

(Thank you, prof. Verstrynge)

Dear professor Mouffe

Dear colleagues,

Dear students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The VUB Chair was founded in the seventies and belongs in fact to all our eight faculties.

Every year another faculty invites an academic personality.

This year it's our faculty of Arts and Philosophy that organises the Chair.

For us as the university of Free Inquiry,

it is absolutely essential to have these chairs.

It is essential to keep questioning ourselves as academics and to question the society we live and work in.

And it is essential to have strong, critical and original voices to be heard at our campus.

It is our conviction that only intellectual debate and free research can lead to new understanding, new insights and new ideas from which society can benefit.

Academic freedom must remain the central focus in this and in all the other chairs that are financed by internal and external funds.

Because as a university,

we educate.

And we research.

But the most important activity should be... thinking.

Independent, fact-driven and creative thinking.

In order to safeguard something that we hold dear, namely to ensure that the truth may come to light unobstructed.

The ethicist Bart Pattyn states that academic freedom *requires an unprejudiced attitude, a researcher who does not feel the need to 'steer' the outcome of an argumentation in a particular direction. And that the researcher is also aware that no opinion can be a final opinion, because new facts or arguments can radically change any conviction at any time.*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Therefore, as the rector of the VUB, I am pleased to welcome professor Chantal Mouffe at our university.

In the Flemish weekly Knack Magazine she was recently interviewed as one of the greatest thinkers of our time, a philosopher with the same influence and impact as Peter Sloterdijk, John Gray and Benjamin Barber.

Prof. Mouffe stresses the lack of dialogue and criticism in today's neoliberal Europe.

With the European elections to be held in a couple of weeks time, there could be no better moment for this chair to be organised.

We live in confusing times.

Old recipes don't work anymore.

We need new approaches;

politically, economically, socially, environmentally.

The subjects that the Chair holder will deal with, will certainly contribute to such new approaches.

Today's inaugural lecture will be followed by three other lectures and – on the 22th of May – by a Colloquium.

Professor Mouffe will talk about the importance of passion in politics, about the state of our democracy and its future, about the objectives for the social movements.

Chantal Mouffe, I am sure that your lectures and the debates they will evoke will make us a richer university. For insight and knowledge are the only things that really matter.

I'm very pleased to give the floor again to professor Karl Verstrynge. He will further introduce the chair holder, professor Mouffe. I thank you.

Paul De Knop
Rector
05/05/2014