



## Study Tour to the Netherlands

The Netherlands, June 23- 27, 2008

*The Democratic Dialogue and Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa Project*

This study tour, in the context of the Club of Madrid's 'Democratic Dialogue and Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa Project', supported by the European Commission and the United Nations Democracy Fund, will bring thirteen key project interlocutors to the Netherlands, June 23-27, 2008. Promoting an interactive dialogue between government, political and civil society leaders, activists, journalists and academics from seven different countries (project countries Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia, and the Netherlands), this study tour focuses on themes directly affecting freedom of association, including civil society development and strengthening; political parties and political development; media and freedom of speech; and minority populations, integration, and citizenship, with a day dedicated to exploring each theme.

The study tour will additionally expose participants to some of the major questions currently being debated in the Netherlands, including the politics around immigration, the relationship between Islam and secular democracy, and the value of freedom of speech, as well as give them the opportunity to learn about how the Netherlands has chosen to regulate and organize politics, government, and civil society.

We will be staying at the **Hotel Mercure Den Haag Central**, Spui 180, 2511 BW, The Hague.  
Tel : (+31)70/3636700. Fax : (+31)70/3639398 Email: H1317@accor.com

### Participants

#### **Bahrain**

- 1) AbdulAziz Abul, *Member of the House of Representatives*
- 2) Abdulnaby Alekry, *Chairman of Bahrain Transparency Society and Member of the Bahrain Human Rights Society*
- 3) Khalil Almarzooq, *Member of the House of Representatives and Deputy Leader of Al Wefaq Political Society*

#### **Egypt**

- 1) Ibrahim El-Hudaiby, *Member of the Muslim Brotherhood*
- 2) Moataz al Feguiry, *Executive Director, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies*

#### **Jordan**

- 1) Mohammad Al Masri, *Political Analyst, Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan*
- 2) Yaser Abu Hilaleh, *Director of Al Jazeera Jordan*

#### **Morocco**

- 1) Aziz Rabbah, *Member of Parliament, Justice and Development Party*
- 2) Maati Monjib, *Human Rights Advocate and Professor, Member of Espace Associatif*

#### **Saudi Arabia**

- 1) Awadh al Badi, *King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies\*\**

#### **Tunisia**

- 1) Ahmed Driss, *Professor of Law and Board Member of the Association des Etudes Internationales*
- 2) Samir Taïeb, *Professor of Law and Executive Member of AL TAJDID political party*

\*\* Not Confirmed

#### **Club of Madrid Secretariat**

- 1) Arwa Shobaki, *Project Officer*
- 2) Elena Findley de Regt, *Project Assistant*

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## AGENDA

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DAY/TIME	ACTIVITY	PLACE
<b>Sunday 22</b>	<b>Arrivals</b>	
	Participants Arrive	Amsterdam Schipol
19:30	Dinner together to introduce and launch study tour	Restaurant Basaal The Hague

**Monday  
June 23**     **Freedom of Association in the Political Arena**  
 Key areas identified as relevant to project countries: Prohibitive and discriminatory electoral laws and systems; legislation governing political parties' legal/illegal status, related to religious or ethnic parties; membership, funding, activity and campaigning restrictions.

**Questions to Consider:**

- How do political parties function in the Netherlands? What is their role, what are their obligations, how are they funded (and what are limits on their funding), how do they form coalitions, how do they develop platforms and agendas?
- How do Dutch political parties stay in touch with their constituents and ensure their relevance?
- What is the legal framework for political parties in the Netherlands? Are there any special restrictions or impediments, or privileges parties receive over other associations?
- Do Dutch political parties undertake any specific minority outreach? Some parties are known for being more engaged with minorities than others.
- What social responsibilities do Dutch parties conceive of themselves as having? What does the Dutch political system have to offer the world?

**AGENDA**

8:00	Breakfast	Caffé Basso The Hague
9:30-18:00	Meetings with political party representatives and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). Founded by Dutch political parties in support of political parties everywhere, the NIMD's mandate is to encourage the process of democratisation in young democracies by providing support to political parties as the core pillars of a multiparty democracy.	NIMD offices The Hague
19:00	<b>Dinner with Club of Madrid Members</b> <b>Wim Kok, Former Prime Minister of the Netherlands:</b> <i>Prior to serving as Prime Minister (1994-2002), Kok worked for and then led various labour unions and the Labour Party, in addition to serving as Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister.</i>  <b>Jenny Shipley, Former Prime Minister of New Zealand:</b> <i>A teacher by training, Shipley was a parliamentarian from 1987-2001, serving as Minister of Social Welfare and Minister of Health, Prime Minister (1997-1999) and Leader of the Opposition (1999-2001). Shipley chairs the Club of Madrid's Shared Societies Project, focusing on intercultural dialogue and social cohesion.</i>	Kandinsky Restaurant, Kurhaus Hotel Scheveningen

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Tuesday  
June 24

### Freedom of Association and Civil Society

Key areas identified as relevant to project countries: NGO legislation including registration processes, membership restrictions/ regulations, professionalization of NGO staff, and funding; restricted or forbidden elections within unions and professional associations and politicization of unions and professional associations.

#### Questions to Consider:

- What is the regulatory framework for associations and non-governmental organizations? What is the size, shape and scope of Dutch civil society?
- How has Dutch civil society changed and/or developed in the last 50 years and is activism a large part of civil society?
- How are unions formed and legally recognized? How do unions act as lobbyists and how are they involved in politics? What restrictions exist on their activities? Are there restrictions on formation of unions? Are there union budget and financial management regulations?

