and expect the unexpected.

**What do you want to teach your children?**

In the US, more and more parents are afraid to let their children go out alone. Thankfully, it's different here. I like to send my children off with their bikes and tell them to go have fun and not get home before midnight. It's a great way to explore the world.

**You can wake me up for...** stargazing, of course – preferably with others. About once a year, I take my two telescopes to Sint Pietersberg on a clear evening and point out all sorts of things to students and passers-by. I also plan to bring my solar telescope to the university during the partial solar eclipse on 29 March.

**The most extraordinary place I've ever taught:** a Buddhist monastery for Tibetan monks in India, as part of a teaching programme with Emory University in the US. It's not the sort of place you can just visit as a tourist. It was a surreal and unique experience.

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

My wife got a new role at her military base, so we no longer have to move every few years. And we enjoy living here, where you can walk or cycle to the shops instead of having to drive everywhere like in the US. Plus, we'd love to see more of Europe before moving back. When will that be? We'd like our youngest son to finish secondary school here, for continuity. After that, we'll see.

*Dennis Vaendel*

*Weekly personal interview with a student or employee*

Chad Ellington  
(Fort Lauderdale,  
United States, 1972)

/ lecturer in the Maastricht  
Science Programme

/ relationship status:  
married to Mary;  
they have two sons,  
Meson (18) and Colin (13)

/ lives in Sittard



*Photo: Joey Roberts*

## Polarised Germany goes to the polls on Sunday

# “The more extreme you are, the more votes you get: that idea is just wrong”



People protesting far-right extremism in front of the Reichstag building, the seat of Germany's Parliament, at the end of January. The sign reads 'Hate is not an opinion'

Germany is set to elect a new parliament on Sunday. It looks like the CDU will win that election, after a campaign that has focused primarily on the German asylum policy. With the far-right AfD hot on their heels, the Christian democratic party showed that now was a time for tough talking. According to German UNU-Merit PhD researcher Tobias Hillenbrand, that only fuels the polarisation, even as there are different ways to deal with this, he says. “The idea that ‘the more extreme you are, the more votes you get’ is just wrong.”

**Text:** Peter Doorackers **Photo:** Shutterstock

Munich, 13 February: a car ploughs into a group of people in the centre of the South German city, leaving dozens wounded and two dead. The attacker is a 24-year-old Afghan national with a residence permit; the public prosecutor says the motive for the attack is religious. The incident took place shortly before the German federal elections and is likely to inflame polarisation around the main campaign issue – German asylum policy.

### Losing control

Tobias Hillenbrand, German by birth, economist and political scientist, is concerned. His doctoral thesis, which he hopes to complete this year, is about the attitude of Germans towards immigration. In an interview that took place shortly before 13 February, he said that he sees a double and inter-related crisis: support for asylum seekers is decreasing and, partly because of that, the polarisation around the issue “is peaking”, which is creating room for extremist parties. “We saw that in recent elections in the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria, and to a certain degree recently, in the United States.” And in Germany, apparently. “When you show people profiles and ask them who should be allowed in, someone who is fleeing a war zone or someone who is coming to work, most people choose the refugee. My hypothesis is that most people are only against

immigration because they associate it strongly with *illegal* immigration.” That gives people a sense that their country is losing control over its borders, “and a loss of control leads to fear”.

Hillenbrand's most important question is “whether you can organise a migration system in such a way that it doesn't lead to polarisation and the rise of extremist parties”. In his search for an answer, he polled how Germans would feel about a reform of asylum policy: reducing illegal immigration by sending those migrants to countries outside the EU which have agreed to allow them to request asylum there, like the British tried to do with Rwanda. And on the other hand, admitting more refugees through legal routes – something that is already happening on a small scale: in 2024, Germany announced that it would comply with a request from UNHCR to admit 6500 refugee from camps in the Middle-East and Africa.

### No fault lines

How realistic is that first scenario? In 2022, the British government agreed a similar deal with Rwanda: henceforth, that country would receive asylum seekers who had reached British shores. In exchange, Rwanda would be given financial aid and asylum seekers in Rwandan camps would be allowed to travel to the UK legally. The deal was always controversial, and the

new British government cancelled it last year. True, says Hillenbrand, “but the legal concerns in that deal were mostly concerned with the situation in Rwanda and the conditions people who were sent there were faced with, not the idea itself”.

So what was the result of the representative sample of 2200 German citizens, which forms the third chapter of Hillenbrand's doctoral thesis? “That an almost 60 per cent majority of people surveyed is in favour of such a reform.” Variables such as education levels, age, and whether people lived in the west or the east (where AfD are, in one state, the largest party), make no difference. Equally irrelevant is political preference: followers of almost all the major German parties show more support than resistance to the proposal. Even among AfD voters, where a large minority (47 per cent) would accept such a reform. “The traditional fault lines in society aren't fault lines on this issue,” says Hillenbrand. “Most people are actually quite prepared to take in refugees, they're mostly unhappy with the way it is currently organised. If it happens in an orderly manner, so that you can anticipate it, they find they can live with it”.

