

# The Battle for the Truth - Democracy & Disinformation in the Digital Media World

Symposium of the KVAB Thinker's Programme 2019



Friday October 11th 2019  
Flemish Parliament  
Ijzerenkruisstraat 99  
1000 Brussels



**KVAB**

Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België  
voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten

## **KVAB Thinkers' Programme 2019**

### **THE BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH - DEMOCRACY & DISINFORMATION IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA WORLD**

Thinkers-in-residence:

**Anja Bechmann and Ben O'Loughlin**

The Thinkers' Programme is a unique multidisciplinary and future oriented initiative with a high-level societal impact. With and around prominent international experts and jointly with members of the Academy and numerous partners and stakeholders, work is performed around an important timely theme which has a specific relevance for Flanders.

The aim is to provide a significant contribution to the further strategic development of Flanders by developing a long term vision and in this way to contribute to governance.

This is the final symposium of the KVAB Thinkers' Programme on Democracy & Disinformation that aimed to reflect on the impact of disinformation on the democratic processes.

Digital media expert Anja Bechmann and expert in international relations & communications Ben O'Loughlin have investigated the Flemish situation and will present their findings. Policymakers and experts from media and academia respond.

- 09:00 Coffee & registration
- 10:00 Opening  
**Karel Velle**, President of the KVAB
- 10:15 About the Thinkers' Programme  
**Jaak Billiet**, KVAB, KU Leuven
- 10:30 Disinformation crisis in Europe? Evidence from the European 2019 elections  
**Claes de Vreese**, University of Amsterdam  
Followed by responses of **Tim Pauwels** (VRT), **Lien Verpoest** (KU Leuven) and a Q&A.
- 12:00 Lunch break
- 13:00 Preliminary Thinkers' Report on Democracy and Disinformation  
**Anja Bechmann**, Aarhus University  
**Ben O'Loughlin**, Royal Holloway, University of London  
Followed by responses of **Jan-Frederik Abbeloos** (De Standaard),  
**Ike Picone** (VUB), **Katia Segers** (Sp.a) and a Q&A.
- 15:00 Response from minister Philippe De Backer  
**Philippe De Backer**, Federal Minister of Digital Agenda,  
Telecom and Postal Services
- 15:30 Closing  
**Peter Van Aelst**, UAntwerpen
- 15:45 Reception



### Anja Bechmann

Anja Bechmann is professor at Media Studies and director of DATALAB - Center for Digital Social Research. Her research examines social media communication and collective behavior using large-scale data collection and applied machine learning. Bechmann's field of research are digital sociology, privacy, critical algorithmic and AI studies and digital news studies.

She is board member of the Danish Council for IT Security and ATV's Digital Sages and appointed member of the Academy of Technical Sciences. Her research has been funded by national and international research councils such as the Danish Council for Independent Research, Swedish Research Council, Danish Agency for Science and Innovation, Horizon 2020 and Aarhus University Research Foundation. Follow @anjabechmann



### Ben O'Loughlin

Ben O'Loughlin (DPhil Oxon, FRSA) is Professor of International Relations and Director of the New Political Communication Unit at Royal Holloway, University of London. He was Specialist Advisor to the UK Parliament's Select Committee on Soft Power, producing the report *Power and Persuasion in the Modern World*. He is co-editor of the Sage journal *Media, War & Conflict*. In 2017 Ben published *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, with A. Miskimmon and L. Roselle, eds.). Ben has recently completed several projects on digital engagement with the British Council. In 2016 Ben and his co-authors won the Walter Lippmann Award for Political Communication at the American Political Science Association (APSA). He is currently completing a book examining the role of narrative in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Follow @Ben\_OLoughlin

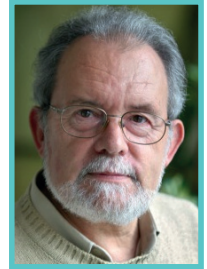
### Karel Velle

Karel Velle obtained his PhD in History in 1988 (Ghent University). Since 2005, he has been General Director of the State Archives of Belgium and the State Archives in the Provinces, General State Archivist and a part-time professor associated with the History Department of Ghent University. He is chairman of the KVAB for the 2019-2020 administrative period.