### AGENDA

8:00	Breakfast	Caffé Basso The Hague
9:00- 10:30	<b>Meeting with Mr. Ruud van Stevenick, Director of Legal Affairs, Regional Kamer van Koophandel (Chamber of Commerce).</b> The Chamber of Commerce is the national entity responsible for registering all civil society organizations and businesses. The Dutch NGO, political party and business registration process is quite different from that in project countries, with a decentralized, apolitical, and "basic" registration process subject to relatively little review, though some decency standards apply.	KvK Offices The Hague
	<i>Additional Questions: Rationale behind this approach in the Netherlands, effect on civil society? Legal obligations of civil society organizations?</i>	
11:00- 12:30	<b>Meeting with the Mr. Sip Nieuwsma, labour market specialist and social affairs advisor, VNO-NCW (Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers).</b> The VNO-NCW is the umbrella employers' union and general business lobbying body. It is the institutional counterpart and counterweight to the labour unions. Both advise the government's Social and Economic Council, and input in the Labour Foundation, which advises government on yearly labour negotiations.	VNO-NCW The Hague
	<i>Additional Questions: How are informal and formal business interests managed? What are effective lobbying techniques?</i>	
13:00- 15:00	<b>Lunch with Mr. Hein Vogel, Chairman of the Board of the Vereniging Sociale Advocatuur Nederland (VSAN- Netherlands Association for Social Advocacy).</b> The VSAN is a professional and lobbying organization for lawyers. Its three goals are to: promote working conditions for independent lawyers; represent independent lawyers' interests vis-à-vis the government, especially maintenance of legal assistance for disadvantaged people; and provide access to the law for everyone, including maintaining a roster of lawyers willing to work on a pro-bono or pro-deo basis.	Amsterdam
	<i>Additional Questions: How do professional associations become effective lobbyists? How do you ensure legal representation for everyone- what was the process to acquire this and what is the committed support by government to provide legal representation to all citizens? Is this also the case for non-citizens?</i>	

16:00	Meeting with Mr. Thomas Bruning, Secretary General of the Nederlandse Vereniging Journalisten (NVJ- Dutch Journalists' Association) and additional journalists. The NVJ is the main professional association for journalists.	NVJ Offices Amsterdam
	<i>Additional Questions: What is the role of the NVJ? What is the environment in which the media operates? How do journalists experience censorship and self-censorship? Have there been changes in recent years? Is there a code of conduct for journalists? Are there legal penalties for journalists? Are there limits to freedom of expression, i.e. Gregorius Nekschot affair, especially given sensitive subjects?</i>	
19:00	Dinner with Mr. Ahmed Aboutaleb, State Secretary for Social Affairs and Labour. Prior to being appointed State Secretary for Social Affairs and Labour (2007), Mr. Aboutaleb served as Amsterdam City alderman for Work and Income, Education, Youth, Diversity and Urban Policy (2004-2007), Director of the Social, Economic and Cultural Development Sector of the municipality of Amsterdam (2002-2004), and director of the FORUM Institute for Multicultural Development (1998-2002.) He has also worked in television and radio broadcasting. Mr Aboutaleb is a dual Dutch/Moroccan citizen, and holds a degree in telecommunications.	Tampat Senang Restaurant The Hague

Wednesday  
June 25

### Freedom of Association and the Media

Key areas identified as relevant to project countries: domination of government owned media outlets; unclear unfair newspaper/ TV channel registration processes (such as excessive amount of funds needed in bank account); no existing code of conduct in the profession; taboo subjects and government censorship; self-censorship; professionalization of the industry; and an overabundance of defamation charges.

#### General Questions to Consider:

- What is the regulatory framework for the media? What restrictions exist on its functioning? Are there any self-imposed restrictions, for reasons of ethics or codes of conduct? What is role of the Council for Journalism?
- Freedom of expression has been a controversial topic recently in the Netherlands. Are Dutch norms on this subject changing? Has recent debate led to any new conclusions?
- Human rights groups contributing to the 2008 UN periodic human rights review have argued that human rights in the Netherlands are stagnating, and in some cases, retreating. Are there any visible effects of this on freedom of association and expression? To what extent can this be linked to security/terrorism concerns?

### AGENDA

8:45	Breakfast	Caffé Basso The Hague
10:00-11:30	Meeting with the Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten (Netherlands Committee of Jurists for Human Rights). The NJCM focuses on freedom of speech and critically monitors human rights both in the Netherlands and abroad, including foreign policy.	Faculty of Law University of Leiden, Leiden
	<i>Additional Questions: How is freedom of expression in the Netherlands handled within the context of controversial cases such the Gregorius Nekschot affair, or the Dutch government's debates on forbidding radical imams to preach? How is the balance between freedom of expression and security handled by the government?</i>	
12:30-14:00	Lunch with Mr. Marcel Betzel, Policy Advisor, Commissariaat voor de Media (CvdM- the Dutch Media Authority).The CvdM is the main media regulatory body. It is responsible for upholding and enforcing the rules of the Dutch Media Act and Dutch Media Decree, the two laws defining the media sector. It is independent.	Restaurant de Basiliek The Hague
	<i>Additional Questions: What are the regulations for financing of media? What is the neutrality/political influence on the CvdM, censorship and self-censorship, limits of what is acceptable on moral grounds in the public sphere, and compliance/enforcement?</i>	

14:30-17:00	<b>Roundtable discussion to discuss freedom of speech with reference to religion and sensitive Muslim subjects, with:</b>	CMO offices The Hague
	<b>Mr. Sadik Harchaoui</b> , Chairman of the Board of Directors of Forum, the Institute for Multicultural Development and <b>Mr. Mohamed Sini</b> , former chairman of the Islam en Burgerschap (Islam and Citizenship) initiative.	
	<i>And</i>	
	<b>Representatives of member organizations of the Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid (Government-Muslim Contact Group):</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Islamic Foundation the Netherlands (ISN)</li> <li>• The Turkish Islamic Cultural Federation Foundation (TICF)</li> <li>• Umbrella Shi'a Association (OSV)</li> <li>• Union of Moroccan Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands (UMMON)</li> <li>• Milli Görüs Northern the Netherlands (MGN)</li> <li>• Netherlands Islamic Federation (NIF)</li> <li>• World Islamic Mission (WIM)</li> <li>• The Islamic Center the Netherlands Foundation (SICN)</li> <li>• Regional Islamic Council Limburg (LIR)</li> <li>• Council of Imams in the Netherlands (VIN)</li> </ul>	
	<p><i><b>Additional Questions:</b> How have anti-terrorist measures limited freedoms, specifically within the Muslim Community? What types of new measures/laws are citizens facing? Are these laws being used indiscriminately? Is there radicalization of youth due to social-economic challenges, expectations and access to resources not realized? How are issues of freedom of speech considered within controversial instances such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali/Theo Van Gogh/Geert Wilders? How are religious beliefs and issues such as nudity and homosexuality handled?</i></p>	
	Free Evening for Participants	The Hague

