

# Volt

## Maastricht: the beating heart of Europe

**Election program for Maastricht**

**Toekomst ● Future ● Zukunft ● Touwkoms**

## Made in Europe

# Volt in Maastricht: our vision for a European and inclusive city

In Maastricht, we are faced with an important choice: are we a remote corner of the Netherlands or the beating heart of Europe? Volt opts for the latter. Maastricht is a uniquely European city. We are a continental nodal point: Cologne, Brussels and Eindhoven are economic engines which are just an hour away from Maastricht. Liège and Aachen are right around the corner. Together with Southern Limburg, Maastricht forms the crossroads of the so-called Euregion Meuse-Rhine: an area the size of the "Randstad" (i.e., the Amsterdam metropolitan area), with a population of 3.9 million inhabitants.

Maastricht is an international city. Students come from all over the world. Historically, our city has been a European meeting place. Romans, Burgundians, Spaniards and French have all left their mark on our city. Maastricht has been modernised by the Liège industry and has been given its own voice by our relatively young, internationally-oriented university. More than half of our students are non-Dutch. Indeed, Maastricht isn't just located in the heart of Europe; Maastricht embodies Europe. For Volt, it's crystal-clear: Maastricht's future is *Made in Europe*.

Yet our city still often lacks the political solutions to meet the concrete challenges that are part of a diverse border city. Volt wants to be there for *all* Maastricht residents: regardless of their mother tongue, origin, gender or lifestyle. Whether it comes to affordable housing, better transport connections with the Netherlands and Europe, or strengthening our cultural sector: Maastricht is ready for a new vision and a new generation of politicians for the twenty-first century.

Tomorrow's Maastricht is a Maastricht that connects: *within* our city, among all those different inhabitants, and *outside of* our city, with the rest of the European border-region. A new kind of political movement is needed to realise that vision. A movement that is pragmatic, but - above all - is border-crossing. A political movement that is active in Aachen, in Liège, in Heerlen, Brussels, Cologne and The Hague. And a party that you can vote for if you are registered in Maastricht: as an EU citizen or as a non-EU citizen living in the Netherlands for over five years.

Volt represents a new generation's politics. We are a movement that thinks European and acts locally. A movement that wants to be there for everyone in Maastricht and Europe. A movement that believes that Maastricht can build bridges in the beating heart of Europe.

# Content

## Volt in Maastricht: our vision for a European and inclusive city

### Content

1. Better connections: Limburg, Belgium and Germany.
  2. Building affordable housing.
  3. A sustainable Maastricht in a green Europe.
  4. A citizens' council in Maastricht.
  5. Establish the Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund.
  6. Museums between Meuse & Rhine: connecting Europeans.
  7. Multilingualism in the heart of Europe.
  8. Councillor of the future: European affairs.
  9. Social Maastricht
  10. Education as a weapon against inequality
  11. Newcomers & Entrepreneurs: trust and guidance
  12. Feeling safe in the heart of Europe
- Maastricht in 2030: the beating heart of Europe?

## 1. Better connections: Limburg, Belgium and Germany.

Together with Southern and Central Limburg, Belgian Limburg, Aachen and Liège, Maastricht forms the so-called Euregio Meuse-Rhine: an urbanised area with 3.9 million inhabitants, the size of the Amsterdam metropolitan area (i.e., the “Randstad”), in the heart of Europe. Maastricht residents should be able to reap the benefits by strengthening the economic, academic and cultural cooperation between these cities. Public transport is a sector that not only responds to passenger demand, but also offers new demand: commuting in the



Western Dutch “Randstad”, for example, was rare until the connections improved. In the same way we also want to look at our cross-border region: as a dynamically urbanised area in which municipal and national borders no longer play a role. That is why, in collaboration with the Province of Limburg, the municipalities of Southern Limburg and the neighboring countries, we want more and faster public transport connections between Limburg, Belgium and Germany. Also during the night.

### Train of Three Countries

Volt wants to pick up the original plan of the train that runs through three countries. The

current train runs from Aachen (Germany) to Maastricht, but not as far as Liège (Belgium), because local politics refused to go along with Liège’s stricter safety requirements. Volt wants these requirements to be respected, so that we can connect our Euregio Meuse-Rhine properly once and for all. To truly make this connection a reality, the train would also have to make fewer stops; it currently takes an hour to get to Aachen, whereas it can be done in half an hour. Finally, this train should run four times an hour, instead of once.