### Jaak Billiet

Jaak Billiet is Professor Emeritus at the University of Leuven. His main research interest in social methodology deals with modeling measurement error in social surveys. His substantial research covers longitudinal and comparative research in the domains of ethnocentrism, political attitudes, and religious orientations. He was a founding member of the European Social Survey and involved in its Central Coordination Team. He is a member of the Class of Humanities of KVAB.



### Claes de Vreese

Claes H. de Vreese is a Danish Professor of Political Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). He is also Distinguished Faculty Professor of AI, Data and Democracy at the University of Amsterdam and Affiliated Professor of Political Science and Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). De Vreese is the founding Director of the Center for Politics and Communication. He is member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the chair of its Social Science Council. Between 2005 and 2013, he was the Director of ASCoR and the Director of the Netherlands School of Communication Research (NeSCoR). Research interests of De Vreese include public opinion, the effects of news, and algorithms, data, platforms, AI and democratic processes. De Vreese is the Editor in Chief of the Political Communication and President-Elect of the International Communication Association ICA.



### Tim Pauwels

Tim Pauwels' career includes work as a journalist for all major media networks in Flanders. In recent years he was best known for his work as a presenter and political journalist for VRT, the Flemish Public Broadcaster in Belgium. VRT News produces daily Radio and TV News, several Radio and TV current affairs programs and a News Website. In April 2017 Tim Pauwels was appointed as the news ombudsman for VRT NWS, for which he will serve a three year mandate.





### Lien Verpoest

Lien Verpoest studied East European Languages and Cultures, and International Relations and Conflict Management at the KU Leuven, Saint Petersburg State University, and Lund University. She is an Associate Professor at the History research unit of the Faculty of Arts (KU Leuven), where she teaches amongst others history of Russia and diplomatic history. She is a member of the Modernity and Society 1800-2000 research group and Academic Director of the Centre for Russian Studies. Her research focuses on institutional transfer in the Russian Empire and the Western influence on Russian conservative and liberal ideas in the 19th century. Together with Eva Claessen, she also studies the Russian contestation of global norms and values in the context of the KU Leuven 'Connectivity, Contestation and Cooperation in Global Governance' research project (2018-2024).



### Jan-Frederik Abbeloos

Jan-Frederik Abbeloos (°1981) is chief political editor for the Flemish newspaper De Standaard. Abbeloos studied History, Economics and Journalism at Ghent University. In 2014 he won the Belfius Press Award for 'De Kloof', a series of articles that evaluated economic inequality in Belgium since 1973. In 2019, an important election year, De Standaard organized Het Grote Gelijk, an event during which hundreds of readers met their ideological counterpart for a conversation.

### Ike Picone

Ike Picone teaches and researches disruptions on the crossroad of journalism, technological innovations and democracy. The thread within his research is the study of news use practices within the broad field of journalism studies. More precisely, his work focuses on 'productive' use of new(s) media, conceptualized within his research as self-publication. The scope is to understand how people participate to media as a social practice, and what motivations and thresholds play a role in shaping this practice. His research topics include user participation to online news, the changing relationship between news audiences and journalists and the role of new media in the emergence of deliberative public spheres.



## Katia Segers

Katia Segers is a professor at the department of Media Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Between 2002 and 2014 she was director of CEMESO. Her research and publications focus on children, media and culture, media literacy and on media and cultural policy matters. She was a member of the Belgian team of EU Kids Online, a multi-national thematic network that aims to stimulate and coordinate investigation into the use of new media by children, funded by the Safer Internet Program of the European Commission. On May 25, 2014 she was elected as Member of the Flemish Parliament and the Belgian Senate. Before, she was the president of the Flemish Regulator for the Media, president of the Advisory Board to the Minister of Cultural Policy, vice-president of the Commission Cultural Treaty between Flanders and the Netherlands, and a member of the board of the Flemish Opera House and Ballet and the Flemish Expert Commission for Governmental Communication of the Flemish Parliament. On May 26, 2019 she was reelected as a Member of the Flemish Parliament and again appointed as a Belgian Senator.



