

Welcome, Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, in particular Her Excellency Minister Ms. Kaag, who's our distinguished keynote speaker today, His Excellency the Ambassador of the Netherlands in Germany, Mr. Kingma, our Governor of the Province of Limburg, mr. Bovens, and our two honoured guests, professor Ignatieff and dr. Ghosh. A warm welcome as well to the members of our Supervisory Board, students, alumni and of course, members of our staff: a heartfelt welcome on behalf of the Executive Board Martin Paul and Nick Bos to this academic ceremony, in which we celebrate our university's forty-third birthday. You just listened to Ms. Ineke Schuit who plays our church organ. She will also accompany us when we leave the church again, thank you Ms. Schuit, it is always such a pleasure to enter the church with such beautiful music.

43 years my dear audience! We hope to be able to celebrate many hundreds more. I don't want to alarm anyone, but people who think that a university is a given, that the institution will stand the test of time and survive for centuries without a sustained collaborative effort, those people may well be disappointed. Fortunately, our colleagues and students don't mind making a real effort. But sometimes, working hard is simply not enough... and it may not be in the future.

A case in point is the Central European University, which recently moved from Budapest to Vienna after severe political interference. The move is alarming. Most of us saw it coming. Our university launched the 'Save CEU' petition on the well-known Change.org site in 2017. It was signed by many Maastricht students and staff. Our staff even signalled to the rector of CEU that the institution was welcome to move to Maastricht.

It's therefore no coincidence that, today, we will present an honorary doctorate to the rector and president of this prestigious university, Professor Michael Ignatieff. He summed it up very clearly in an interview on our UM website:

“Every university in Europe ought to be free from the kind of overtly political manipulation and intimidation that we’ve been subjected to”.

The threat to academic freedom is only one of the many global challenges we face. Climate change, unrestricted migration, the impact of globalisation on cultural identity, gender equality or access to quality education for all - these and many other global challenges require citizens who are engaged and feel socially responsible. People who are internationally literate, which means that they are able to understand and use information from various sources and disciplines and who are capable to analyse differing perspectives, for instance influenced by cultural differences and complexities.

Our second laureate today, Dr Amitav Ghosh, wrote a book titled 'The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable'. In it, he highlights this enormous global challenge from various perspectives: literature, history and politics. He was also interviewed for the UM website and he’s quoted as saying: "Any conversation about climate change that does not focus on Asia is just whistling in the dark."

To me, this quote underlines the importance of engagement, social responsibility and international literacy. These are three core competences often labelled under the concept of global citizenship education. These competences were also defined as key by our students and teachers who debated the implementation of global citizenship education at our university over the last year. A global citizen can understand and analyse global issues with local impact, or vice versa, with an eye also for the need to connect different scientific disciplines.

In addition to recognising theoretical and methodological connections, this involves cognitive skills which enable us to think in a systematic, critical and creative way. This also means, and this is considered imperative, working with people from different backgrounds, as we have been doing for many years within our international classroom.

Global citizenship education is about inclusiveness, sustainability and qualities such as empathy, integrity, curiosity, courage and resilience. When I ponder the future of Maastricht University, I cannot help but think that it will be inextricably linked to the future of our students.

In our new bachelor's programme Global Studies, which we are currently developing, all our six faculties work together to train students to analyse and collaboratively contribute to solving global challenges. I am extremely proud that our faculty's leadership and staff involved in developing the programme have taken this historical step to jointly offer this innovative programme, setting aside faculty or disciplinary boundaries. Through co-teaching by staff from different academic disciplines and including perspectives, staff and students from the global south and global north we aim to put our aspirations into concrete actions.

This is of course not the only programme in which we train the global citizens of the future. For decades, we've used Problem-Based Learning to teach students curiosity, empathy mutual understanding and all the other aforementioned values. I think it's important to highlight this, to make it even more explicit, and to explain to our students and to the outside world why our university finds this so important. *And* what those skills mean: not only for their own careers, but also for the future of us all.

I've noticed in our discussions over the last year that some dismiss global citizenship education as pursuing a political agenda. As if educating socially responsible citizens was a leftist hobby. As if Maastricht University was pursuing a leftist agenda by setting up this new bachelor's programme. I hope you don't mind me stressing once again: UM has no political agenda. We are a safe haven for all political colours, religions, nationalities and cultures. We find it important that our students learn how to deal with different perspectives, opinions and visions, and that they can interpret viewpoints based on sound reasoning and respectful dialogue, being aware of one's own prejudice, and with an open mind and understanding for each other.

I therefore genuinely do not believe we need to be ashamed that we're training young people to become socially responsible, internationally-oriented citizens. In fact, that's what we proudly stand for. When universities no longer articulate the values they stand for, as a way of preventing any criticism of political bias, everything becomes flat and grey.

Likewise, I'm equally proud of the fact that so many of our students are wholeheartedly committed to creating a better society, both far away and close to home, here in Maastricht, by the many extracurricular activities they undertake.

Providing education on global studies and incorporating global citizenship education in all our curricula fits perfectly in our existing research theme called Europe and a Globalized World. We aim to further strengthening our research under this theme including other activities for instance in the area of professional development education and societal engagement through encouraging and initiating interdisciplinary connections between our existing research groups and with external stakeholders.

So yes, we are and will remain a European university with a global outlook, whatever the prevailing public opinion and however ticklish the political underbelly.