

# “Leuven is still Europe's best kept secret”

PROFESSOR BART DE MOOR,  
VICE RECTOR FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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“International affairs used to be a supplementary responsibility, but have now been given a vice rector’s office in their own right. This fact indicates just how important they will be for the university in the near future.” Professor Bart De Moor is the first vice rector at our university charged exclusively with the responsibility for international affairs. “Leuven is still Europe’s best kept secret”, he says, and that is something he wants to change.

Vice Rector De Moor is a professor at the Faculty of Engineering, but has been leading a double life for some time. After his post-doc at Stanford, he first embarked on a research career in system theory and control engineering, and later also in bioinformatics. Between the early ‘90s and just recently, he combined this research with a career in the research policy of Belgium and Flanders. He currently heads a research team of about 30 doctoral students. He is also the chair of Leuven’s Industrial Research Fund and of the Flemish Hercules Foundation, as well as being a member of the Flemish Academy of Technical Sciences.

of the university. This is something I can now commit to full time again, as the vice rector for international affairs. I do not doubt that I will have more than enough on my plate, but I can always rely on the structures that are in place to support me, which is very reassuring.”

“International affairs used to be a supplementary responsibility, but have now been given a vice rector’s office in their own right. This fact indicates just how important they will be for the university in the near future. The concept is obviously not a new one; much work is already being done in this area. The International Office, for example, plays a key role. The



Professor Bart De Moor (© Rob Stevens)

and education, as well as social service. And let’s not forget that our international contacts, visiting students and professors for example, are our best ambassadors, but only if their experience in Leuven is a positive one.”

percent of our students travel abroad as part of the Erasmus programme. I’m convinced this percentage can be increased substantially, and not only through Erasmus, but also through other channels.”

"I worked in the cabinets of Wivina De-meester and Luc Van den Brande for many years, as an advisor and chief of cabinet, working mainly on science and innovation policy. During Minister-President Van den Brande's term in office, funding for science and innovation increased dramatically; it almost doubled in five years. I consider that to be one of our greatest achievements. We also founded the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology and Technopolis, among other things. It is, of course, absolutely wonderful to work in an environment where you are given two billion franks extra a year for a period of five years to spend on really useful, constructive progress. In 1999, the dioxin crisis ended the political constellation of which I was a part at the time, so I returned to the university full time and became involved with the new research field of bioinformatics."

"In 2005, Yves Leterme (*then Minister-President of Flanders*) asked me to become his chief of cabinet for socio-economic policy. One of our most important achievements was the 'Flanders in action' initiative – ViA – which we conceived of as the successor to Flanders Technology, but with a slightly different focus. ViA has become an important factor in the current Flemish coalition agreement. Indeed, internationalisation is one of the cornerstones of ViA."

"Cabinet life teaches you how to deal with adrenaline rushes, and you experience first hand what hectic work actually is. But even while I worked in the government, the university was always my primary concern; it is the habitat in which I truly belong. I have never aspired to a breakthrough into the world of politics or international business, and have always considered my professional life from the perspective

three departments, co-ordinated by Bart Hendrickx, have been doing a fantastic job for years. There are also many faculty, departmental and even individual initiatives that fall under the heading of 'internationalisation'. But there is certainly some room for growth on the strategic level. At this stage, that is the level where I think my job plays a role."

"I want to create sensitivity for the real goal of internationalisation: the fact that we can attract more students from country X is great, but there has to be a reason to do so. We must also be committed to discerning win-win situations. For example, we must consider development co-operation more from the perspective of 'research for development'. This would also facilitate a better approach to prioritisation: if you know the reasons why you are doing whatever it is that you are doing on an international level, it is far easier to de-

termine what is most important."

"Internationalisation has a great many perspectives and common interests. Take globalisation for example, which creates opportunities, but also forces us to make certain choices and urges us to reflect on our own position in a huge world. I am also convinced that increased international contacts foster creativity and tolerance, and are thus of great formative value. But you can also broaden the issue, and emphasise the economic importance of internationalisation. When it comes to Flanders, 'abroad' is an enormous place. On the one hand, we must make a breakthrough there, but on the other hand, we also have to safeguard our identity while we do so. Internationalisation is also related to our internal quality: if you want to be the best in your field, you must attain international standards, both with respect to research,

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BART DE MOOR

"These experiences are undoubtedly good, though there is always room for improvement. For example, I think that though the reception of our international students is already excellent, perhaps we need to continue to touch base with them after the first few weeks. If we don't do this, we will have created a multicultural environment, but we will never achieve one that is genuinely intercultural. And the fact that the importance of internationalisation is on the rise, is evident from the figures: the number of international students increased by 20 percent this year. At the moment, one out of every ten students in Leuven comes from abroad."

"I also think there are possibilities to increase the support of many faculty initiatives. Establishing an international Master's programme requires a great deal of preparatory work and it would be great if we could cluster the best practices in this regard, and improve the incentives to develop such projects for the initiators."

"Internationalisation is not only concerned with bringing more international students and professors to Leuven. We also have to do the reverse. For example, currently only about five

"Perhaps we don't make enough use of our assets. Think of K.U.Leuven Research & Development: our research transfer office, which is one of the very best, even in comparison to excellent foreign universities. Such spearheads are essential when it comes to propagating the K.U.Leuven 'brand'. We probably don't do this enough yet. Leuven is still 'Europe's best kept secret'. You can also consider our development co-operation to be an aspect of internationalisation. Uniting the powers of a greater critical mass would certainly make more sense in this regard, just as the positioning of our international policies in the broader context of Flanders, Belgium and Europe."

"Internationalisation is transversal, permeating the whole organisation. It has an effect on our research, our education, our social commitment, on every aspect and division of who we are and what we do. This makes it a very complex, but also a very beautiful and challenging area, which I would like as many members of the university as possible to support. Bottom up input with top down guidance guarantees the best results. I would like to contribute to achieving this."

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## Supplement: International programmes

Along with this issue of *Campuskrant International*, we are sending you the supplement *International programmes – Tradition in Excellence in the Heart of Europe*. This contains a colourful, clearly organised and succinct presentation of the international programmes available at K.U.Leuven. The three doctoral schools are also introduced. Finally, concise information blocks provide the main details on education, research, innovation, tuition fees, housing, the mobility programme Erasmus Mundus, and scholarships for students from developing countries. If you would like to order further copies of this supplement, please send an e-mail to [international@kuleuven.be](mailto:international@kuleuven.be)