<b>Thursday June 26</b>	<b><u>Freedom of Association and Minority and Diverse Population Inclusion:</u></b> Key areas identified as relevant to project countries: unequal access to resources; inconsistent and unfair hiring and promotion practises; religious/ethnic discrimination; unequal status in society; general disenfranchise
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## AGENDA

12:00-13:30	<b>Lunch with Arno Terschegget, Coordinator of the Buurtbemiddeling Rotterdam (Neighborhood Facilitators) and colleague.</b> Neighborhood facilitators work to consensually mediate conflict between neighbors on a range of issues, including cross-cultural issues. Facilitators are volunteers, and come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds themselves.	Shabu Shabu Restaurant <b>Rotterdam</b>
	<i><b>Additional Questions:</b> Are there independent citizen initiatives for conflict and cross-cultural communication? What is the relationship between citizen and government? What is the success of policies for integration, especially of Muslim citizens in Rotterdam?</i>	
14:15-15:45	<b>Meeting with Ms. Carla Lepelaars, Rotterdam Manager, RADAR.</b> RADAR is the discrimination complaints board in Rotterdam.	RADAR offices <b>Rotterdam</b>
	<i><b>Additional Questions:</b> What are the different capacities and functions of RADAR? To what extent can/does it influence policy approaches to ethnic/cultural inclusion/discrimination in Rotterdam?</i>	
16:00-17:00	<b>Meeting with Professor Tariq Ramadan on Identity and Citizenship (chair he holds at Erasmus University in Rotterdam).</b> Dr. Tariq Ramadan also works with the city of Rotterdam on the 'Citizenship, identity and the sense of belonging' program.	Social Sciences Faculty, Erasmus University <b>Rotterdam</b>
	<i><b>Additional Questions:</b> What is your perception of inclusion of minorities, especially the Muslim community in the Netherlands? What have been your observations of best and worst practises? The relationship between Islam and modern democracies in Europe seems to be very fluid, how do you perceive this and what do you predict for the future in this regard?.</i>	
18:00-19:30	<b>Meeting with Stichting Lokaal Board Members (the Local Foundation).</b> Stichting Lokaal is an independent foundation dedicated to improved relations between citizens and politicians, focusing on trainings, debates, etc. to improve participation. Meant to be a neutral facilitator between both.	Rotterdam City Hall <b>Rotterdam</b>
	<i><b>Additional Questions:</b> How to increase citizen/politician engagement, especially making politics relevant, accessible and interesting to citizens? Strategies, why the need for this in Rotterdam, effect to date on citizen participation? Special minority outreach? Effect on politicians?</i>	
20:00	Dinner: Group Debriefing Discussion	Restaurant Bazar <b>Rotterdam</b>
<b>Friday June 27</b>	<b>This day will focus on the international view on and support for freedom of association.</b> <i>Topics: State of human rights regionally and how European nations can strengthen their influence to support civil society and pressure governments to improve their human rights records, including extent/limitations of influence, financial leverage and incentive,, best practices, and the global threat of terrorism and its influence on foreign and national policies and regional relations.</i>	
<b>AGENDA</b>		
7:45	Breakfast	Caffé Basso <b>The Hague</b>
9:00-10:00	<b>Meeting with Mr. Arjan Hamburger, Dutch Ambassador for Human Rights, and representatives from the Middle East and Human Rights Departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs <b>The Hague</b>
	Participants Depart	Amsterdam Schiphol

## BRIEFING MATERIAL: TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **GENERAL**

*Introduction to the Dutch Parliament and Political Parties.* Wikipedia.

*Why I'm Banned in the US,* by Tariq Ramadan. Washington Post, October 1, 2006.

### **NEWS**

*Parliament to probe human rights conditions in Netherlands.* Turkish Daily News, June 14, 2008.

*The Netherlands passes its human rights exam.* Radio Netherlands Worldwide, June 12, 2008.

*Dutch lessons on integration,* Radio Netherlands Worldwide, June 11, 2008.

*Imams: Government more Afraid than Us of Islam Criticism.* NIS News, May 28, 2008.

*'Insulting' cartoons under investigation.* Radio Netherlands Worldwide. May 16, 2008

*Unbearably harsh: Press review: Press Review 7 April 2008: Monday.* Radio Netherlands Worldwide, April 7, 2008

*Dutch parliament debates MP Wilders' Fitna movie.* Radio Netherlands Worldwide, April 2, 2008

*'Fitna': Dutch leader's anti-Islam film brings strife.* Christian Science Monitor, March 26, 2008.

*Dutch government plans new approach to integration.* Radio Netherlands Worldwide, August 22, 2008.

*CDA wants to find way to close radical mosques.* [www.DutchNews.nl](http://www.DutchNews.nl), August 9, 2007

*New Dutch Immigration Test Under Attack.* [www.workpermit.com](http://www.workpermit.com), April 6, 2008.

## States-General (Parliament)

The Dutch Parliament or [States-General](#) consists of a Lower House or [Second Chamber](#) and an Upper House or [First Chamber](#), also referred to as the [Senate](#). Both houses of Parliament discuss proposed legislation and review of the actions of the cabinet. The Second Chamber also has the right to propose or amend legislation.

Members of the Second Chamber, generally considered the more important House, are elected directly every four years with a [list proportional representation](#). Members of the First Chamber are elected indirectly by [provincial councillors](#), again every four years, just after the elections of the provincial councils, via a system of proportional representation. This election method reflects the historical roots of the First Chamber as a representative body of the different regional entities that formed the Netherlands.

### Fourth Balkenende Cabinet (2007-present)

Parties	Political Leader	Votes (2006)	<a href="#">Tweede Kamer</a> seats	<a href="#">Eerste Kamer</a> seats
<a href="#">Christian Democratic Appeal</a> (CDA)	<a href="#">Jan Peter Balkenende</a> *	2,608,573	41	21
<a href="#">Labour Party</a> (PvdA)	<a href="#">Wouter Bos</a> *	2,085,077	33	14
<a href="#">Socialist Party</a> (SP)	<a href="#">Jan Marijnissen</a>	1,630,803	25	12
<a href="#">People's Party for Freedom and Democracy</a> (VVD)	<a href="#">Mark Rutte</a>	1,443,312	22	14
<a href="#">Party for Freedom</a> (PVV)	<a href="#">Geert Wilders</a>	579,490	9	0
<a href="#">Green Left</a> (GroenLinks)	<a href="#">Femke Halsema</a>	453,054	7	4
<a href="#">Christian Union</a> (CU)	<a href="#">André Rouvoet</a> *	390,969	6	4
<a href="#">Democrats 66</a> (D66)	<a href="#">Alexander Pechtold</a>	193,232	3	2
<a href="#">Party for Animals</a> (PvdD)	<a href="#">Marianne Thieme</a>	179,988	2	1
<a href="#">Political Reformed Party</a> (SGP)	<a href="#">Bas van der Vlies</a>	153,266	2	1
<a href="#">Independent Senate Fraction</a> (OSF)	<a href="#">Hendrik ten Hoeve</a> *	<i>did not compete</i>	0	1
<b>Total (turnout 80.0%)</b>		9,654,475	<b>150</b>	<b>75</b>