### A Southern Limburg intercity system

Our Dutch region, Southern Limburg, basically consists of three highly urbanised areas: Maastricht, Heerlen and Sittard-Geleen. All three cities are roughly 23 kilometres away from each other. Volt wants to run intercity trains between these three cities on a metro schedule: every ten minutes, from city to city, within a quarter of an hour and until two o'clock at night. This would create a dynamic working-living relationship within the urban triangle of Southern

Limburg. After all, in such a scenario, it makes less of a difference whether you have a job in Heerlen, live in Sittard-Geleen or have your last drink with friends in Maastricht. By making it much easier to commute, the three cities will increase in appeal towards each other's inhabitants. This will solve a large part of the housing crisis in Maastricht, as well as the demographic decline (and resulting vacancy) in Sittard-Geleen and Heerlen (including Heerlen's larger urban area of Parkstad).

## 2. Building affordable housing.

Volt wants to build more homes and campuses. The housing shortage in Maastricht shows how Maastricht residents of different groups are often connected as they face the same challenges. By building affordable campuses and accommodations, we can solve the housing crisis for students and make the existing residential areas more liveable for other residents.

### Concrete examples for a new Maastricht

A closer look reveals how many areas in Maastricht are still available for building campuses and new residential districts. A few examples are the Oeslingerbaan near Randwyck, the river's bank of the Franciscus Romanusweg, the area around the Noorderbrug, the "Koompe" on the Prins Bisschopsingel, the old KPN site near the Noormannensingel and the Terrain of Trega near the Borgharenweg. Many of these plans have already been proposed by local residents, such as those who participated in the Topos project (titled in Dutch: "Maastricht op weg naar een nog mooiere stad"). Volt wants the municipality to listen to these proposals as soon as possible. It is extremely important to make clear demands when making deals with project developers so that our first and biggest concern will be solved: accessible campuses for students and affordable housing for starters.

### The possibility of high-rise buildings

High-rise buildings should never block the view of the historic centre. Volt wants to start an open dialogue with community centres and residents about possible high-rise buildings that are not in the city centre, as this could provide new opportunities for housing. This would be a good example of a subject that could be discussed in Volt's proposed local Civic Council (see 4. *A citizens' council in Maastricht*).

### Flexible zoning plans.

Moreover, Volt wants a flexible approach to zoning plans, so that, for example, offices, shops and flats can share buildings more easily. With one function per building, it is difficult for the city to keep up with changing times.

### Public transport & housing: Two sides of the same coin

Finally, Volt sees public transport and housing policy as two sides of the same coin. Let's explain that for a second: while Maastricht is experiencing a housing crisis, many municipalities in our region are experiencing vacancy and abandonment. Not just

neighbouring Dutch municipalities, but also Belgian ones offer a lot of housing opportunities. With strong public transport, our region and the neighbouring areas in Belgium and Germany are ready for a dynamic and well-connected work-and-living area, a place where commuting is no longer an obstacle, a connected region which will benefit all municipalities and inhabitants (see also: *1. Better connections: Limburg, Belgium and Germany*).

### 3. A sustainable Maastricht in a green Europe.

Think European, act local. Last summer's floods of the Meuse painfully reminded us that the border is no obstacle to natural disasters. Climate change affects us all. Volt wants to make Maastricht more sustainable and to better connect the city with public transport. Volt wants Maastricht to learn as much as possible from other European cities. By sharing knowledge together, we can work towards a green Europe on a sustainable planet.

#### **Car-free and bicycle-friendly**

Volt wants to make the city centre car-free: not for local residents, but for visitors. A car-free city motivates people to take public transport more often. By doing so, we want to work with local experts to realize as many bicycle routes as possible throughout Maastricht, such as a pedestrian and bicycle connection (as a bridge or tunnel) between Sint Maartenslaan and Meerssenerweg. More and more cities in Europe are now starting to invest in better cycling routes. Maastricht should not lag behind.

#### **Visitors parking on the outskirts of the city**

In order to still welcome visitors to the city, Volt wants to move the parking facilities for visitors to the outskirts of the municipality, such as at Maastricht-Noord station and at a new location at Randwyck station. Volt also wants to place more bicycle sheds and places for shared bicycles in the city centre. After the Vrijthof's Q-Park contract will expire, Volt wants to set up the Vrijthof garage primarily for permit holders: including inner-city residents, entrepreneurs and personnel working in the city.

