Sofie Marien 26 October 2022

Oostenstraat 50-14

2018 Antwerpen

Program Group Challenges to Democratic Representation AISSR

Universiteit van Amsterdam

Postbus 15718

1001 NE Amsterdam

**Vacancy Associate Professor EU Political Science**

Distinguished members of the selection committee,

I am writing to express my profound interest in the position of Associate Professor in EU Political Science. I am convinced that my strong track record in research and teaching as well as my innovative research agenda on legitimacy, inequalities and polarization, extensive international experience and contributions to the public debate make me an ideal candidate for this position.

I received my PhD from KU Leuven in 2011, after which I was awarded a FWO postdoctoral scholarship (2011) and took up the position of Assistant professor at the University of Amsterdam (2013) and KU Leuven (2015). Since 2018 I am an Associate professor at KU Leuven, where I founded and lead the LEGIT team. My research and teaching centre around the challenges facing representative democracy. Central to my academic work is the aim to better understand the legitimacy challenges European democracies face and how these can be addressed, and to use this knowledge to strengthen the resilience, inclusiveness and fairness of democracies, and increase the quality of life of its citizens. My projects are methodologically diverse, with an emphasis on quantitative analysis and experimental methods, and a geographical focus on Europe. I am convinced that the University of Amsterdam is an excellent place for me to advance my academic career, to further grow as an academic and to contribute to the vibrant research and teaching taking place at Challenges and at the department.

My research agenda has an excellent proven track record. In the past years I secured competitive research funding for over 5million euros including an ERC Starting Grant, VENI grant and FWO-FNRS Excellence of Science projects on legitimacy (REPRESENT) and polarisation (NOTLIKEUS). My research results appeared in the leading journals in the field including *British Journal of Political Science, European Journal of Political Science* and policy forum of *Science* and are cited widely (4,500 google scholar citation to date). Moreover, this agenda enabled the development of strong international contacts and membership of various international networks (e.g. ECPR, Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics at the University of Pennsylvania, Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the University of Canberra).

In my future research, democratic legitimacy, polarisation and inequalities continue to play a central role, which aligns particularly well with the research program of Challenges. In recent years, a wave of autocratization has been unfolding, which has also hit several countries in the European Union. Public commitment to and support of democratic norms and principles is declining among the public and willingness to participate in illegal or violent forms of political engagement increased. Moreover, given the nature of the problems we are facing, European citizens are facing painful losses, including loss of status and control, which offers an excellent breeding ground for democratic erosion, especially when the relationship between citizens and their representatives is already troubled. As a result, increasing our knowledge on democratic legitimacy, polarisation, inequalities but also democratic innovation is more relevant than ever.

Teaching is an equally important aspect of my career as an academic. I have extensive teaching experience in a broad variety of topics - ranging from political behaviour over comparative politics, political history, political theory, to research methods at the undergraduate and postgraduate level at the University of Amsterdam, KU Leuven, VUB and Åbo Akademi. I completed the Certificate in Higher Education (BKO). The interaction between research and teaching has also felt enriching to me. Teaching challenges me to explain my ideas as clearly as possible and also sharpens them. In my teaching, I follow a research-based approach and I am strongly committed to creating high-quality inclusive learning environments. By employing diverse teaching tools and assessment tasks, I aim to ensure students acquire a wide variety of skills and competencies during their studies. I have received excellent teaching evaluations. I also have extensive experience in supervising student dissertations at the Bachelor and Masters levels and mentoring PhD and postdoctoral students. Noteworthy is the extensive (inter)national recognition these students have received. I have also taken up mentoring roles outside of my research group and I have been active in building a welcoming community for Early Career Researchers, who have been particularly affected by the pandemic.

I am confident in designing and delivering introductory courses that cover a wide range of topics in political science, as well as specialized courses in comparative politics, public opinion and political behaviour. Similarly, I have experience in teaching introductory and advanced courses in quantitative methods and research design. At the University of Amsterdam, I would like to take up responsibilities in teaching existing modules in the political science program and proposing new modules at the BA and MA levels in accordance with the needs of the program. These could include modules in public opinion, deliberative democracy, democratic erosion, comparative political behaviour and institutions in Europe, as well as modules on research methods, survey design and survey experiments. In line with my strong interdisciplinary teaching and research track record, I would be eager to contribute to the PPLE program as well.

In the past fifteen years I have taken up several leadership roles and gathered extensive management and administrative experience. I care deeply about creating a positive societal impact, which becomes clear through my active contributions to the academic and public debate. Most recently, this includes an invited two-page widely read guest contribution to the [De Morgen](https://www.demorgen.be/meningen/de-vraag-van-bart-eeckhout-welke-uitwegen-zijn-er-om-het-vertrouwen-in-het-politieke-bedrijf-te-herstellen~bc5707bc/) on political trust and democratic renewal. Probably most visible is my work with the public broadcaster VRT on the election shows (2018, 2019, planned 2024). Another example includes the founding of a [Belgian-Dutch network on participatory budgeting](https://burgerbegrotingen.eu/) offering workshops, intervision, networking and dissemination.

The advertised position at Challenges constitutes the ideal environment to realize my research agenda and to continue my academic career. I believe that my research and teaching profile is highly complementary to the work of several scholars at Challenges, both thematically as in terms of methodology and international orientation. The complementarity, but also the dynamic research context that characterizes Challenges explain why I like to pursue my career within this group. The shared research interests make it rewarding to start up joint projects with colleagues and students. These kinds of collaborations have been central throughout my career. I have often been described as a team player and community-builder. If granted the position, I would aim to actively participate across the spectrum of departmental academic life, contributing to administrative tasks, ensuring high quality teaching and care of students, and promoting research that emphasizes social and policy impact. My work in mentoring networks, and widening participation initiatives, as well as fifteen-year experience within the Belgian and Dutch higher education system, makes me confident I can make a positive contribution. I am eager to join a team of scholars who share my commitment to cutting edge research, high quality teaching and democracy.

A copy of my resume is included, giving further details of my work history. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at an interview. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Sofie Marien