\*: These political leaders are not chair of Second Chamber [parliamentary parties](#)

### Political Parties

The system of proportional representation, combined with the historical social division between Catholics, Protestants, Socialists and Liberals has resulted in a multiparty system. The major political parties are CDA, PvdA, SP and VVD. The parties currently represented in the Dutch Second Chamber are:

- [CDA](#) is a [centre-right Christian Democratic](#) party. It holds to the principle that government activity should supplement but not supplant communal action by citizens. The CDA sees its philosophy as standing between the "[individualism](#)" of the VVD and the "[statism](#)" of the PvdA.
- [PvdA](#) is a [social democratic, centre-left](#) Labour party. Its programme is based on greater social, political, and economic equality for all citizens.
- [SP](#) is a socialist party, which has evolved from a [Maoist](#) split from the [Communist Party Netherlands](#) into a much less radical socialist party. It remains far more left-wing than the Labour party, but at the same time is considered more conservative than the Labour party and the GroenLinks party.
- [VVD](#) is a conservative-[liberal](#) party. It attaches great importance to [private enterprise](#) and the freedom of the individual in political, social, and economic affairs.
- [PVV](#) is an anti-Islam nationalist-conservative party. It has a platform based on free market economics and opposition to immigration and European integration.
- [GroenLinks](#) combines, as its name implies green, environmentalist, ideals with leftwing ideals.
- [ChristenUnie](#) is a Christian-democratic party made up by mostly orthodox Protestant Christians, with conservative stances on [abortion](#), [euthanasia](#) and [gay marriage](#). In other areas the party is considered centre-left, for instance on immigration, welfare state and the environment.
- [D66](#) is a [social-liberal radical](#) party. The party supports liberal policies on abortion and euthanasia and reform of the welfare state. The party is left-wing on immigration, the environment and foreign policy.
- The [Party for the Animals](#) is a single-issue [animal rights](#) party with natural affinity with environmental issues. For general purposes, the party is considered left of centre.
- [SGP](#) is an orthodox Protestant party with conservative policies and it sees government as unconditional servant of God.
- *Trots op Nederland* is the proposed political movement associated with independent parliamentarian and former government minister [Rita Verdonk](#).

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## Why I'm Banned in the USA

By Tariq Ramadan  
 Sunday, October 1, 2006; B01

washingtonpost.com

LONDON

For more than two years now, the U.S. government has barred me from entering the United States to pursue an academic career. The reasons have changed over time, and have evolved from defamatory to absurd, but the effect has remained the same: I've been kept out.

First, I was told that I could not enter the country because I had endorsed terrorism and violated the USA Patriot Act. It took a lawsuit for the government eventually to abandon this baseless accusation. Later, I reapplied for a visa, twice, only to hear nothing for more than a year. Finally, just 10 days ago, after a federal judge forced the State Department to reconsider my application, U.S. authorities offered a new rationale for turning me away: Between 1998 and 2002, I had contributed small sums of money to a French charity supporting humanitarian work in the Palestinian territories.

I am increasingly convinced that the Bush administration has barred me for a much simpler reason: It doesn't care for my political views. In recent years, I have publicly criticized U.S. policy in the Middle East, the war in Iraq, the use of torture, secret CIA prisons and other government actions that undermine fundamental civil liberties. And for many years, through my research and writing and speeches, I have called upon Muslims to better understand the principles of their own faith, and have sought to show that one can be Muslim and Western at the same time.

My experience reveals how U.S. authorities seek to suppress dissenting voices and -- by excluding people such as me from their country -- manipulate political debate in America. Unfortunately, the U.S. government's paranoia has evolved far beyond a fear of particular individuals and taken on a much more insidious form: the fear of ideas.

In January 2004, I was offered a job at the University of Notre Dame, as a professor of Islamic studies and as Luce professor of religion, conflict and peace-building. I accepted the tenured position enthusiastically and looked forward to joining the academic community in the United States. After the government granted me a work visa, I rented a home in South Bend, Ind., enrolled my children in school there and shipped all of my household belongings. Then, in July, the government notified me that my visa had been revoked. It did not offer a specific explanation, but pointed to a provision of the Patriot Act that applies to people who have "endorsed or espoused" terrorist activity.

The revocation shocked me. I had consistently opposed terrorism in all of its forms, and still do. And, before 2004, I had visited the United States frequently to lecture, attend conferences and meet with other scholars. I had been an invited speaker at conferences or lectures sponsored by Harvard University, Stanford, Princeton and the William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Foundation. None of these institutions seemed to consider me a threat to national security.

The U.S. government invited me to apply for a new visa and, with Notre Dame's help, I did so in October 2004. But after three months passed without a response, I felt I had little choice but to give up my new position and resume my life in Europe. Even so, I never abandoned the effort to clear my name. At the urging of American academic and civic groups, I reapplied for a visa one last time in September 2005, hoping that the government would retract its accusation. Once again, I encountered only silence.

Finally, in January, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Academy of Religion, the American Association of University Professors and PEN American Center filed a lawsuit on my behalf, challenging the government's actions. In court, the government's lawyers admitted that they could establish no connection between me and any terrorist group; the government had merely taken a "prudential" measure by revoking my visa. Even then, the government maintained that the process of reconsidering my visa could take years. The federal court -- which issued a ruling recognizing that I have been a vocal critic of terrorism -- rejected the indefinite delay. In June, it ordered the government to grant me a visa or explain why it would not do so.

