Ladies and gentlemen,

As a former European Law School student of the University of Maastricht, I’ve been asked to give my vision on the enlargement of the EU and the role Universities in Europe.

In doing so, I would like to draw your attention to something I’ve encountered during my holidays in Indonesia:

The *Durio Zibethinus*, better known as Durian.

The Durian is the most exclusive fruit available in Southeast Asia. However it is not only exclusive and highly prised. The Durian is primarily known because of its controversial character.

On the one hand, its hard and spiky skin, and its repulsive odor once it has been opened, create the image of a medieval instrument of torture which has been kept too long in a public toilet.
On the other hand, Durian flesh has been described as the ‘jewels in the king’s crown’, as it produces a unique and rich flavour.

These specific characteristics make that Durians are loved by some and hated by others.

Moreover, they are the only fruits, to my knowledge, which have been banned from most public places in Southeast Asia, because of their scent.

It is only possible to fully enjoy this special fruit with a certain level of experience or expertise. In short, one may not be detracted by its inaccessible character, nor its smell.

Furthermore, Durian flesh deteriorates quickly and should therefore be consumed within hours after harvesting.
In a number of ways Europe is not that different from a Durian.

First of all, just like a Durian, Europe has remained an exclusive entity.
It is mainly reserved for politiciens, large companies and academics.

Secondly, Europe is not always that attractive!
Especially at first sight!
Its abstract character and the irregularities that have been reported in the past, do not exactly function as an appetizer or a light dessert.

And finally, a lack of knowledge keeps the majority of Europeans from getting better acquainted with it.
As a result, in parallel to the Durian, many do not make the effort to taste its sweet and attractive flavour.

The enlargement of Europe, in my opinion, has to be considered in the light of the foregoing.
Notwithstanding the fact that the Enlargement may be important for political, socioeconomic, and many more reasons, Europe has not directly become more attractive to its citizens.

To the contrary! The Durian has increased in volume, and so has its paradox.

To stop it from growing even further, we need a certain level of acquaintance with Europe.

In essence, Europe must become accessible without prejudice provoked by the unknown.

Just as little children have to learn to appreciate the taste of certain nourishments, the Europeans must obtain a basic understanding of Europe.

Increased knowledge will diminish prejudice and thus aid to accessibility.

Education must therefore be the keyword.
Starting with primary school, all the way up to forms of higher education.

Universities in Europe also have a strong role in this respect. They may not be accessible for everyone, but they do yield a large part of the future generation, that will in turn learn others to appreciate the taste of Europe.

Education will not reform all orthodox critics into believers, nor can every fruit be appreciated equally. However education will give people the opportunity to form a well founded opinion. And in the end, it also remains a matter of taste and *de gustibus non disputandum esse*!

Thank you!