

## Speakers:

### **Prof. dr. Rianne Letschert**

*Minister of Education, Culture and Science | Former President of Maastricht University | Former Chair of COARA*



**Prof. dr. Rianne Letschert** serves as the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, bringing to government an extensive academic career as President of Maastricht University and internationally recognised scholar in international law and human rights. Throughout her career, she has been a passionate advocate for international scientific collaboration, academic freedom and strengthening Europe's knowledge ecosystem. As Chair of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, COARA, she played a leading role in one of the most significant reforms of European research policy in recent years, promoting a more inclusive and responsible approach to recognising scientific excellence. Today, she is responsible for shaping Dutch policy on higher education, science and innovation at a time when Europe faces critical choices about its future competitiveness and investment in knowledge.

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### **Prof. dr. Maria Leptin**

*President of the European Research Council*



**Prof. dr. Maria Leptin** is President of the European Research Council (ERC), Europe's funding organisation for frontier research, supporting the very best researchers and their boldest ideas solely on the basis of scientific excellence. An internationally renowned developmental biologist, she has devoted her career to advancing our understanding of fundamental biological processes while holding leadership positions at some of Europe's foremost scientific institutions, including as Director of the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO). As President of the ERC, she is one of Europe's most influential advocates for curiosity-driven research, scientific freedom and long-term investment in knowledge. At a time of growing geopolitical competition and increasing pressure on public budgets, she continues to make the case that frontier science is not a luxury but a strategic necessity—providing the discoveries, talent and knowledge that underpin Europe's future competitiveness, resilience, technological sovereignty and societal well-being.

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## Prof. dr. Ben Feringa

*Multiple ERC Laureate | Nobel Prize in Chemistry (2016) | University of Groningen*



**Ben Feringa** is Professor of Organic Chemistry at the University of Groningen, a two-time ERC Advanced Grant recipient, former Member of the ERC Scientific Council, and recipient of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for the design and synthesis of molecular machines—tiny molecular motors capable of controlled movement, opening an entirely new field of molecular nanotechnology. His pioneering research has fundamentally changed the way scientists think about controlling matter at the molecular level and is paving the way for future applications ranging from smart materials and molecular robotics to targeted drug delivery, precision medicine and advanced nanotechnologies. Ben Feringa's career is one of Europe's most compelling examples of how curiosity-driven frontier research, supported over decades through programmes such as the ERC, can generate discoveries that redefine entire scientific disciplines while creating opportunities for transformative societal and technological innovation. Through both his groundbreaking research and his service on the ERC Scientific Council, he has also helped shape the future of excellence-driven research in Europe.

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## Prof. dr. Marcel Levi

*President, Dutch Research Council (NWO)*



**Prof. dr. Marcel Levi** is President of the Dutch Research Council, NWO, the principal public funding organisation for scientific research in the Netherlands. An internationally renowned physician, scientist and academic leader, he has combined an outstanding clinical and research career with senior leadership positions, including as Chief Executive of University College London Hospitals. Throughout his career, he has championed scientific excellence, international collaboration and evidence-based policymaking. As President of NWO, he plays a central role in shaping the Dutch research landscape and is a leading voice in discussions on how Europe can strengthen its scientific excellence, innovation capacity and international competitiveness through sustained investment in frontier research.

## Prof. dr. Karin Roelofs

*ERC Laureate | Member of the ERC Scientific Council | Professor of Experimental Psychopathology, Radboud University*



**Karin Roelofs** is world-leading neuroscientist on stress resilience and emotion regulation. She is Professor at Radboud University and the Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behaviour. She is a member of the European Research Council's Scientific Council and three-time ERC grantee (Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grant). As one of Europe's leading neuroscientists, her pioneering research investigates how the brain and body respond to stress, threat and social interaction, providing new insights into resilience, mental health and decision-making under pressure. A three-time ERC grantee, she exemplifies how long-term frontier research can fundamentally advance our understanding of human behaviour while helping shape the future direction of excellence-driven science in Europe.

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### **Prof. dr. Caroline Klaver**

*ERC Laureate | Professor and Clinician Erasmus MC*

**Caroline Klaver** is Professor of Epidemiology and Genetics of Eye Diseases at Erasmus

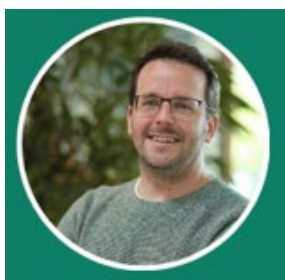


MC, multiple ERC laureate and one of Europe's leading clinician-scientists in ophthalmology. Through her pioneering research, she has transformed our understanding of the genetic and environmental causes of common eye diseases such as myopia, glaucoma and age-related degeneration. By bringing together fundamental science, population research and clinical care, she has helped pave the way for more personalised prevention and treatment of eye diseases. Her career exemplifies how frontier research can improve the lives of millions of people while advancing scientific excellence.

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### **Prof. dr. Tom Emery**

*ERC Laureate | Professor of Population Sciences Erasmus University Rotterdam | Executive Director of ODISSEI*



**Tom Emery** is Professor of Population Sciences at *Erasmus University Rotterdam*, an ERC laureate and Executive Director of ODISSEI, the Dutch national research infrastructure for the social sciences. His groundbreaking ERC research combines demography, sociology, network science and computational social science to understand how inequalities emerge and persist across societies. By analysing how behaviours and opportunities

spread through social networks using large-scale linked population data, his work challenges traditional approaches to understanding demographic change, family dynamics and social inequality. As Executive Director of ODISSEI, he also helps build the cutting-edge research infrastructure that enables the next generation of data-intensive social science, demonstrating how frontier research can generate new insights for evidence-informed policymaking and more resilient societies.