On Sept. 21, the long-awaited explanation arrived. The letter from the U.S. Embassy informed me that my visa application had been denied, and it put an end to the rumors that had circulated since my original visa was revoked. After a lengthy investigation, the State Department cited no evidence of suspicious relationships, no meetings with terrorists, no encouraging or advocacy of terrorism. Instead, the department cited my donation of \$940 to two humanitarian organizations (a French group and its Swiss chapter) serving the Palestinian people. I should note that the investigation did not reveal these contributions. As the department acknowledges, I had brought this information to their attention myself, two years earlier, when I had reapplied for a visa.

In its letter, the U.S. Embassy claims that I "reasonably should have known" that the charities in question provided money to Hamas. But my donations were made between December 1998 and July 2002, and the United States did not blacklist the charities until 2003. How should I reasonably have known of their activities before the U.S. government itself knew? I donated to these organizations for the same reason that countless Europeans -- and Americans, for that matter -- donate to Palestinian causes: not to help fund terrorism, but because I wanted to provide humanitarian aid to people who desperately need it. Yet after two years of investigation, this was the only explanation offered for the denial of my visa. I still find it hard to believe.

What words do I utter and what views do I hold that are dangerous to American ears, so dangerous, in fact, that I should not be allowed to express them on U.S. soil?

I have called upon Western societies to be more open toward Muslims and to regard them as a source of richness, not just of violence or conflict. I have called upon Muslims in the West to reconcile and embrace both their Islamic and Western identities. I have called for the creation of a "New We" based on common citizenship within which Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims and people with no religion can build a pluralistic society. And yes, I believe we all have a right to dissent, to criticize governments and protest undemocratic decisions. It is certainly legitimate for European Muslims and American Muslims to criticize their governments if they find them unjust -- and I will continue to do so.

At the same time, I do not stop short of criticizing regimes from Muslim countries. Indeed, the United States is not the only country that rejects me; I am also barred from Tunisia, Saudi Arabia and even my native Egypt. Last month, after a few sentences in a speech by Pope Benedict XVI elicited protests and violence, I published an article noting how some governments in the Muslim world manipulate these imagined crises to suit their political agendas. "When the people are deprived of their basic rights and of their freedom of expression," I argued, "it costs nothing to allow them to vent their anger over Danish cartoons or the words of the Pontiff." I was immediately accused of appeasing the enemies of Islam, of being more Western than Muslim.

Today, I live and work in London. From my posts at Oxford University and the Lokahi Foundation, I try to promote cultural understanding and to prevent radicalization within Muslim communities here. Along with many British citizens, I have criticized the country's new security laws and its support for the war in Iraq. Yet I have never been asked to remain silent as a condition to live or work here. I can express myself freely.

I fear that the United States has grown fearful of ideas. I have learned firsthand that the Bush administration reacts to its critics not by engaging them, but by stigmatizing and excluding them. Will foreign scholars be permitted to enter the United States only if they promise to mute their criticisms of U.S. policy? It saddens me to think of the effect this will have on the free exchange of ideas, on political debate within America, and on our ability to bridge differences across cultures.

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Tariq Ramadan, a fellow at Oxford University, is author of "Western Muslims and the Future of Islam."

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*Turkish Daily News*

Saturday, June 14, 2008

### **Parliament to probe human rights conditions in Netherlands**

Parliament's human rights commission will fly to the Netherlands to investigate human rights problems of Turks living there. The Commission will visit a prison in Rotterdam and hold talks with Integration Minister Ella Vogelaar on Tuesday. The Commission will meet Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen and Turkish-origins Dutch parliamentarians Wednesday.

ANK  Anatolia News Agency

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

### **The Netherlands passes its human rights exam**

by Sebastiaan Gottlieb\*

12-06-2008

The Netherlands has passed its human rights exam at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. A month ago the country was one of the first countries to account to the council for its human rights record. On Wednesday, Human Rights Ambassador Arjan Hamburger was back in Geneva to discuss the results.

Mr Hamburger thinks the Netherlands has passed the exam with ease, because unlike some other countries it had no additional questions to answer. He believes the Netherlands is seen as a country where human rights are generally respected and promoted.

This doesn't mean there is no criticism of Dutch human rights policy. During Deputy Justice Minister Nebahat Albayrak's original presentation of the Netherlands at the Human Rights Council, there were around thirty recommendations for change. They covered a wide range of issues, says Ms Albayrak.

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"Tolerance in the Netherlands, aspects of immigration policy, aspects of policy on prostitution - but we were very open about it and that was appreciated too."

### **Recommendations rejected**

The Netherlands has adopted most of the recommendations on ways to improve human rights policy. Some were rejected, including an Egyptian proposal for the Netherlands to consider introducing the death penalty. According to Mr Hamburger, this is not only unthinkable in the Netherlands, but also forbidden by the constitution. He says the recommendations that have been adopted are all linked to the open character of Dutch society.

"Much in the area of promoting tolerance, and much in the area of combating discrimination. In the Netherlands we're therefore working hard to set up discrimination hotlines, which will become a national network. We've taken up these recommendations, and we say 'thanks for the recommendation'. "Dutch organisations in the field of human rights still have a wish list. Aim for Human Rights would like to see the Netherlands ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. This gives people detained as illegal immigrants more protection against inhumane treatment, which would include access to lawyers, and medical and psychological support.

### **Combating terrorism**

The Netherlands also needs to adjust its legislation on combating terrorism, which according to the International Law Commission conflicts with human rights on a number of points. There should also be a national institute for human rights in the Netherlands, something that has been promised for a long time but never put into practice.

So the Netherlands has passed its human rights exam, but not with an A grade. There are still improvements to be made, although the matters they concern are minor in comparison with those of other countries. The country will face another exam in four years time.

\*RNW translation (mb)

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

### **Dutch lessons on integration**

By political editor John Tyler  
11-06-2008

Integration in the Netherlands is not going well. At least, that is the dominant feeling here. But a group of policy makers from the US and Canada do not agree. The Dutch foreign ministry invited eleven officials and academics to come see what is being done here to improve the integration of minorities, particularly Muslims. They liked what they saw.

Ataf Husain is an executive at Howard University in Washington, DC. He is glad to see a government actively involved with promoting integration:

"It's important for us to know, what is it like when the government works closely to empower those local communities such as the immigrants and refugees and what is the outcome of that interaction."

### **Jealous**

After a visit to two immigrant neighbourhoods in Den Haag and Amsterdam, (Transvaal and Slotervaart,) Mr Husain says he is impressed by the progress we have made here in the Netherlands. The group visited a mosque subsidised by the government, as well as an elementary school. Mr Husain is more than a little bit jealous of such freedom of choice in the Dutch school system.

