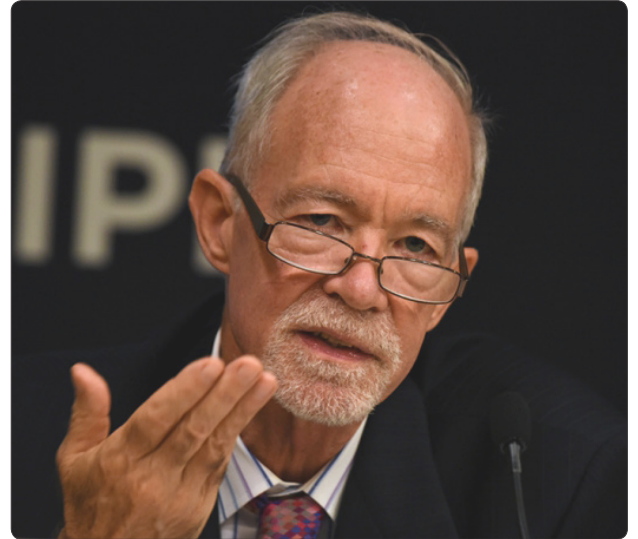


Ghent University and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel Will Lend Their Support to the United Nations University in Bruges

On 9 February 2017, the United Nations University (UNU), Ghent University (UGent) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) will co-organise an academic meeting in the Gothic Hall of the Bruges City Hall to announce their new five-year cooperation agreement. United Nations Under-Secretary-General and UNU Rector David M. Malone will attend this special event.

UNU is an independent think tank and research arm for the United Nations system with a global network of 11 research and training institutes coordinated by UNU Centre in Tokyo, Japan. At the request of the Flemish government, Flemish universities explored the possibility of collaborating with UNU in their academic activities.



*UN Under-Secretary-General and UNU Rector
David M. Malone*

Following negotiations between all parties involved, an international jury selected the joint proposal of UGent and VUB to collaborate with the UNU Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), based in Bruges on the premises of the Episcopal Seminary (Grootseminarie) at the Potterierei 72.



In its mission to foster a better understanding of regional integration processes worldwide and the role of regionalisation in this globalised world, UNU-CRIS conducts research on how regions can help pursue sustainable growth and democracy. For example, while the European Union was awarded the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, what role can the EU play after Brexit? There are now more and more proponents of leaving the European project. UNU-CRIS helps to develop insights to cope with these and other challenges.

Under the new cooperative agreement the universities will contribute to research carried out by UNU-CRIS in addition to providing financial aid and administrative support. VUB, through the Institute for European Studies, and UGent have years of combined research experience on European integration and international cooperation. This experience will serve as a strong basis for conducting further research with UNU.

Building on its pioneering work, UNU-CRIS 2.0 will continue its comparative analysis of regional organisations worldwide (such as Mercosur, the EU, the African Union and ASEAN), but will focus more on the interaction between globalisation, regionalisation, democracy and welfare. It will link more than before to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and provide policy-relevant research to both the UN and national/regional authorities. Although the fruitful and structural partnership with the College of Europe formally ended, a close working relationship will remain.

UGent and VUB are very pleased to join a strong UN research group in Bruges. The partnership will foster synergies between the two universities and will enable them to bundle their expertise on regional integration into one centre of excellence, while it also opens prospects to expand their presence in the province of West Flanders. UNU-CRIS therefore functions as an academic catalyser for further high-level research and as a window of opportunities for investing more in the region – something UGent and VUB have already aspired to.

UNU-CRIS plays an important role in putting Bruges on the map as an international centre for high quality academic research, where intellectual knowledge is exchanged among researchers from all parts of the world. The institute therefore helps, to some extent, to prevent the brain drain that has been affecting the province in the past years.

On 9 February, this new cooperation will be officially celebrated in an academic session in the Gothic Hall of the Bruges City Hall. The governor of the province of West Flanders, Carl Decaluwé, and the mayor of Bruges, Renaat Landuyt, will discuss the importance of the UN and the presence of UNU-CRIS for both city and region. The rectors of UNU, UGent and VUB will explore the value of research on regional integration. Both sessions will be moderated by journalist Lieven Verstraete. Minister Muyters, highlighting the future importance of UNU-CRIS for Flanders, will also take the floor in a video speech.

UN Under-Secretary-General and UNU Rector David M. Malone will present his vision on the UN since the election of Secretary-General António Guterres, and since the election of the new president of the United States, Donald Trump. He will also expand on the changing role for UNU and UNU-CRIS. Last but not least, the director ad interim of UNU-CRIS, Anthony Antoine, will express his vision for UNU-CRIS 2.0.



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