He says politicians could talk about admitting more refugees “without fear of being punished by voters”. The CDU certainly could, says Hillenbrand – their manifesto even says they want to have more regularised refugee migration, but because they are scared of losing voters, they rarely talk about it. “But the idea that you can attract more voters by saying more and more extreme things is just not true. People might not want the more extreme solution, just a different one. Their ideas about migration aren't as simplistic as the media sometimes likes to portray them.”

### Balance

It must be said that Hillenbrand collected his data before ‘Munich’ and the incident in Aschaffenburg, where another Afghan asylum seeker stabbed two people to death, one of them a toddler. Although he doesn't think that opinions will have changed much. “Because, unfortunately, these incidents aren't isolated: there were similar incidents in Magdeburg, Solingen and Mannheim. What's new about the idea is that it's not a classic pro- or anti-immigration story, but about finding a balance.”



## Student liaison officer Can Gölpek is 'famous' thanks to *Bureau Maastricht*

# "CAN'T YOU SEE I'M IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ARREST!"

The Maastricht police service has two 'student liaison officers', contact points for the thirty thousand or so students in the city. It doesn't exempt them from ordinary police work, and "what happens on the beat" always has priority. International students are the most trouble, says student liaison officer Can (pronounced 'Djan') Gölpek. Although it is mostly the Dutch students who recognise him now, after he appeared on *Bureau Maastricht*.

Text: Lena Reichel Photo: Joey Roberts

The reality tv show available on Videoland had already been to other cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Eindhoven, before recording in Maastricht over the summer. When Gölpek (32) was "approached by the Maastricht team lead", asking if he wanted to take part, he initially had doubts whether he should appear on television. "I don't really feel the need to be popular. And what if I make a mistake on tv? I already have a hard time with people recording in public on their mobiles; everything you do can be taken out of context. On the other hand, if, as a police officer, you follow all the rules, you should have nothing to fear." In the end, he said yes to the tv show and he doesn't regret it, he says at the beginning of January. "It's a fair representation. You see that we do make jokes and have fun; police work isn't always hard work. Of course, sometimes you have to be patient with the people you meet, but if you are open-minded towards them, they will be too. And yes, you do behave a little better when you're on camera," he laughs. "I don't want to become the butt of any jokes because of my television appearance."

The show has changed some things, though, as he does get recognised on the street and asked for a picture. "I like that, and especially when it's kids, you can't really say no." However, for many people, especially young people, it means they are no longer afraid to approach him at all. "Those people see me as 'someone from the telly', rather than a police officer. There was one time, I had just arrested a suspect, when someone asked if they could take a picture with me. I said, No! Can't you see I'm in the middle of an arrest!"

### Zero time

He has been a student liaison officer for two years now. "It's good, and I know what it's like to be a student. I studied commercial management at the Zuyd University of Applied Sciences in Heerlen, before I decided halfway through that it wasn't for me. I wanted my work to be more meaningful. I had to take some tests to move to the police, but they saw potential in me and gave me

a chance."

He gets "zero time" for his work as student liaison officer. There are a few fixed assignments, though. "During INKOM, we organise information sessions for students about safety and rules, and we organise meetings between students and other citizens. They use those sessions to tell students what bothers them in the area, mostly excessive noise, or cigarette butts on the pavement. Some complaints are a recurring theme. Sometimes you hear people say that they shouldn't have chosen to live in the city centre, that these nuisances are part of the deal, but I don't agree. It's a question of values for me. Students have to behave as much as the next person.

"Twice a year, I tour the different student associations and ask, 'are there any students doing anything they shouldn't be?'" he says with a wink. "Usually, it's all fine, student associations often have good relationships with their neighbours. For example, Amphytrion [actually currently in the news because of a hazing scandal, red.], the student association for the hotel school. They're in Limmel and they have a neighbourhood WhatsApp group. They use it to announce when there's going to be a party, so that everybody is aware of what's going on."

### Loneliness is a killer

When there are problems, it's more often the international students than the Dutch ones, notes Gölpek. "I get it, everything is different for them here. Take the traffic laws, for example, so much is *not allowed* in the Netherlands. Cycling on the wrong side of the road, using a mobile phone, cycling without a light, they're almost daily occurrences," he says. "So often, I hear 'oh, but that's not a problem where I'm from'. Some get really angry, call you 'those fucking cops'. But insults and aggressive behaviour towards officers just makes the situation worse. International students, especially from countries where the police are very different, often think we're all just soft here, but we do take that very seriously. It can lead to higher fines or even arrests. And fines in the Netherlands

are already ridiculously high: holding you phone while on the bike, that'll cost you €169. Bad lights: €79. If you're unemployed, that's a big hit."