"This is fully funded by the Dutch government for the Muslim children. And it really ei

funding of Muslim schools that has some in the Netherlands calling for them to be banned. Mr Husain and other members of the delegation say that banning Muslim schools would be a step backward.

### **Pillar system**

The visitors are being hosted by the Dutch foreign ministry as part of an information exchange for officials and academics involved with integration. Minister for Europe Frans Timmermans explains to the group that the freedom of choice in the Dutch school system dates back to the 'pillar' system of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Different segments of society had their own institutions, including schools. Mr Timmermans says the schools are a positive aspect of that system, but attributes some of our problems with integration to the very same system.

The Minister says Dutch people used to take care of one another within their own pillar, but did not pay attention to people in other pillars. But that does not work in modern society. On top of this there is a lingering feeling that immigrants here are guests as large numbers of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants were brought here in the 1960s and 70s as guest workers, and some feel that they really should not outstay their welcome.

### **Family**

For Timmermans the question of integration is the most important issue in the Netherlands:

"I think that this is THE big social question that we here in the Netherlands have to solve. If we could learn that there are no guests at the table, that we're all one family with brothers and sisters who sometimes don't behave and must be corrected but are part of the family, and together we represent a country in which people have rights as well as duties. If we can realise this, things will work out well for the Netherlands." Here in the Netherlands we often look to the US and Canada as examples for how we can do better integrating our minorities. But from what the visitors have seen so far, they feel there is also something to learn from the Dutch.

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## **Imams: Government more Afraid than Us of Islam Criticism**

**NIS News Bulletin**

THE HAGUE, 28/05/08 - The Union of Moroccan Imams in the Netherlands has questioned the arrest of cartoonist Gregorius Nekschot. "Debate is healthy; you are allowed to say anything," said chairman Yassin Elforkani yesterday in De Pers newspaper.

Nekschot (Neck Shot) was arrested two weeks ago in his home in Amsterdam, by about 10 police. The Public Prosecutor's Office claims that eight of his cartoons are offensive to Muslims or persons with a darker skin colour. As far as is known, no cartoonist has ever been arrested before in the Netherlands.

"Certainly if it is really only about these cartoons, I consider the arrest remarkable," said Elforkani in De Pers. "Debate is healthy; you are allowed to say anything". How far someone can go in the debate is a question of ethics and not a legal question, he argues.

"The cabinet is more afraid of criticism of Islam than the Dutch Muslims," concludes De Pers. (...) "Their attitude is considerably more matter-of-fact than that of the government" in questions about freedom of speech.

The arrest of Nekschot fits into a trend, the newspaper continued. "Thus, the cabinet tried to prevent MP Geert Wilders from making his anti-Koran film Fitna for fear of riots and attacks. Muslims actually reacted very mildly: not a single car went up in flames."

The fear also reigns among local authorities, De Pers added. Recently, Huizen municipality removed a painting in the town hall in which breasts were to be seen following complaints from some Muslims. But the local Turkish mosque considered this action unnecessary, according to the newspaper.

Elforkani: "You live in a certain environment where agreements have been made. (...) For example, that freedom of expression is a core value of Dutch society. Earlier generations have fought for this."

In the Lower House, various MPs have suggested that the arrest of Nekschot was an appeasement signal from the Netherlands to the Arab world after Fitna. The arrest after all followed a complaint - by a radical Muslim - made way back in 2005 and hence lying in a drawer for three years.

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

## **'Insulting' cartoons under investigation**

By Philip Smet\*

16-05-2008

The Dutch Public Prosecutor's Office has announced that the cartoonist who works under the pseudonym Gregorius Nekschot was arrested for publishing 'insulting cartoons'.

The cartoonist will not reveal his real name out of fear that Islamic extremists will seek revenge for the cartoons, many of which make fun of the Muslim religion.

It is extremely unusual for a Dutch artist to be arrested for his works. Justice Minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin says he does not believe the case has anything to do with suppressing free expression.

On Tuesday, Gregorius Nekschot was arrested at his Amsterdam home. The arresting force was made up of the magistrate, five police officers and three members of the Public Prosecutor's Office. His home was searched and he was taken to a police station, where he refused to answer questions. That night he had to remain in the cell; he was released the next day.

### **Investigation**

The complaint which Public Prosecutor's Office is handling was made in 2005. The Public Prosecutor's Office's issued a press release saying:

"The investigation has revealed that a number of cartoons published on the internet were, according to our office, insulting to Muslims and to people of colour. Moreover, the Public Prosecutor's Office believes the cartoons could inspire hatred."

Gregorius Nekschot published his cartoons on his own website. Film producer and columnist Theo van Gogh, who was killed in 2004 by a Muslim extremist, also used to publish Gregorius Nekschot's cartoons on his website. The cartoonist is known for his extremely insulting caricatures of religion and left-wing politicians. One of the reasons he was not arrested earlier is because he works anonymously - the Public Prosecutor's Office says they simply couldn't find him.

### **Political reactions**

Minister Hirsch Ballin says the Netherlands has an international obligation to crack down on this type of discrimination. However, many politicians have complained about the arrest. Democrat party D66 MP Boris van der Ham has asked the minister for clarification about the arrest. Not only does he think it was carried out with an excessive show of force, he does not think the Public Prosecutor's Office should have taken legal action against the artist. He says 'a public debate' is preferable to a trial.

"It's also not true that Dutch Muslims aren't capable of defending themselves. In the discussion of the film by Geert Wilders - Fitna - many moderate Muslims just raised their shoulders. I think the same holds true for this cartoonist, even if (the cartoons) are extremely coarse."

### **"Exaggerated"**

Even though he thinks the cartoons are sometimes tasteless, the lawyer Gerard Hamer does not agree with the conviction of the Public Prosecutor's Office that they inspire hatred. He also describes the arrest of the cartoonist as "exaggerated, not right and not in agreement with the constitution." He says the cartoonist should be able to explain his actions to the judge, without being arrested.

