

Interview 50 years NFK

Important: keep in mind that this interview has been translated from Dutch to English, and that due to this, some connotations or sayings may get lost in translation. If you want to read the original text - the text that the people that got interviewed have written themselves - you can go to our website (nfk.be), where you can find the original interview in Dutch under the tab '50 jaar NFK'.

1. What did the student association look like when you were praeses? For example, what were typical or popular events that were often organized, what did the structure of NFK look like...

Prof. Pieter d’Hoine, praeses during the academic year 1999-2000: One of the events that was organised for the first time under my praesidium and of which I was particularly proud was the sophist debate. This was a playful debate between the philosophers and the classicists, in which the trial of Socrates was reenacted. Each association - NFK and Klio, then the former association of students of Greek, Latin and Ancient History - sent two professors who had to put themselves in the shoes of a philosopher or sophist - Gorgias was certainly one of them, with a starring role for the graecus Luc Van der Stockt. Former dean Carlos Steel and Kierkegaard specialist Paul Cruysberghs, if I am not mistaken, also participated in that first edition, and our current dean was there the following year. After an entertaining evening full of rhetorical fireworks and philosophical humor in the Grote Aula of the MTC, we came to the conclusion that Socrates had been rightly condemned after all, and we could go to fakbar Letteren to have a chat.

The Fakbar of NFK - which until a few years before had been housed in the basement of the Institute, where now a depot of the library is - was then located in the legendary Biertuin. That was a pub at the end of the Mechelsestraat, where on an evening during the week very few people stood around the table football game, cursing and smoking, but which on Thursday evenings was overrun by philosophers. The café then transformed into a brown pub where chess was played, empathy was shown for all the oppressed of the world and coffee was drunk -

but not only coffee. The fakbar was located a bit too far outside the centre, especially on a drizzly evening, so those who had made the long journey usually did not have the courage to return home early. That one evening every week, it was our little piece of Paris in Leuven. Pieter Adriaens performed there with his band, and Samuel Ijsseling once came to talk about Greek gods and French philosophy on the terrace. And once a year, on the day of the praesidium elections, the philosophers went totally crazy during a karaoke night.

Much remained the same: we had our annual Christmas party, the student lounge in the basement of the Institute, and we pondered how to better involve the students of the English programme in our working.

Liesa Vosch, praeses during the academic year 2020-2021: The structure of NFK is twofold. First of all, there is the NFK association with a praesidium that organizes all kinds of activities and the course service. On the other hand, there is the NFK Faculty Educational Body ('het Facultair Overlegorgaan NFK'), or NFK education. These two are not strictly separated. I am currently both praeses and the president of the NFK Faculty Educational Body, and 'education' is also a function in NFK that exists alongside the functions vice-praesides, PR, party, culture, breadmeal, cudi, sports, social, fakbar, treasurer, Zeitgeist (formerly DeWijzer) and volunteers. First some more about what NFK does in the field of education. We represent all philosophy students at faculty and university level and hold an Open Educational Meeting every two weeks. These meetings can also include student representatives who are not members of the praesidium. The

praesidium holds its meetings (PVs) biweekly. The coordinators of the largest functions hold an additional meeting every two weeks, called the HPV.

Many NFK events that have been going on for many years could not go on in their normal way this year (we all know why). Nevertheless, I would like to mention some activities in which I have participated myself with great enthusiasm over the past (almost) three years, all before corona. Some examples are the weekly fakbar evenings on Tuesdays in the café of Museum M, the weekly breadmeals in the lounge, the Christmas dinner, a culture trip (to Paris), cosy cantusses and TDs, a gala ball, an open expo and sooo much more. This year we tried to keep some NFK traditions alive. We organized a freshmen day instead of a freshmen weekend, online fakbars and breadmeals, several speeddating events, yoga sessions, a quiz, online museum visits and more: small and bigger events with varying attendance numbers but always super fun and cozy (but I might be biased).

2. What do you think is the value of becoming a member of a student association like NFK?

Pieter d'Hoine: NFK is a place where your fellow students also (can) become your friends, because the association offers the opportunity to meet each other in other circumstances than in the context of a lesson or library visit and to get to know each other in a different way. I already had my friends from Mechelen in Leuven and I knew a lot of people from Letteren, where I did my first study, but it is nice to be able to go on in the evening about *The Consolation of Philosophy* with others who have actually read it, or to watch movies together which would be too difficult for your friends from Law. And it also helps to

have someone who laughs when you make a silly joke about the categorical imperative (or who at least takes the time to explain why your joke presupposes a wrong interpretation of Kant's ideas). I think that certainly in the current corona circumstances, many people can appreciate the 'community' feeling that an association like NFK can help to create - even if that is not easy to maintain in the current circumstances. I have a lot of admiration for the role NFK is trying to play in this today. I have no idea how we would have done it twenty years ago.