#### **Using urban greenery**

Volt also wants to make smart use of urban greenery, as a barrier to protect life in the city against air pollution, but also to provide cooling during heat waves and to use healthy water management to prevent flooding or drought.

#### **Saving energy**

Finally, Volt sees that people in Maastricht often want to save energy but do not always know how. That is why Volt wants to actively inform homeowners about possibilities to reduce energy consumption by making municipality's Energy Help-Desk (i.e., *het Energieloket*) more visible - also in English.

## 4. A citizens' council in Maastricht.

It's time for Democracy 2.0. Elections are a direct way for Maastricht citizens to change the politics of our city, but it offers few opportunities to really engage in dialogue with each other, to connect different groups of Maastricht residents, and to involve inhabitants who may feel less involved in politics. A Maastricht Citizens' Council is eminently the best way to make the city more dynamic and democratic. Following the model of Eupen (East-Belgian), Volt wants to set up a citizens' council in Maastricht, just like in Aachen, that is directly linked to the city council.

### **A new Citizens' Council in Maastricht: thanks to Eupen and Aachen**

Experiments with citizens' forums are already taking place throughout the European Union, such as in Ireland with regard to the legalisation of abortion. Closer to home, in the East Belgian town of Eupen, there is already a permanent citizens' council. Using the "Eupener Model", Volt Aachen has started to set up an *Aachener Bürgerrat*. We want to take over Aachen's proposal and implement it in Maastricht. The Citizens' Council will become a permanent institution, not just a forum: citizens will be invited at random for new votes. Together with experts, they provide advice on policy proposals from the municipal council in democratic consultation. If the city council's representatives do not follow this advice, they will have to defend their decision in a live debate with the Citizens' Council.

### **Maastricht in conversation with its own residents**

Some citizens may have no knowledge of the content; experts are available for this purpose. The experts are appointed by the citizens' committee. Decision-making is done under the supervision of a moderator. The Citizens' Council discusses and decides. This is summarised and submitted to the city council as a recommendation. This is an urgent recommendation. At the end of a whole year, a new citizens' council is set up and an evaluation is made with the city council as to how everything went. A citizens' council is therefore not a short-lived citizens' participation project but a permanent voice for residents in the city in which different inhabitants of Maastricht become connected with each other: born-and-bred Maastrichtians, international students, the young starters who have their roots elsewhere, and residents who have just migrated to Europe. Maastricht needs to talk with its own residents.

## 5. Establish the Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund.

Volt wants to connect the cultural sectors of our Euregion Meuse-Rhine - Liège, Aachen and (Belgian and Dutch) Limburg - within a Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund. In this way we bring people together and build a distinctive sound as a European border region Culture is a strong factor for a better connection between Maastricht residents and other citizens of our region.

## **A distinctive sound for Maastricht, Limburg and the Meuse-Rhineland**

The Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund provides an answer to Maastricht's quest of establishing a cultural sector that is distinct from the major Dutch cultural industries, such as those in Eindhoven and Amsterdam. Precisely our Euroregional border area offers a treasure of culture that only awaits to be connected, such as the dynamic pop scenes in Belgium and Germany, famous operas and symphony orchestras in Liège and Aachen, Sittard's German *Oktoberfest* and countless small projects aimed at involving cross-border audiences. This gives Maastricht an authentic sound in the local cultural industry that cannot simply be reproduced. Authenticity, in turn, ensures that our region attracts talent from outside the area.

### **Cross-border culture set up from the bottom up.**

Volt does not want to go down the familiar bureaucratic path. Although cooperation projects such as Interreg Euregio do add value to our region, Volt wants the Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund to be established from the bottom-up. In this scenario, a part of the municipality's cultural budget would be aimed at making connections with, and between, people of Limburg, Liège and Aachen. Other municipalities in the region will be motivated to participate, but this isn't a requirement for establishing the fund. Maastricht will take the initiative.

### **From culture to integration**

Cultural cooperation creates encounters that, in the long run, will have a tremendous impact on socio-economic integration in the border region of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Volt is strongly in favour of involving schools in cross-border cultural cooperation, so that young people from our international region come into contact with each other.