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### **Prof. Aida Todri-Sanial**

*ERC Laureate | Professor, Eindhoven University of Technology*



**Aida Todri-Sanial** is Professor at Eindhoven University of Technology, ERC laureate and one of Europe's leading experts in next-generation computing systems. She is also the Scientific Director of the Eindhoven Semicon Summer School, an initiative established together with leading semiconductor companies including ASML and imec. Her research focuses on the future of microelectronics, semiconductor technologies and sustainable computing architectures, exploring how new materials, chip designs and computing paradigms can deliver ever greater performance while reducing energy consumption and environmental impact. At a time when Europe is striving for technological sovereignty and leadership in semiconductors and artificial intelligence, her work demonstrates how frontier research provides the scientific foundations for tomorrow's digital economy.

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### **Prof. dr. Oane Visser**

*ERC Laureate | Professor, International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam*



**Oane Visser** is Associate Professor at the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam and an ERC laureate. His research examines how global food systems, agriculture and rural economies are being transformed by digitalisation, sustainability transitions, geopolitical developments and changing patterns of investment. His work demonstrates how fundamental social science helps us understand the complex societal systems that underpin Europe's food security, resilience and green transition, and provides the evidence needed to address these most pressing global challenges.

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## Susanne Caarls

*Head of Unit European and International Research & Science, Talent and Social Safety of Scientists | Ministry of Education, Culture and Science*



**Susanne Caarls** heads the Unit for European and International Research & Science, Talent and Social Safety of Scientists at the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. In this role, she leads the Netherlands' engagement with European science policy and plays a key role in shaping Dutch positions on Horizon Europe, the European Research Area and broader international research cooperation. Her portfolio also includes strengthening research talent, fostering attractive and socially safe research environments and supporting international scientific collaboration. Working at the interface between science, policy and diplomacy, she helps ensure that the Netherlands remains an active contributor to Europe's research and innovation agenda.

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## Dolf Grasveld

*Coordinator European Research & Innovation Policy | Ministry of Economic Affairs*



**Dolf Grasveld** is Coordinator for European Research and Innovation Policy at the Ministry of Economic Affairs. He works at the intersection of research policy, industrial strategy and European competitiveness, helping shape the Dutch position on European research and innovation policy. His work focuses on strengthening Europe's innovation ecosystem, supporting strategic technologies and ensuring that research and innovation remain central to Europe's industrial competitiveness, economic resilience and technological sovereignty. At a time when Europe is seeking to translate scientific excellence into sustainable growth and strategic autonomy, he plays an important role in connecting national priorities with the broader European innovation agenda.

## Hosts and Moderators

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### **Prof. dr. Annelien Bredenoord**

*President, Erasmus University Rotterdam | Member of the Heitor High-Level Expert Group on the Future of Horizon Europe*



**Annelien Bredenoord** is Professor of Ethics of Biomedical Innovation, and one of the Netherlands' leading voices at the intersection of science, innovation, ethics and public policy. Throughout her career, she has worked at the interface of cutting-edge biomedical research, technological innovation and societal responsibility, advocating for scientific excellence that is both human-centred and values-driven. Alongside her academic career, she served for eight years as a member of the Dutch Senate for D66, including four years as Parliamentary Leader, where she played a prominent role in national debates on higher education, science, healthcare, ethics and innovation. This unique combination of scientific leadership and political experience gives her a deep understanding of how evidence, policy and societal values come together in public decision-making. As a member of the High-Level Expert Group chaired by Manuel Heitor on the future of Horizon Europe, she has helped shape the strategic vision for Europe's next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Throughout her career, she has consistently argued that Europe's competitiveness depends not only on technological leadership, but also on sustained investment in talent, academic freedom, interdisciplinary collaboration and responsible innovation.

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### **Prof. dr. Jantine Schuit**

*Rector Magnificus, Erasmus University Rotterdam*



**Jantine Schuit** is Rector Magnificus of Erasmus University Rotterdam and Professor of Health Sciences. Before joining Erasmus University, she served as Vice-Rector Magnificus and member of the Executive Board of Tilburg University, and Professor of Health, Behaviour and Society. Earlier in her career, she held senior leadership positions at the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), combining scientific research with evidence-informed public policy. Her research focuses on health behaviour, health promotion and the broader social determinants of health. She is also a member of the Governing Board of the European Alliance for Social Sciences and Humanities (EASSH), contributing to

strengthening the role of the social sciences and humanities in European research and innovation policy. As Rector, she is committed to advancing academic excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration and the societal impact of research, while fostering international partnerships to address Europe's major societal challenges

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**Prof. dr. Ruard Ganzevoort**

*Rector, International Institute of Social Studies*



**Ruard Ganzevoort** is Rector of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), part of Erasmus University Rotterdam. An internationally recognised scholar in religion, society and public policy, his research explores themes such as resilience, identity, conflict, social inclusion and sustainable development. Before joining ISS, he served as Dean of the Faculty of Religion and Theology and Chief Diversity Officer at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Alongside his academic career, he served for twelve years as a member of the Dutch Senate, where he was spokesperson on education, healthcare and constitutional affairs, and chaired several parliamentary committees. His unique combination of academic leadership and political experience provides him with a broad perspective on the role of science, education and public policy in addressing today's global societal challenges.