



In Memoriam Bert Voskuil (1929–2019)

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On 29th April 2019 Cornelis Carel Albert Voskuil suddenly passed away at the age of 89. He was the founding father of the T.M.C. Asser Institute in The Hague and its first Director. Voskuil stayed in office until his retirement in 1994. In 1992 he was honoured with a *Liber Amicorum*, *Law and Reality*, on the occasion of his 30th anniversary as the Institute's Director.¹ Voskuil studied law at the University of Amsterdam and defended his doctoral dissertation on 9 July 1962 under the supervision of professor Johannes Offerhaus. Voskuil's dissertation was dedicated to the international jurisdiction of the Dutch Courts, especially in relation to matters of divorce and maintenance.² The Centre of Foreign Law and Private International Law of the University of Amsterdam was an inspiring surrounding for students and young scholars such as Bert Voskuil. After the completion of his dissertation, he started to work on the establishment of an institute where all Dutch universities should cooperate in order to promote education and research in the fields of private and public international law, European law and international commercial arbitration. Voskuil succeeded to convince the governmental authorities and the boards of the Dutch universities of the importance of such an institute for the development of international law and its interest for the Netherlands, and in particular for The Hague. In 1965 the inter-university Asser Institute was officially opened and Voskuil became, as said, its first Director. Leading an inter-university institute was not an easy task. It was always a challenge to find the right balance between the Institute's interest and the interests of the participating universities. Bert Voskuil was an equilibrist *pur sang*. He always managed to convince the authorities of his plans and to receive the necessary financial support. One of his secrets was writing long and complicated letters to the decision makers in such a way that they were impressed and would not refuse his requests. Voskuil also initiated the Hague-Zagreb Colloquia, an inter-university exchange of scholars between the Netherlands and (former) Yugoslavia, for which the University of Zagreb honoured him with a *doctorate honoris causa* in 1987.

¹ Sumampouw et al. (1992).

² Voskuil (1962).

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In his capacity of Director of the Asser Institute, Voskuil was also a member of the board of the *NILR*. He initiated the transition of the *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Internationaal Recht* into the *NILR*, as it is today, and found a way to promote and continue the publication of the *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law*. Besides his work at the Asser Institute, Voskuil was a member of the Dutch Standing Government Committee on Private International Law. From time to time he enjoyed sitting as a single judge trying strict forward criminal cases. As he said, these criminal proceedings kept him in touch with society and its failings.

In 1990 Voskuil's beloved wife Karin died. The Institute lost its 'mother', but Bert lost his soulmate. Her death shaded the last years of his Directorship of the Asser Institute. After his retirement in 1994 Voskuil dedicated his life to literature, music and his children and grandchildren.

In November 2018 the 65th anniversary of the existence of the *NILR* was celebrated with a lunch for members of the board of editors and former board members. Bert Voskuil attended the festive meeting. I had not seen him for a long time. Of course he was older and was looking a little bit fragile now, his mind was as clear as ever. He still had these little twinkling eyes when he told us a story about the first years of the existence of the Asser Institute and how he managed to overcome certain obstacles. He told me that he had done enough for law in general and that he enjoyed his life as it was. After lunch we said goodbye, not knowing that this was the last time we would see Bert Voskuil.

The Board of the *NILR* is saddened by the departure of a good friend and a prominent personality who had in the period from 1962 to 1995 so much influence on the development of international law in the Netherlands. The Board expresses its deep-felt sympathy to Bert Voskuil's children and grandchildren for the loss they have suffered.

References

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