## **6. Museums between Meuse & Rhine: connecting Europeans.**

As part of our connecting cultural policy, Volt wants Maastricht citizens and visitors to experience Maastricht's history in an accessible way. For this, Volt wants to develop an interactive app together with the municipality and various partners from the cultural sector. This application can be varied per visitor group (age group and language), event (such as the Maastricht Treaty) and depth (tourist/resident/expert). In this way, Maastricht residents and visitors can learn something about our city's unique history at any time of the day. Neighborhoods outside the historic city center will also be featured in the app. Museums in the city will have a strong emphasis in the app, thus gaining more visibility. On the one hand, this invites Maastricht residents to revalue their own city. On the other, this invites tourists to experience their day in Maastricht in a more in-depth way than they often do. Moreover, this would draw tourists away from the overcrowded city centre. After a test period, the concept of the app can also be extended to other municipalities in Southern Limburg and the Euregional border area.



## Connecting museums in Europe

In addition, Volt wants to look at the idea of a European Experience Center, which already exists in other European cities (such as Berlin, Copenhagen and Tallinn). This is an accessible way to digitally involve people in both the city and the EU. Volt also wants Maastricht to join the Euregional museum card. Museums in Aachen, East Belgium and Parkstad have been participating in a two-year pilot for this initiative since 2019.

## 7. Multilingualism in the heart of Europe.

The Randstad area (including Amsterdam), Eindhoven, the German Ruhr area and Brussels: Southern Limburg is located right in the beating heart of Europe. It's time to recognize that and reap the benefits. Southern Limburg shares its border for 97% with Belgium and Germany and only for 3% with the Netherlands. There are great opportunities here for the Maastricht economy and the urban areas of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany can be better connected. But not only our location is European, the inhabitants are also European. Almost one in three Maastricht residents has a non-Dutch background (partially or completely non-Dutch), and that share is growing. In addition, the absolute majority of students at Maastricht University have a non-Dutch nationality.

### Language courses: affordable and accessible

To reap the benefits of Maastricht's location and international composition, it is crucial that the city council invests in accessible and affordable language education. Volt therefore advocates accessible courses in English, German, French, Dutch and Limburgian. In partnerships (such as with the university, the Translation Academy of Hogeschool Zuyd and *Alliance Française*), the city can encourage cross-border work and invite non-native speakers to integrate into our local economy. It is important that the municipality makes the Border Info Point more visible to Euregional residents. In this way people are informed and motivated to work across borders.

### The Dutch language for new Maastricht

residents Accessible and affordable Dutch language education deserves extra attention. The arrival of international students and labor migrants makes Maastricht a dynamic city. But seldom do they feel welcomed enough to stay in the city. New Maastricht residents only stay if they form a bond with the region. It is therefore crucial that the municipality offers visible, affordable and accessible Dutch language courses to our newcomers. International students should also be able to combine Dutch courses with their regular studies. Volt wants to ensure, in consultation with the university, that Dutch courses are always available as electives within English-language studies and that the corresponding ECTS credits are included in the diploma. Such a way of keeping non-Dutch speaking students in the city is already being used at other universities in Europe. For example, the University of Tartu in Estonia has the explicit goal of integrating and retaining as many international students as possible. Volt wants Maastricht to follow the example of Tartu University.

## **French and German at school**

While young Limburgers are learning English better and better, their knowledge of German and French is declining. That is a major problem for a region whose entire economy is linked to that of Belgium and Germany. Volt therefore wants language education to receive much more attention in Maastricht primary and secondary education. The earlier children start learning other languages, the better they become at learning new languages. In Maastricht and in the rest of South Limburg, Volt wants primary schools to be able to offer at least one of the two border languages - French or German - to children (*see also: 9. Education as a weapon against inequality*).

## **8. Councillor of the future: European affairs.**

In order to transform Maastricht into a city that is ready for the European twenty-first century, Volt wants the city council to change significantly from within. One of the most important positions within Maastricht politics is a Councillor or "Wethouder": a municipal executive; somehow comparable to being a minister on a local level. In the context of Maastricht's position near the Belgian and German borders, Volt proposes a new Councillor with an associated committee: a Councillor of European Affairs (*Wethouder voor Europese Zaken*). In this way, Maastricht can transform into the city it always aspired to be: a political frontrunner in the heart of Europe.