## Philippe De Backer

In May 2016, Philippe De Backer (40) joined the Belgian government as Secretary of State for the Fight against Social Fraud, Privacy and North Sea. Since December 2018 he is Minister of Digital Agenda, Postal Services and Telecom, responsible for Administrative Simplification, the Fight against Social Fraud, Privacy and North Sea. Prior to that he was a Member of the European Parliament, at ALDE group. In his first legislature – 2011-2014 – he was full member of the Transport Committee and substitute member on the Economy and Monetary Affairs Committee. After the elections of 2014 Philippe became full member of the Industry Research and Energy Committee and substitute member of the Economy and Monetary Affairs committee. Before joining the European Parliament, Philippe worked as Technology Transfer Officer and as Business Analyst, in different venture capital firms specialised in the life-sciences. Philippe holds a PhD in biotechnology from Ghent University and an MBA from Solvay Business School (Belgium).



## Peter Van Aelst

Peter Van Aelst is a professor in political communication at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) and a founding member of the research group 'Media, Movements and Politics' (M2P). He has published widely on election campaigns, agenda-setting and the growing influence of social media in political life. In a current project, in collaboration with the university of Zurich, he studies disinformation in comparative perspective.



## Deelnemerslijst

Abbeloos	Jan-Frederik	De Standaard
Abdelhamed	Salah	European Egyptian Council Brussels
Almasi	Mustapha	VUB
Baetens	Yana	
Bechmann	Anja	Aarhus University
Bekaert	Marc	UAntwerpen
Bergmans	Patrick	UGent
Billiet	Jaak	KVAB / KULeuven
Blekman	Freya	VUB
Bocken	Hubert	KVAB / UGent
Boelens	Nathalie	KVAB
Borry	Franciska	
Boussemaere	Machteld	Europahuis Ryckvelde
Boute	Raymond	UGent
Brantegem	Annelore	sp.a
Brossé	Kris	KVAB
Brouwers	Karin	
Brovdij	Jana	College of Europe
Bruffaerts	Lauren	Britse ambassade
Buyens	Willem	University of Antwerp
Buyse	Myriam	EC / AICE-Belgique / GROEN
Calis	Christophe	AHOVOKS
Carreau	Sophie	FOD Buitenlandse Zaken
Cassimon	Johan	Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media
Celens	Eduard	Koninklijke Militaire School
Chang	Meg	
Christiaens	Christophe	Teneo
Claes	Bart	Vlaams Belang
Claessen	Eva	KU Leuven
Conings	An	
Cools	Hannes	KU Leuven
De Backer	Philippe	Federaal minister van Digitale Agenda, Telecom & Post
De Bodt	Ann	UGent
De Clercq	Marc	KVAB / VRT / UGent
De Corte	Katelijne	
De Corte	Rogier	
De Dijn	Herman	KVAB / KU Leuven
De Jaegher	Lut	Arteveldehogeschool
De Meerleer	Anja	
De Ridder	Bram	KU Leuven
De Ridder	Leo	UGent
De Sitry	Laura Lynn	KU Leuven
de Vreese	Claes	University of Amsterdam
Deltour	Pol	VVJ
Demeulenaere	Andy	Mediawijs