Mr Hamer described the arrest as "Pure intimidation":

"If it isn't really necessary to arrest people you shouldn't do it. Our freedom is a great good, as is the freedom of expression. By arresting someone you have an influence on free expression. You show that because of his cartoons he has a real chance of losing his freedom. This is what they do in Zimbabwe, or in other countries; there it happens all the time. One hopes that the Amsterdam Public Prosecutor's Office won't end up making this a habit." The Dutch government said on a previous occasion that insulting religion should remain a punishable offence. Many MPs disagree and want to abolish the law. On Tuesday, Parliament will continue to debate freedom of expression and the arrest of Gregorius Nekschot.

\*RNW translation (fs)

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

Press review: Press Review 7 April 2008: Monday

### **Unbearably harsh**

A heartening report in the NRC Handelsblad reckons that the level-headed response of the Dutch Muslim community to Geert Wilders' anti-Islam film *Fitna* is in part due to the sharp criticism of Islam in the Netherlands over recent years. Deputy Social Affairs Minister Ahmed Aboutaleb believes the "at times unbearably harsh" debate has bolstered the self-confidence of Dutch Muslims.

The paper says many observers think the government and the Muslim community have successfully kept the lid on the *Fitna* issue. Not only moderate Muslim leaders, but also fundamentalist clerics such as Abou Ismail called on the faithful to stay calm. He is quoted as saying: "If you resort to violence, he (Mr Wilders) will get more support. If you behave with restraint, you'll demonstrate that he's wrong."

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

### **Dutch parliament debates MP Wilders' *Fitna* movie**

#### **All parties attack MP Geert Wilders and his movie**

By political editor John Tyler

02-04-2008

During a special debate in the Dutch parliament, right-wing populist Geert Wilders accused three cabinet ministers of lying, and submitted a motion of no-confidence in the entire government. Parliament put aside all other business to discuss Freedom Party leader Geert Wilder's anti-Islam film, *Fitna*, during a debate that went well into the night. No other party in parliament supported Wilders.

Mr Wilders was defensive, and frequently got caught up in his own inconsistencies. He says freedom of expression is a fundamental right, but wants to limit it for Muslims by banning the Quran. He says he is not against Muslims, but against Islamic ideology. Yet he proposes a number of policies with far-reaching effects for Muslims, including a complete immigration stop from Muslim countries, a freeze on new mosques and the closing of all Muslim schools.

He accuses the government of overreacting to the film, yet it was Mr Wilders himself who warned the government about the film. He defends the rule of law, but refuses to use the legal process to get a book banned which he says sows hatred.

#### **Embarrassing**

Mr Wilders struggled to defend his motivations for making the film. In a particularly embarrassing moment for the right-wing populist, Justice Minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin produced notes from meetings in October and November, before news of production of the film became public.

During those meetings, Mr Wilders informed the Justice Minister, the national anti-terrorism coordinator and two other cabinet-level officials of his tentative plans for the film, including showing the Muslim holy book, the Quran, being torn up and burnt in a fireplace. The government based its security preparations for possible repercussions of the film on these meetings with Mr Wilders.

During Tuesday's debate, Mr Wilders repeatedly denied that he had informed the government in such detail about his film. Mr Wilders said,

"I'm being taken for a ride here by the Minister of Justice. The cabinet is just trying to clear itself. This is a great and unprecedented shame."

He accused the Justice Minister of lying, and said the Prime Minister only worsened the commotion around the film by talking about a crisis. Mr Wilders submitted a motion of no-confidence in the entire cabinet.

### Tense

The debate was at times tense, and emotions ran high. The leaders of every other party in the lower house questioned Geert Wilders about why he made the film, and what he is trying to achieve. A number of MPs spoke about integration of the nearly one million Muslims in this country, and the tensions between immigrants and their descendents, and the native Dutch population.

### Apology

Prime Minister Balkenende himself demanded an apology from Mr Wilders. Mr Balkenende said,

"I agree that apologies are in order, but I mean apologies by you, to the people of good will, who belong to Islam, who fully respect the Dutch rule of law, who want to live in peace here with others, and those people who have reacted with such restraint. If apologies are to be made, it is by you, to those people."

MPs sounded a drum roll on their desks to sound their approval of the PM's statement - a gesture rarely made in the Dutch parliament.

In reaction, the Freedom Party leader said he would never, ever, not in a hundred years, not in one-hundred-thousand years, apologize to the government.

Geert Wilders says he wants Fitna to lead the debate in the Netherlands about Islam, and is organizing a series of town-hall debates around the country. If Tuesday's debate in parliament is any indication, Mr Wilders can expect a stormy time in the next few months.

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## 'Fitna': Dutch leader's anti-Islam film brings strife

By [Robert Marquand](#) | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

from the March 26, 2008 edition

The Hague - It's a lurking provocation in Europe's sometimes rocky encounter with its burgeoning Muslim population: For months, a popular, flamboyant far-right Dutch party leader has been preparing an incendiary film about Islam rumored to contain lurid scenes of execution and a flaming Koran. With his flashy dyed platinum hair and his 24-hour security protection, Geert Wilders routinely compares the Koran to Hitler's "Mein Kampf," says almost all terrorists are Muslims, and advocates deporting Islamic clerics.

So it isn't surprising that the short film - which has yet to secure an outlet that will air it - is being compared to Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad that sparked global Muslim riots two years ago. Iran and Pakistan have condemned the video, titled "Fitna" - Arabic for strife. The Taliban has threatened retaliation against Dutch troops in Afghanistan.

"Fitna" has so far been the biggest show never seen, but the buildup has given Mr. Wilders growing publicity, and civic leaders time to respond.

Unlike Denmark, which held to a free speech position on the cartoons, the Dutch government has been telling Muslim nations and Islamic organizations that it doesn't agree with Wilders's views. The main question that has emerged in the debate is whether it is acceptable for an elected official to use free speech to attack the identity of other groups, even if he or she feels they are causing harm to the Netherlands.

"I don't care if someone hates Islam," says Tafiq Ali, a young Muslim from Morocco who works in a construction firm in Amsterdam. "But is it responsible for a leader to use words that can bring hate and negative consequences?"

Since January, Wilders has tried – and failed – to air "Fitna" on Dutch TV and then at The Hague's foreign press center. This week Wilders's backup, a US-based website, was shut down by the hosting service Network Solutions, pending an investigation of its acceptable use policy. Tuesday, the right-wing Czech National Party proposed broadcasting "Fitna," citing the "cowardice" of Dutch and EU politicians. Wilders said he might resort to handing out DVDs in central Amsterdam.