### **Councillor of European Affairs: an institutional connection with Europe**

For cross-border cooperation, discussions with border municipalities or following international advice within the cooperation platform of *Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine* are simply not enough. To actually become part of the beating heart of Europe, Maastricht will have to Europeanise its political institution from within. Volt therefore wants a executive to be appointed who connects Maastricht with Europe: a Councilor for European Affairs with their own committee.

### **The European Councillor: five responsibilities**

The Councillor and the associated Maastricht Commission of European Affairs will have five responsibilities. Firstly, this Councillor will assess best practices from Europe (such as Vienna's affordable housing constructions) and inform the city council as well as implement the best practices if necessary. In this way, the municipality is assured to use the best existing solutions for its challenges. Secondly, this Councillor will have to closely follow the council debates of, at least, the Meuse-Rhine regional capitals (Liège, Aachen and Hasselt). The Councillor shares his acquired knowledge about new political developments with the Maastricht city council when these are important for our local politics. Thirdly, the Councillor will implement the Brussels legislation applicable to our municipality as appropriate as possible. The city council is informed transparently about the implementation of rising legislation, so public debate on EU policies is motivated. Fourthly, the Councillor of European Affairs is in direct contact with cross-border partners (not only municipalities, but also, for instance, the Technical University

of Aachen) when this is necessary in the context of certain cross-border cooperation adopted by the city council. Lastly, this Councillor must embody Maastricht's ambassadorship in other municipalities, with or without the mayor as the city's representative. For example, the Councillor can be deployed for various occasions, whether it concerns a visit to a sister city such as Koblenz, or during an important visit to a border municipality such as Lanaken.

## 9. Social Maastricht.

Volt emphasises what the social domain is intended for: to emancipate people economically and make them financially independent from the government. Until 2024, the municipality of Maastricht will invest 369 million euros in the social domain. To effectively ensure that this money is actually used to economically emancipate residents, Dutch and municipal politics must focus on actual decentralisation and innovation. On the one hand, Volt wants real decentralisation, not the national decentralisation implemented in 2015, which in practice mainly resulted in local budget cuts. Volt therefore wants the municipality to receive more financial instruments than it currently has. On the other hand, Volt wants more room for health sectors so they have more space to constantly reinvent the social domain.

### **Decentralisation in Maastricht, the Netherlands and Europe**

Volt stands for real decentralisation, so that politics and administration are as close as possible to the citizens. The national decentralisation of 2015 seemed to be an impetus for this, but offered too few resources to take on the newly gained responsibilities as a municipality. As a result, what was called a national decentralisation in fact forced municipalities to cut back on costs. Volt therefore wants to continue talking at a national level to get more money from the government for municipalities. As the Maastricht chapter of Volt, we continue to be in close contact with the Dutch and European chapters, so that municipal interests are included in parliamentary debates.

### **Future-proof youth care: prevention instead of aftercare**

Prevention is more effective than aftercare. Volt wants to involve health care staff more in education, so that young people receive the care they deserve early on and so that people in care continue to innovate and keep up with changing times. Prevention reduces healthcare costs in the long run. Volt argues in favor of decentralised, neighbourhood-oriented youth care centres: children and carers can then go to one place with their request for help. For more complex issues, help - if not nearby - will always be available in the region.

### **Reward work: part-time premium for benefit recipients**

Volt wants to reward work. Benefit recipients are now deprived of their benefits when they start working. This policy actually punishes labour. In Limburg this causes even more problems than elsewhere, now that we are dealing with a historic labour shortage. We need more workers to keep the economy going. Volt therefore wants to provide social benefits for

part-time workers up to 30% of the additional income, and up to a maximum amount of €219 per month. In Amsterdam it appears that this policy helps people find a job twice as quickly.

### **Bring informal care to a local level**

Let's make sure that the informal care budget (the *mantelzorgbudget* in Dutch) actually goes to informal carers. A lot of money now goes into the coordination of the budget. That has to be more efficient. District-related informal care budgets can help. Volt wants them to be immediately available to informal carers, through low-threshold organisation and management via neighbourhood tables, consisting of residents, professionals and volunteers.

