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## **Van Randwijklezing by David van Reybrouck**

*By Mara Braslava*

Political participation and the democratic deficit in the European Union were the focus of this year's van Randwijklezing. Well-known Flemish author David van Reybrouck delivered the lecture in the Sint Jacobskerk, Vlissingen on the day of the *Bevrijdingsfestival*.

Van Reybrouck is an historian, archaeologist and writer, author of the prize-winning book 'Congo: A history' ('Congo – Een Geschiedenis'). In the lecture, however, he focused on the European Union and called for more public involvement in politics.

One of the key thoughts of van Reybrouck was that democracy is expensive, but a lack of it costs even more. In his view, European democracy is in crisis. Politics has become elitist and European Union communication is mostly aimed at the highly educated.

Van Reybrouck said the EU should put more effort into reaching out to the majority of European citizens who do not have a university degree and "who do not watch Euronews". He proposed that the EU should increase direct citizen involvement in decision-making.

Throughout the lecture van Reybrouck spoke with excitement and passed this feeling onto the public who rose to applaud him at the end. Many in the audience seemed to echo van Reybrouck's ideas.

Bert Thönissen from Hulst, who listened to the lecture, agreed that "democracy is oppressed because the people are not engaged anymore". He also praised van Reybrouck's ability to speak in a "literary way".

After a short break, around 40 people joined an interview with van Reybrouck in the bookstore 't Spui. Journalism students from University College Roosevelt, together with their professor Dr. Anya Luscombe, moderated the talk.

Van Reybrouck further explained his ideas on democratizing politics while answering the students' questions. Eventually, the audience engaged in the discussion.

The van Randwijk lecture takes place every year during the *Bevrijdingsfestival* and is usually well attended. This year the maximum number of people, around 700, came to the Sint Jacobskerk.

The audience was, however, mainly senior. While van Reybrouck spoke about engaging different groups of people in politics, the van Randwijklezing itself seems to struggle with reaching beyond a certain type of audience.