

**Slotwoord Caspar van den Berg bij lezing Paul Krugman  
Den Haag, Universiteit Leiden, 17 september 2025**

*Dear guests, dear students, dear colleagues, dear Professor Krugman,*

This has been an afternoon of ideas that challenge, unsettle, and inspire: and I feel privileged to add a few closing reflections.

First of all, let me extend my heartfelt thanks to Professor Paul Krugman for his lecture. Your reflections on *Wellbeing, Science and Society Under Stress* resonate deeply in the Netherlands, a small and highly globalized country navigating a turbulent global economy while facing old and new scarcities: of land, of energy, and, not least, of political stability and effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

Your words remind us that prosperity in the twenty-first century cannot be reduced to growth statistics alone. Wellbeing requires resilient institutions, inclusive societies, and the ability to adapt when global winds shift. That is not just an economic challenge, but also a social and political one.

Just yesterday, new research reminded us of a sobering fact: almost three quarters of Dutch citizens no longer believe politics is working for them.<sup>2</sup> They see leaders who postpone hard choices and look inward rather than to the common good. Expectations of change after the elections are low. This makes it all the more urgent to restore trust, by acting decisively and investing in the long term, including in education, research, and innovation.

Restoring trust also means showing vision: not by merely responding to economic demand-side pressures, but by focusing on the supply side, as Professor Krugman has long championed.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, this message has not yet landed with our caretaker government, as yesterday's Budget Memorandum made clear. Even the Council of State, normally cautious in its words, did not mince them this year. It warned that policy remains too narrowly focused on purchasing power and short-term consumption, while urgent public investments to address the structural challenges continue to fall short. The Council's

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<sup>1</sup> Van den Berg, C.F. (2002) *Can the centre hold? Over de robuustheid van de rijksoverheid*  
<https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/3502111>

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos/I&O (2025) <https://www.ipsos-publiek.nl/actueel/prinsjesdagonderzoek-2025-politiek-vertrouwen-daalt-naar-niveau-van-voor-kabinet-schoof/>

<sup>3</sup> Krugman, P. R. (1994). *Peddling prosperity: Economic sense and nonsense in the age of diminished expectations*. WW Norton & Company.

warning was stark: “This could fatally undermine the country’s earning capacity in the future.” What is needed, the Council stressed, are sustained investments in infrastructure, in education, in research and development, and in sustainable energy.<sup>4</sup>

As Dutch universities, we feel this responsibility acutely. Our tradition of openness, trade, and science-driven policy has long been a source of strength. But today’s challenges require us to renew and deepen that tradition. As Peter-Paul Verbeek, Rector of the University of Amsterdam, noted at the opening of the academic year, today’s debate is about more than budgets or research output. It is about internationalisation, student protests, diversity, and the political role of science in issues from climate to vaccination. In all these areas, science is being questioned in new ways. This puts a responsibility on us to articulate that contribution afresh: What does society truly gain from science? And why are academic freedom, a stable financial foundation, and an international outlook essential conditions for producing knowledge that is both reliable and of lasting public value?<sup>5</sup>

In times of uncertainty, universities can and must act as beacons of trust, of long-term vision, and of critical inquiry. And perhaps most importantly: we bear the great responsibility of facilitating and stimulating a strong and open debate, where all perspectives, as long as they are backed by sound arguments, must be given space. In a polarized society, this is not easy. As King Willem-Alexander reminded us yesterday in the Throne Speech, our public life is increasingly marked by sharp divides, in politics, online, on the streets, and yes, also within our universities.<sup>6</sup>

Protest should always be possible, even fierce protest, but it must never slip into hostility. Strong disagreements are part of academic life, yet they should not come at the cost of mutual respect. What we need is a culture in which we challenge one another openly, while also remaining open to being challenged ourselves. It requires us to give wide space to free academic exchange, while at the same time ensuring that our campuses remain free and safe for all students and staff. We work on this every single day, because without open debate, and without a free and safe academic environment, our university community cannot thrive.

I would like to thank our organizing partners for joining forces in today’s program. Together we have shown how dialogue between science, policy, and society can illuminate the path ahead.

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<sup>4</sup> Raad van State (2025) <https://www.raadvanstate.nl/actueel/nieuws/september/advies-miljoenennota-2026/>

<sup>5</sup> Verbeek, P.P. (2025) *De maatschappelijke waarde van wetenschappelijk onderwijs* <https://www.uva.nl/content/evenementen/2025/09/opening-academisch-jaar-2025-2026.html?cb>

<sup>6</sup> Rijksoverheid (2025) <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/toespraken/2025/09/16/troonrede-2025>

And finally, let me thank all of you, students, colleagues, policymakers, and citizens, for being here and for engaging in this important conversation.

Professor Krugman, your lecture leaves us with both caution and courage. Caution, because the challenges are grave. Courage, because science, policy, and society together hold the keys to resilience. For this, we are deeply grateful.

*Thank you.*