### **Digital innovation: adding digital affairs to a Councillor's portfolio**

Maastricht needs a strong digital transition to make the city, including its social domain, future-proof. In order to be able to steer the current and future information flows and systems in a safe and efficient way, it is necessary that someone is appointed at the administrative level who has digital affairs as a portfolio. By doing so, local government digitisation issues are dealt with in a responsible manner. Online safety and accessibility for Maastricht residents should play an important role in this.

### **Free software for the municipality**

As a concrete example, we want the municipality to develop its own, free and accessible software. This can be done by hiring our own people or by making clear agreements with implementing parties. As an investment, this costs money, but in the long run it provides a lot of freedom and flexibility. We want to pay for the investment from an existing European subsidy. The European Commission has already released a free license with which the Corona Check App has been developed. We believe that such free municipal software can also be applied at a local level.

## **10. Education as a weapon against inequality.**

On the one hand, Maastricht is a city where a child is being prepared for the European future. For example, you can receive English-language education in Maastricht from the Kindergarten until the end of your PhD. On the other hand, however, 11500 Maastricht residents (7770 households) live in poverty. That is almost 1 in 10 Maastricht residents. The income of this group is on average among the lowest in the Netherlands. Education is the way to combat inequality, to prepare Maastricht residents for the future and to teach the new generation to live a healthy and responsible life.

### **Young people from Maastricht: tomorrow's Europeans**

Children today speak better English than any generation before. However, the knowledge of French and German declines quickly. Volt wants Maastricht youngsters to set an example for the Europeans of tomorrow. For example, Volt wants French and German language education to receive much more attention in Maastricht and the rest of South Limburg, especially

because of our location in Europe. Primary schools in Southern Limburg should in any case offer one of those two foreign languages at school. In this way you create equal opportunities for all Maastricht residents for the cross-border economy of tomorrow (see also: 7. *Multilingualism in the heart of Europe*).

### **Educational integration for *all* Maastricht residents**

Education has the task of properly integrating children into our society. Integration is often mentioned as a theme when it concerns people with a non-Western background. Whereas integration is, in fact, the responsibility of *all* citizens. Society must constantly strive for mutual understanding and respect. It is therefore crucial to have conversations about social themes such as democracy, discrimination and emancipation from an early age. Volt therefore wants to develop a municipal teaching package.

### **For a healthy childhood in Maastricht**

Limburg's 'Healthy Primary School of the Future' project (in Dutch: *Gezonde Basisschool van de Toekomst*), which focuses on healthy school meals, information and exercise, has been a success. Results show that children make significant progress. Children also appear to have a positive influence on the lifestyle of parents and carers. Volt therefore wants this initiative to become the norm in Maastricht. Each child must be provided with information about healthy school meals, as is already the case in France. The municipality must provide financial assistance to vulnerable families. After all, a healthy life should never be a privilege.

### **Combating illiteracy**

A Maastricht of the 21st century is a Maastricht without low literacy. Low literacy and illiteracy are right now higher in Maastricht than the national average. Volt wants to help residents with low-threshold language education that can take place in community centers, carried out by the municipality and volunteers. To this end, cooperation with educational institutions must be set up (see also: 6. *Multilingualism in Europe*).

## **11. Newcomers & Entrepreneurs: trust and guidance.**

To help new residents to build up their lives in Maastricht, Volt argues for more attention for economic emancipation and integration. Local politics must start from a healthy relationship with new and old citizens: from trust and a willingness to guide. The role of local politics in education plays an important role in this respect (see also: 9. *Education as a weapon against inequality*). In addition, economic integration (in other words: having a job) is an important driver for making people part of our society. Due to the recent covid support, the relation between municipality and entrepreneurs has become stronger. As a result, the municipality can now act as a confidential guide for new Maastricht residents who want to get started.

### **Actively connecting entrepreneurs and newcomers**

Acting on the basis of trust is something that has been happening for a long time within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). While Limburg-based SMEs are desperate for staff, many newcomers struggle to get started. Due to regulations, lack of language skills and limited diploma recognition, but also due to xenophobia, a large group makes a late start. The municipality is in a unique position to connect employers and newcomers. Volt wants the municipality to start a job placement agency for newcomers and to establish connections between these groups. Like the Province of Limburg, the municipality can also start traineeships for this target group. In addition, Volt sees the existing legislation on assistance for the self-employed (the *bijstand voor zelfstandigen*, i.e.: Bbz) as the ideal solution to make entrepreneurship more appealing for this group. This regulation offers assistance recipients the opportunity to keep their benefits for two years while they start their own business.