Equally important is the way in which NFK also facilitates studying itself and everything that comes with it. This ranges from welcoming new students to the faculty, sharing information about and experiences with subjects and professors, copying and distributing courses through the course service, and letting the students' voices be heard in POCs, faculty councils and the faculty board. And also, of course, through the representation in LOKO, on the broader level of the university. In that respect, I think NFK has made good progress in recent years: the student representation usually comes to meetings well prepared and, partly because of that, I think it gets a lot done.

Liesa Vosch: Becoming a member of NFK is very accessible, we don't do baptisms or anything like that. Yet you are immediately part of a group, and there is a big sense of community. You can commit yourself to something that you like, together with other people, because there is literally something for everyone, and it is very varied. You help each other out, and you do nice and meaningful things for your fellow students, which gives you the feeling that you are doing something useful. You get a lot of satisfaction out of it (in a non-corona year a little more, but that's beside the point). You can literally make students' lives better, no matter how small you think your

contribution is. Moreover, you learn an enormous number of things. You get to know lots of new people, you learn how to organize activities and events, how to work together, you learn how to think in a problem-solving way, you learn more about how things are decided at faculty and university level and you get a say in these decisions. In short, becoming a member of NFK is a very valuable experience that will stay with you for the rest of your life: both the great memories you make and the things you learn.

3. What is your craziest, strangest, funniest... in short: most memorable memory of NFK?

Pieter d'Hoine: I still remember our traditional barbecue, organised for the proclamation in June. It was a particularly sunny day with lovely early summer weather. NFK had, as usual, committed itself to get everything ready in the inner courtyard of the Institute and to do all the necessary so that everyone could be provided with drinks immediately after the ceremony. Our former fakbar coordinator had connected the kegs to the tap system pretty quickly, but had apparently adjusted the cooling temperature a bit too enthusiastically, causing the whole system to freeze. Shortly before the proclamation was ending, we noticed that not a drop of beer was coming through the pipes. In the meantime, the thirsty people had started to come outside, and we had to come up with a solution quickly. We then started negotiating with the manager of the Café Erasmus, the café that was located on the Kardinaal Mercierplein (where Restaurant Gainsbourg is located currently), which had a large terrace that could be considered an extension of the HIW, as the café probably owed half of its turnover to the Institute. We then rolled our barrels to the Erasmus and in return we could return to the HIW with a long procession of trays filled with

beer to serve to the thirsty and by now impatient crowd of professors and students. The summery atmosphere, the long wait and the preceding excitement all made it, in my memory, one of the most legendary editions of the barbecue, which lasted until well after sunset. When it was time to clean up, the last professors had quickly disappeared. I still suspect that some of them went to their offices to have a quick nap before going home.

Liesa Vosch: In my answer to the first question, I already mentioned many NFK events, so I find it incredibly difficult to choose (help, too many choices!). I was one of the most enthusiastic freshmen, present at almost all the activities, and in my second year I liked to promote these activities as coordinator of PR and then it became clear pretty what my next praesidium position would be □. I don't think I can choose one moment in particular from the many memories I have of NFK. But what will always stay with me the most, is how welcoming and open the people of NFK are. At NFK activities, I could always have a chat with students of different years and people I didn't know yet. I think that's the most memorable thing for me. I thought of myself as shy and not very sociable, but because of the openness and welcoming enthusiasm of the people of NFK, that shyness disappeared, and I could suddenly emerge as a spontaneous and confident person. Sorry for the corny tone, but lockdowns like these make you think about what's important and what you need in life.

4. What do you think NFK stands for? What are the most important values that NFK must have and must carry out?

Pieter d'Hoine: I don't know if NFK really has to propagate some kind of message. Among Leuven's student associations, NFK has always been an outsider. A relatively small association, where everybody knows everybody, and which doesn't take itself too seriously. A group that does not need an accountant, that is not organised above average and that does not really participate in all that student stuff of the other associations. Other associations were close to being shocked when they heard that it was OK for us to come to a cantus and drink water all evening. Or that NFK was one of the first groups to denounce the often very female-unfriendly posters that the larger associations used to promote their parties. And I dare to hope that this also had something to do with the 'F' in our association's name.

Liesa Vosch: One of the most important characteristics of NFK, in my opinion, is openness: NFK is open to everyone. Important values that contribute to this, are versatility and accessibility. NFK organizes all sorts of activities where everyone is welcome. Everyone can find something in our offer that interests them. NFK creates a space for healthy discussions and philosophizing, but also for lots of fun, laughter, craziness and everything in between. Furthermore, NFK is always open to input and contributions from all philosophy students and must continue to strive to keep the threshold as low as possible. That way we can really be there for everyone, and create and maintain a community feeling at the HIW.