

GREAT REPLACEMENT DEBATE GOES AHEAD DESPITE PROTESTS

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In an age of increasing polarisation, the debate in Belgium proves that it is possible to discuss sensitive

subjects despite their controversy.

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The contentious Great Replacement theory went under debate last week at the Katholieke Universiteit (KU) of Leuven, Belgium's largest university. But protesters tried to shut it down.

The main target of the protesters was the controversial Filip Dewinter, an MP in the Flemish Parliament for the nationalist [Vlaams Belang](#), who has been active in promoting the Great Replacement theory in Flanders—through his book *Omvolking*, or 'Repopulation' in English. He was [invited](#) by the Liberal Flemish Students' Association (LVSV) to debate another MP, Maurice Vande Reyde of the liberal Open Vld party, on Monday evening, March 13th.

The invitation sparked a wave of outrage, resulting in an [open letter](#) signed by over 200 students and professors. It declared that the debate was normalising alarming views, saying that "[the] replacement theory is a dangerous and racist conspiracy theory and not just an innocent idea that deserved being debated."

However, signatures did not translate into angry mobs. Dewinter tweeted images of the anti-debate demonstrators, writing, "Outside: a few dozen far-left bigots, inside: hundreds of students for a debate on repopulation and immigration." [Video](#) shows the protestors outnumbered by the students queuing to get in.

https://twitter.com/FDW_VB/status/1635403777615491072

This reception is in marked contrast to the last time Dewinter gave a lecture in Leuven, when he was met with a crowd that [assaulted](#) him and smashed the venue windows.

However, this time his hosts were determined to thrash out disagreements with words. The Chairman of LSVS Leuven, Xander Mihailidis, [defended](#) the decision, “the far Right has never disappeared by silencing it to death.” Vande Reyde [echoed this](#) on Twitter, saying he didn’t understand “the call of left-wing organisations to ban a debate between myself and Vlaams Belang tonight. Open debate is the best way to counter idiocy.”

Luckily, the event went off without a hitch. Speaking to a full auditorium, Dewinter [advocated](#) the basic foundations of nationalism, saying

People sell you this principle— the principle of “your own people first”—as being racism. That is not true. It is a matter of common sense.

In an age of increasing polarisation, it is good to see that open debate can still be held on subjects in spite of their controversy.