d'Haenens	Leen	KU Leuven
Dierickx	Daniel	e2mos
Discart	Koen	Vlaamse Overheid WVG
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Dumortier	Freddy	KVAB / UHasselt
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Engels	Nicole	
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Goidts	Chris	
Goovaerts	Lidwina	Future Force BVBA
Goris	Ria	EhB
Grisane	Aiga	Dace Melbarde
Groothedde	Celia	Groen
Gybels-Delperdange	Hélène	
Hamm	Lauren	EU DisinfoLab
Heirman	Hubert	
Hermans	Sanne	Mediawijs
Hermans	Stefaan	European Commission
Hills	Brady	IRI Europe ASBL
Hochner	Daniel	Hochner
Hoorens	Stijn	RAND Europe
Hoornaert	Johan	KU Leuven
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Huyghe	Claudine	SERV
Huyghe	Hein	
Indemans	Wouter	
Jagers	Jan	Knack / VUB
Kenens	Joya	Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kindermans	Hugo	
Laeremans	Jan	
Lambrecht	Ingrid	CiTIP - KU Leuven - imec
Laureys	Godelieve	KVAB / UGent
Lemeire	Frans	UHasselt
Leroy	Josiane	
Liefoghe	Frank	Independent artist
Lin	Jiun-Chi	Institute for Media Studies, KU Leuven
Luyten	Walter	KU Leuven
M.C. Simoens	Joran	UAntwerpen
Malfroid	Cedric	
Mallego	Yvette	
Matthijs	Koen	KU Leuven
Mehra	Deepak	
Michiels	An	ESCN
Mirbach	Karolina	European Democratic Party

## Deelnemerslijst

Morosoli	Sophie	UAntwerpen
Moyaert	Nico	N-VA-fractie Vlaams Parlement
Nolf	Marie-Thérèse	
O'Loughlin	Ben	Royal Holloway, University of London
Opgenhaffen	Michael	KU Leuven
Pataki	Zsolt	European Parliament
Pauwels	Tim	VRT
Pereira Eires	Joaquim	Independent conceptualist
Picone	Ike	VUB
Pierson	Jo	VUB / imec-SMIT
Pluymers	Jean-Pierre	Thomas More university of applied sciences Kempen
Poppe	Toon	
Rits	Geert	Vlaams Parlement
Ronning	Helene	EASAC
Roth	Lorna	Concordia University, Montreal
Salo	Mikko	Faktabaari (FactBar)
Scharpé	Michiel	Vlaams Journalistiek Fonds
Schobbens	Pierre Yves	UNamur
Sebastian	Manu	KU Leuven
Segers	Katia	Sp.a
Selleslag	Christian	Thomas More
Simons	Massimiliano	UGent
S'Jegers	Rosette	VUB
Spruyt	Bram	Jonge Academie / VUB
Stiers	Walter	IBM
Stoffels	Paul	
Symoens	Hilde	KVAB / UGent
Tanova	Svetla	EP
Trangez	Ivan	Consultran BVBA
Troch	Paul	VLAST / CERA / BRS
Vaes	Diego	Vlaamse Regulator voor de Media
Valcke	Peggy	CiTIP / KULeuven / imec
Van Aelst	Peter	UAntwerpen
van Bodegraven	Jeannette	
Van de Voorde	Johan	UGent
Van den brande	Tine	
Van den Bremt	Kris	Vlaams Parlement
Van der Steen	Chris	
Van der Wee	Herman	KVAB
Van Essen	Ulrich	European Union
Van Humbeeck	Peter	SERV
Van Vinckenroye	Wilfried	Vlaams Parlement
Vancrombrugge	Thierry	Federale Overheid
Vande Walle	Britt	Vlaams Parlement - Open Vld
Vandenbrande	Marc	Marc Vandenbrande
Velle	Karel	KVAB / UGent

Vercammen	Hugo	
Verkest	Sofie	UGent
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Willaert	Tom	VUB
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Willems	Jacques	KVAB / UGent
Wissaert	Roland	KVAB
Witte	Els	KVAB
Wolf	Hanna Valerie	FWO / University of Antwerp
Wynant	Julie	Rijksarchief / KU Leuven
Zeeuwts	Sofie	KVAB

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