But despite the setbacks, the Sturm und Drang surrounding "Fitna" has been a colossal publicity boon for the controversial politician.

"He doesn't care [about negative consequences]; I think he loves this," says a Hague-based journalist who covers Wilders's party.

### **Much publicity – for him and Muslims**

Dutch security alerts have gone from "limited" to "substantial" this month. In the Netherlands, the unseen video brings daily press coverage, as well as seminars, TV debates, lectures by the mayor of Amsterdam, and a recent decrying of it as an "unnecessary provocation" by the eminent philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in what he calls the modern condition of a "post-secular Europe."

Last week Harry de Winter, a prominent Dutch citizen who is Jewish, took out a large ad in the daily de Volkskrant arguing

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## Why Wilders's popularity is rising

Wilders, who has warned of a "tsunami of Islamization coming to Europe," has built his career on fears over an immigrant influx – including those of the nearly 1 million Muslims in this country of 16 million residents. His message has resonated with a growing percentage of Dutch voters who feel he is telling truths that elite politicians are too polite or tolerant to voice.

His popularity rose after the shocking 2004 street killing by a Dutch-Moroccan of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, who with a Dutch parliamentarian had produced a film criticizing Islam's oppression of women. Two years later, his Freedom Party surprised the elites by scoring nine out of 150 members of parliament in 2006 elections.

Some residents here described conflicted feelings about politicians like Wilders that they detest, and a public discourse that seems not to capture the extent of social divisions in Holland.

"I hear Muslims making very hard statements about their situation," says Wouter Mertens, a shop manager and PhD candidate in Amsterdam. "The cultures in Holland are separating further; you can feel it. Our tolerance is being destroyed. We used to be able to have reasonable discussions about things like the burqa or scarf. People did and didn't like it, said so, and did it with some tolerance and certainly openly. Now, no."

There's little outward tension along the famed canals here, or among the diffident and pragmatic Dutch. Some are tiring of Wilders and the film build-up. "It could come out any time – right now, in two weeks, no one knows," says Hans Ulrich, a retired history teacher in Leiden. "Now we joke that "Fitna" doesn't exist, but is an April fool's trick."

### 'He represents the fear we feel'

One Rotterdam business consultant, Rhys Jansen, who spent years working for a Dutch oil firm in the Arab world, says Wilders has rightly grasped the uncertainty and worry over losing a good standard of living in a country that traditional Dutch people feel is different from the one they were born in – and he is playing on this fear.

"He represents fear, the fear we feel, it's all about fear," says Mr. Jansen. "He exacerbates our feelings. We don't know each other anymore. There's less time in our lives, less time to cook, to talk, to socialize. We live in houses with walls two meters high separating our gardens. When I grew up we talked across our gardens. Now if you meet your neighbors, it is pretty much by accident. This is what Wilders understands."

Even many Muslims say they don't like the hidden tensions and new pressures in Holland brought by culture wars. Mehmet, who works in a Leiden falafel and kebab cafe, says he came from Egypt 20 years ago to escape religion. "No one here would bother you about anything," he says. "That's what I like about Holland, but I am worried this is changing."

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*Radio Netherlands Worldwide*

## Dutch government plans new approach to integration

by Hans Andringa in The Hague\*

22-08-2007

The new Dutch Minister for Integration wants to make language lessons for newcomers free-of-charge. Minister Ella Vogelaar has promised that the integration process will be more positive. That's a major change compared to her predecessor, Rita Verdonk, who favoured promoting a more hardline approach.

In her "Naturalization Deltaplan", Minister Vogelaar spells out that she wants to achieve the integration of migrants through schooling, work and participation. For example, through doing voluntary work the Dutch language can be learned more easily. At the same time, people are learning social skills. That, in turn, will

increase their chances of finding work, reasons the minister. Apprenticeships can also help them to gain a better grasp of Dutch.

### **Leaked plans**

The plans, which haven't yet been discussed in cabinet, were leaked via Dutch public broadcaster NOS. At the moment, a lot of migrants have to take out loans in order to pay for language courses. Many participants fail to reach the desired proficiency in Dutch, says minister Vogelaar. So she believes that things have to change.

Under former minister Rita Verdonk, the course participants had to pay part of the course fee themselves. Vogelaar wants a system in which immigrants no longer have to pay for the course.

### **Former minister reacts**

Verdonk is now an MP for the People's Party for Freedom and Demo

## New Dutch immigration test under attack

06 April 2006

The Netherlands has introduced Europe's most stringent immigration requirements for would-be immigrants. Applicants for a resident visa must now pass a Dutch language test administered at the Dutch Embassy in their country of origin costing \$417.

Along with the language exam, applicants will be tested on their compatibility with Dutch liberalism. This is done by way of a civil-examination, including a 108 minute film which includes homosexuals kissing and nudity in beach scene.

"According to polls, Dutch public opinion has been changing for years, with most people now in favour of the government's assimilation drive," said Meindert Fennema, a professor at the University of Amsterdam and a specialist on immigration.

Opponents of the new immigration exam say that the Dutch government is trying to offend and exclude devout Muslims from immigrating, and halt Muslim immigrants bringing wives over from their country of birth.

"Dutch society was once known for its promotion of multiculturalism, and tolerance of languages and customs of its immigrants. This image now is being replaced with one of intolerance, said Kees Groenendijk head of the Centre for Migration Law at the University of Nijmegen

Groenendijk said, "The law seems to be more about keeping poor, mostly Muslim immigrants out, rather than integrating foreigners into Dutch society."

The Dutch Immigration minister Rita Verdonk denies these claims.

"That simply is not the case, everyone is welcome. It is important to make clear demands of people. They need to subscribe to our European values, respect our laws and learn the language," said the minister.

"There are over 600,000 people in the country that don't speak proper Dutch and are mostly unemployed. We can no longer afford to welcome immigrants who will not integrate into mainstream society, which is why we have advocated a new restrictive visa system," she said.

Verdonk dismisses claims the test will damage the country's open reputation, saying that we have a problem in Dutch society and need to address it.

The Netherlands is not the only European country that has begun to restrict immigration or citizenship. Britain will rate potential immigrants in accordance to a points system favouring skilled workers, and Germany has proposed a history exam, and would question applicant's views on arranged marriages, homosexuality, women's rights and terrorism.

Immigrants from Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand and Japan are exempt from the tests.