And of course, there are the parties and the nuisance they bring. In October, there was a party on Bredestraat that got completely out of hand: speakers on the street playing music until the small hours, upsetting the neighbours. International students – it's said, mostly Germans – clashed with police officers who had been sent to deal with the situation en masse. One German student even had his wrist broken when he was hit with a baton. Gölpek: "I wasn't there myself, but parties like that happen more often. And the more students involved, the more police officers are sent. Large groups of international students are particularly prone to causing problems."

Alcohol and drugs are also often a problem with that group. "They're far

away from their parents and want to experiment, I get it. A hundred points if you come all this way and have the time of your life. But if, for example, you combine alcohol and weed – not everyone is ready to deal with the consequences of that."

What's the worst thing he's ever had to deal with as a student liaison officer? He sighs. "All sorts of things happen, even at UM. Destruction of property, sexual assault, rape. We handle all the reports, investigate facts and circumstances that could help us solve cases. The worst ones are the suicides; they happen frequently. It's loneliness, isn't it, it's a killer. Recently, this student – We'd spoken over the phone just three minutes before and then moments later, there this person is; jumped off a block of flats. That is tough, you never get used to it." Thankfully, there are always colleagues. "They support you, you can talk to them."

## ACCESSIBILITY

If you want to contact the student liaison officer, you can call 0900-8844 and ask for Can Gölpek or his colleague, Sander Alberts. If you are a student experiencing an emergency, call 112. If necessary, the report will be forwarded to Gölpek or Alberts, who may contact you afterwards. Gölpek is unwilling to share his email address. "If I did that, I'd have 10 thousand students emailing me, and I don't need that."

## news

# “Have the students only just found out?”



Illustration: Shutterstock

Continued from page 3

system), ICTS, the SSC and the chief privacy officer, the course coordinator can see the data for the whole course. Everything is done

according to UM's privacy rules (which can be found on the UM website) and is in line with the GDPR. Permission from the student is not required, as UM needs the data to perform education tasks, and that is a legally

accepted reason.

“Have the students only just found out? Surely it was clear from the start of Canvas in 2020, that this data would be accessible”, was the reaction from one of the nine lecturers con-

tacted by *Observant* to ask whether they knew about and used this feature. Apparently it isn't as clear as all that, as four of the lecturers contacted were also unaware. “No idea. I can barely use Canvas myself, it's a massive labyrinth.” Another responded by saying, “I didn't know about it, but I also couldn't care less. I've got better things to do!” Of the five who do know about the option, two never use it and a further two only sporadically. “Only at the start of the course, to check whether everybody has downloaded the course reader.”

Only one of the lecturers regularly makes use of the option. “I use it to check whether students have looked at an assignment or a video before our question and answer sessions. And how much time they spent there. I absolutely don't see this as a breach of students' privacy. It's a way to get a better grip on the study process and to see how appealing and attainable our course material is.” Before adding, “I'm actually quite curious, why are students shocked? That strikes me as a massive distrust of the lecturers. I don't think that's fair, I think that the lecturers at UM are some of the most committed professionals in the Netherlands.” University Council member Bram van den Berkmortel doesn't want to call it distrust towards the lecturers. He isn't against the option, in principle, but against the fact that the students aren't aware it's a possibility. And the memo says nothing about that, he states. “They mention privacy rules on the UM website. As if students are going to read that. We want transparency so that every student knows that a tutor can view all kinds of online activity.” Currently, he is discussing a solution with the rest of the student faction of the University Council. For example, they are considering a standard notification in every course book.

And finally, the question whether data in Canvas or PebblePad can be used to assess the level of participation: the memo writers say that is something they are not aware of. But according to the University Library, every course reader contains a section explaining what assessments make up a grade.

Riki Janssen

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY, FACULTIES, SERVICE CENTRES AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS CAN BE FOUND ON [WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL](http://WWW.OBSERVANTONLINE.NL)

## Agenda academic ceremonies

Aula Minderbroedersberg 4-6



SCAN THE CODE



## Maastricht University

### Vacatures

Werken voor de meest internationale universiteit van Nederland? Scan de QR-code voor ons actuele vacature overzicht\*.

Voor meer informatie over werken bij de Universiteit Maastricht, ga naar <https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/nl/werken-bij-de-um>

\*Medewerkers van UM kunnen een volledig overzicht van interne- en externe vacatures vinden door in te loggen op SuccessFactors via Umployee.


[www.maastrichtuniversity.nl](http://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl)