

The Investigative Desk (De Onderzoeksredactie)

Founded 16 November 2018

The concept

We intend to set up a new non-profit organisation for investigative journalism that will

- focus on
 - (potentially) harmful practices of selected, international industrial sectors and
 - the way governments and politicians deal with these industries and these practices,
- seek close cooperation with existing investigative journalistic non-profits, journalistic networks, investigators at NGO's and researchers at universities in Europe and elsewhere,
- seek close cooperation with existing media and online platforms for its publications, and thus
- generate as much public debate about its findings and publications as possible.

In the past decades, a range of international journalistic networks has formed, such as ICIJ, OCCRP and others. Their investigative projects have considerable impact. We think that a specialised journalistic non-profit organisation with a focus on selected industrial sectors and a systematic international research approach will complement and reinforce this type of investigative journalism, and bring it to a higher professional level.

As for our mission: we fully support the mission of our American sister ProPublica, see annex 3.

History:

The new non-profit organisation will build on the experience of two earlier projects, both in The Netherlands:

- De Onderzoeksredactie (DOR, The Investigative Desk), developed by long-time journalist and author Marcel Metze in 2012-2015 (see online [paper](#) about DOR-history).
- Onderzoeksredactie Tabak (ORT, Tobacco Investigations Desk) developed by Marcel Metze and the Dutch Journal of Medicine Association - a temporary project between March 2017 and September 2018 (see onderzoeksredactietabak.nl and tobacco-investigations.org).

De Onderzoeksredactie (DOR, The Investigative Desk) started in 2010 as an investigative journalism masterclass. In 2014 it expanded into a full-fledged journalistic non-profit organisation of about fifteen freelance journalists. DOR:

- focused on The Netherlands;
- investigated a wide range of subjects such as the energy sector, the health care system, the public housing sector, public ICT projects (which often run way over budget), and the commercialisation of universities;

- was very productive;
- published its stories in existing media;
- was successful in gaining media attention and stimulating follow-up stories in other media;
- acquired funding from a variety of sources: philanthropic (Adessium Foundation and Democracy & Media Foundation), project subsidies (Special Journalistic Projects Fund, Pascal Decroos/EU Journalism Fund, Democracy & Media Fund, Free Press Unlimited, Flemish-Dutch journalist scholarship) and publication fees (from media-partners),
- set out on a budget of € 130,000, which grew to € 200,000 in year one and € 500,000 in year two.

In 2016 DOR continued as Platform Investico. Stories on their website from before July 2015 are in fact DOR-productions.

Onderzoeksredactie Tabak (ORT, Tobacco Investigations Desk) was set up in early 2017 as a temporary one-issue project, and worked with three part-time editors and about ten freelance journalists. ORT

- focused on the tobacco industry and anti-smoking policies in The Netherlands;
- was active from March 2017 until August 2018;
- produced 15 investigative reports and stories (major plus follow-up), which generated around 200 stories in the mainstream media and on national news sites;
- was financed by the Dutch Journal of Medicine Association (€ 210,000 euros for 1,5 years), which also provided office space and other facilities.

Five of ORT's investigations prompted questions in Parliament, four prompted further investigation by the Netherlands Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority and in some cases resulted in fines (for illegal tobacco promotion practices).

By funding this project the Dutch Journal of Medicine Association wanted to stimulate the national debate about smoking and anti-smoking policies. In the spring of 2018 the Association felt that this debate had indeed intensified - in part stimulated by ORT's publications. It decided to end its structural funding by September, but remains open to proposals for subsidising individual (tobacco) research projects.

The plan:

ORT editorial staff feels that its expertise and project list warrant continuation of its investigations of the tobacco industry and tobacco policies. However, since a one-issue journalistic organisation has its limitations, the staff wants to widen its scope and create a non-profit Investigative Desk with a focus on selected industrial sectors.

Many actions, lobbies and products of large industrial corporations in sectors such as (of course) tobacco, but also alcohol, food products, armaments, pharmaceuticals and fossil fuels have negative impacts on both individual and public health.¹ The tactics they employ to influence governments bear many similarities. Since governments started withdrawing from their traditional role as keepers (guardians) of the public domain, corporate influence has grown substantially. Journalistic surveillance of the actions and practices of these corporations is of the utmost importance and should take place at an international level and in international co-operations.

In 2019, the staff intends to:

- form a nucleus of specialised journalists², who will formulate an investigative program for their respective focus-industries;
- contact sister-organisations, specialised NGO's and academic researchers, primarily in Europe and the US, to identify investigative projects which The Investigative Desk might contribute to and/or take the lead in;
- contact selected media and news sites to
 - a) present ourselves,
 - b) offer investigative and story-producing capacity,
 - c) discuss possibilities for both co-operation and publication;
- seek both structural financing and project financing, at a start-up level that is about twice the initial budgets of DOR/ORT, (so € 200.000 - € 300,000).

By 1 February, funding for the year 2019 had reached around € 133,700, with additional promises of around € 22,000.

¹ Public health, in our view, includes socio-economic, legal and political health, as is expressed in balanced and transparent legal and political systems.

² The team will initially consist of Ties Keyzer for tobacco & food products, Krijn Schramade for the weapons and defence industry, Marcel Metze for fossil energy production, and Daan Marselis & Lucien Hordijk for the pharmaceutical industry. Keyzer worked for Tobacco Investigations Desk, as did Schramade, who is also a defence industry expert. Marselis and Hordijk are journalistic contributors of the Dutch Journal of Medicine; Hordijk also writes for NRC Next.

Amsterdam, 1 February 2019

Marcel Metze (founder DOR and ORT)
Krijn Schramade (ORT and Follow the Money)
Ties Keyzer (ORT)

More information:

- governance structure Annex 1
- the initiators Annex 2
- ProPublica Mission Annex 3

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Annex 1 The Foundation / governance

Stichting De Onderzoeksredactie (The Investigative Desk Foundation) was founded 16 November 2018 in Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Fiscal registration (RSIN) 859391735

Chamber of Commerce registration (Kamer van Koophandel) 73189065

Supervisory board (Raad van Toezicht):

A.P. van den Berg

E.A.M. van den Bosch (chairman 2019)

Prof. dr. J.A. Knottnerus

Board of (executive) directors (raad van bestuur):

Dr. M.A.H.M. Metze

Remuneration policy supervisory board and board of directors (beloningsbeleid):

- Members of the supervisory board receive no remuneration except compensation of direct costs (travel etc.); introduction of a 'vacatiegeld' (board meeting attendance & preparation fee) may be considered after the organisation's yearly budget surpasses € 200,000.
- Members of the board of directors receive no remuneration except 'vacatiegeld' (board meeting attendance & preparation fee) and compensation of direct costs (travel etc.)

Annex 2: about the initiators

Marcel Metze (1952) has been working as a journalist since 1980. In the 1990s he began investigating big business and government. He authored books on Philips Electronics, the Dutch banks, the powerful Highways and Waterways Agency, and the international vegetable oils trade & industry. Between 2011 and 2015 Metze developed a successful teaching lab for young investigative journalists, which produced stories about the Dutch healthcare system, McKinsey & Co. and conflicts of interest at the Dutch universities. In 2014 he incorporated this teaching lab into a new non-profit research journalism organization, The Investigative Desk³. In March 2017, he started the Tobacco Investigations Desk (Onderzoeksredactie Tabak), which focused on the tobacco industry and tobacco policies in The Netherlands and Europe. He is currently working on a political biography of Royal Dutch Shell, and is an editorial advisor of the Dutch Journal of Medicine.

Krijn Schramade (1980) acquired a master's degree in Business Administration at Tilburg University. He worked as a management consultant for both private companies and government departments. He was drawn to journalism by a sense of urgency, commitment and curiosity. As an investigative journalist he focuses on the connections between industry, politics and government, especially in the defence sector. In 2016 he published a book about the reduction of the Dutch armed forces after the end of the Cold War. At Onderzoeksredactie Tabak he organised a series of investigations based on extensive FOIA requests. He is currently freelance and working a.o. for Follow The Money, an online platform for research journalism.

Ties Keyzer (1992) quickly developed an interest in politics. He acquired a master's degree in public administration, and worked at ProDemos, a 'House of Democracy and The Rule of Law' providing educational programs about politics. While participating in a post-master journalism program at Erasmus University Rotterdam, he worked as an intern at the financial newspaper Het Financieele Dagblad. In the spring of 2017 he joined the Dutch Journal of Medicine and Onderzoeksredactie Tabak. At ORT he developed into a tenacious and creative investigative journalist who exposed several illegal practices in tobacco marketing. He is currently active as a freelance journalist.

Co-developers:

Lucien Hordijk (pharma industry)
Daan Marselis (pharma industry, health care industry)
Caroline Spilt (government policies concerning various industries)
Ivo van Woerden (EU lobbying industry, tobacco industry)

³ This initial Investigative Desk was later renamed Platform Investico. The present Investigative Desk is a new organisation.

Annex 3 Mission ProPublica

To expose abuses of power and betrayals of the public trust by government, business, and other institutions, using the moral force of investigative journalism to spur reform through the sustained spotlighting of wrongdoing.

ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism with moral force. We dig deep into important issues, shining a light on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust — and we stick with those issues as long as it takes to hold power to account.

With a team of more than 75 dedicated journalists, ProPublica covers a range of topics including government and politics, business, criminal justice, the environment, education, health care, immigration, and technology. We focus on stories with the potential to spur real-world impact. Among other positive changes, our reporting has contributed to the passage of new laws; reversals of harmful policies and practices; and accountability for leaders at local, state and national levels.

Investigative journalism requires a great deal of time and resources, and many newsrooms can no longer afford to take on this kind of deep-dive reporting. As a nonprofit, ProPublica's work is powered primarily through donations. The vast bulk of the money we spend goes directly into world-class, award-winning journalism. We are committed to uncovering the truth, no matter how long it takes or how much it costs, and we practice transparent financial reporting so donors know how their dollars are spent.

ProPublica was founded in 2007-2008 with the belief that investigative journalism is critical to our democracy. Our staff remains dedicated to carrying forward the important work of exposing corruption, informing the public about complex issues, and using the power of investigative journalism to spur reform.

<https://www.propublica.org/about/>
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