## **12. Feeling safe in the heart of Europe.**

When you feel safe, you feel at home. Here too Volt emphasises the importance of connecting: between Maastricht residents and with our European border region. Our city must pay more attention to guaranteeing mutual respect and understanding: this is crucial to make all those different groups in Maastricht feel safe. Volt believes that, in the long run, actively motivating mutual conversations are more successful than fierce crackdowns. This is how we make our city truly inclusive. Apart from being inclusive, our region will also have to become more internationally oriented. Due to our location, Southern Limburg and the surrounding Meuse-Rhineland of Belgium and Germany form a unique region in Europe when it concerns security challenges. Crime in the heart of Europe is often border crime by definition - because it concerns Belgians, Germans and Dutch alike. The safety of our local residents can therefore only be guaranteed by working together within the framework of cross-border politics. A safe heart of Europe.

### **Pan-European crime demands for pan-European solutions**

While crime in Maastricht is often pan-European, politics rarely is. Maastricht crime is often linked to the cross-border drug trade. Volt is in favour of drug decriminalization, something that was successfully implemented in Portugal in 2001. Prevention must always be central in the fight against drug addiction (see also: *8. Social Maastricht*). Volt is also in favor of further integration of Europol: the cross-border police body. Within that framework, Volt wants to accelerate Euregional cooperation. This must go hand in hand with strengthening Eurojust, which judicially supports Europol. In no way should European integration negatively impact our values. A stricter approach against ethnic profiling and police violence is crucial.

### **A queer community that feels at home in a safe Maastricht.**

Maastricht is a 'Rainbow City': a city that receives government support to promote emancipation and acceptance. In this framework, Volt wants to clearly communicate the expectation of rainbow subsidy and make processes accessible for citizens' initiatives to

increase tolerance. This must be actively managed by the municipality. Still, several residents feel unsafe. The COC (the Dutch union for the LGBTIQI+ community) reports that violence based on sexual orientation is increasing. Rainbow subsidy is therefore not enough. Protecting Maastricht residents must also be expressed in actions. That's why Volt is advocating for more money to *Roze in Blauw* (i.e., Pink in Blue): the Dutch queer community's police network. Volt also wants community service officers (*BOAs* in Dutch) to pay more attention to queer safety. At the same time, Volt recognizes that the queer community is only one part of our intercultural society. Respect and understanding for each other can at most be guaranteed by law enforcement, but can never be built by cops. A society of intercultural respect and understanding usually begins in education. That is why Volt emphasises the importance of strengthening an inclusive culture through locally developed textbooks that address important social issues (see in detail: 9. *Education as a weapon against inequality*).

## Maastricht in 2030: the beating heart of Europe?

With your support, the newly elected Volt crew can get to work in 2022 to better connect Maastricht: to connect *inside of* our city, between all those different inhabitants, and *outside of* our city, with the rest of Europe. With a strong political mandate, Volt can meet the challenges of tomorrow's Maastricht. That is why we now want to mark that spot on the horizon: will the heart of Europe beat faster in 2030 than ever before?

In this election program you were able to read our 12 themes: from equal education to cross-border public transport, from affordable and sustainable housing to creating a Councillor for European Affairs, and from establishing the Meuse-Rhine Culture Fund to making affordable language courses available: we want to follow a constructive, pragmatic and transparent way to achieve these goals in the coming decade. We can't do that alone. We will need other political partners, organisations from all corners of the region and especially you: Maastricht residents and fellow Europeans who want to make the best out of our city.

Maastricht is a city that feels different from the rest of the country. That is why it deserves its own vision. That vision can only be told through radically new politics. Pragmatic politics that looks beyond borders. Politics that are active in Aachen, Liège, Brussels, Cologne and The Hague. Volt is that new generation in politics. A movement that thinks European and acts locally. A movement that wants to be there for everyone in Europe. A movement that believes that Maastricht is a bridge builder in the beating heart of Europe. Build with us. Not only by voting for Volt in the Maastricht elections, but also by following, supporting us and keep in dialogue with us. Only in this way will we, together, connect Maastricht. Only in this way can Maastricht become the beating heart of Europe.