



Netherlands

Assessment: Very Good

Trend: ↔

Capital: Amsterdam

Type of Government: Constitutional Monarchy

Head of Government: Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende (since 22 July 2002)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

Population: 15,981,472

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 8

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Netherlands has generally been a **very good** supporter of democracy throughout the world. A generous donor, the Dutch government has supported democratization with bilateral and multilateral aid, provided electoral assistance, and criticized regimes that violated democratic norms. Since it is a small country with limited unilateral influence, the Netherlands has generally preferred to support multilateral efforts to promote democracy.

In general, the Netherlands has tried to promote democratization with foreign aid rather than through aggressive diplomatic intervention. However, the Netherlands is a strong supporter of greater roles for the United Nations and the European Union, through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The Netherlands is also a close ally of the United States and often follows its lead. On bilateral issues, the Dutch government has traditionally preferred to exert international political pressure by suspending non-humanitarian aid, rather than by downgrading diplomatic relations or isolating the offending regime in other ways.

FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

The Netherlands, despite its size, has major economic and trade interests around the world, but has increasingly tied its future to European integration. It sees itself as at the forefront of promoting respect for international law. The Netherlands is also one of the most generous foreign aid donors, with Dutch foreign assistance pegged to 0.8 percent of Dutch GNP (currently approximately 4 billion euro).¹ A significant portion of the Netherlands' development assistance is targeted at promoting democratization processes and strengthening democratic institutions.

Dutch foreign policy traditionally has been very "progressive," and has contained an explicit human rights agenda since 1979. Democracy is considered essential to the protection of human rights, and democratization has become increasingly important in Dutch foreign policy since 1992, when the World Bank identified good governance as essential for development.²

Official Dutch policy states that development assistance will be suspended "where human rights are violated, where there is stagnation in the democratization process or excessive military expenditure."³ On 1 December 1996, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established a new directorate, the "Directorate of Human Rights, Good Governance and Democratization," now the "Directorate of Human Rights and Peace Building." In 1999, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created the post of Ambassador for Human Rights, to help integrate Dutch foreign policy work on human rights, good governance and peace building.

Because the Netherlands is a small country, the Dutch government prefers to exert political pressure through international institutions like the UN and World Bank, and through regional institutions like the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The preference for multilateral action is due in part to its view that unilateral sanctions as a tool of forcing change have failed in the past.⁴

The Netherlands, and other members of the EU are increasingly speaking with one voice with regard to foreign policy. Since the enactment of the Maastrich Treaty in 1993, members of the EU have agreed to



adopt “common foreign policy” positions on armed conflict, human rights and “any other subject linked to the fundamental principles and common values” of the EU. The Dutch government is a keen supporter of the development of an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, but would prefer that the CFSP be controlled by the EU Parliament, rather than the European Commission (EC), which is dominated by the larger European states.

On bilateral issues, the Dutch government has traditionally preferred to exert international political pressure by suspending non-humanitarian aid. It generally avoids measures such as embargoes, downgrading diplomatic relations or ending cultural exchanges. All of the Dutch government’s foreign assistance, including economic assistance, technical assistance, and cultural exchanges, is subject to review of the diplomatic posts and is required to be in harmony with Dutch foreign policy goals.

RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS

The Dutch government has generally been critical of leaders that overthrow democratically-elected governments. Furthermore, the Netherlands has strongly supported multilateral, mostly UN and EU, efforts to restore civilian rule.

Dutch government criticism of the coup in Pakistan in October 1999 was muted, much like that of the rest of the world. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it deplored the overthrow of the democratic government, but that it would await General Musharraf’s next moves.⁵ The EU warned that it would discontinue its foreign assistance if the military government did not quickly indicate when it would return rule to a civilian government. Despite promises to do so, Musharraf instead decided to consolidate his control of the country by unilaterally amending the Pakistani constitution to allow him to remain president for another five years. Nonetheless, the EU threat has never been carried out, largely because Pakistan is an important ally in the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

In the summer of 1999, prior to the coup, the Dutch government ended most of its bilateral development cooperation with Pakistan, citing lack of good governance, poor macro- and socio-economic policies, and bad human rights record. The Dutch did, instead, offer Pakistan special assistance in good governance and human rights, though this assistance was reduced after the coup.⁶

In the Americas, the Netherlands was one of

the first countries to contribute forces to the UN-authorized and U.S.-led blockade and invasion to restore democracy in Haiti.⁷ Later, the Netherlands also contributed a detachment of 150 Dutch marines to serve in the UN peacekeeping mission for one year during the election cycle that culminated in the election of President René Préval on 17 December 1995. Haiti, however, remains a fragile and unstable democracy. Because of the chaotic presidential elections at the end of January 2001, the EU, on the basis of the Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, discontinued most of its development assistance. The Dutch government had already, in 1999, discontinued its bilateral aid to Haiti due to lack of good governance there, though it indicated that it would resume development cooperation when good governance was established.

RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESS

The Dutch government has generally been critical of attempts by foreign leaders to manipulate electoral processes or to uphold fraudulent election results. In addition, the Netherlands has contributed to many international electoral assistance and monitoring missions. Every year approximately 12 Dutch missions participate in multinational election monitoring missions, usually organized through the EC.⁸

On 19 February 2002, the EU imposed “smart sanctions” on President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and recalled its election observers after determining that the elections could not be free and fair. Within the EU, the Netherlands had been a strong critic of Robert Mugabe’s attempts to manipulate the elections, and in retaliation Zimbabwe refused entry to Dutch election observers.

Dutch government policy in similar cases has not always been so firm. When the Nigerian military annulled the presidential elections in June 1993, the EU imposed relatively weak economic and diplomatic sanctions. Stronger sanctions, including a total freeze on development assistance (except for humanitarian assistance), official visa restrictions, and sports contacts were not imposed until November 1995, in response to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni environmental activists. More meaningful sanctions, such as an oil embargo or the freezing of military bank accounts, however, were reportedly vetoed by the British and Dutch governments, because of the interests of Shell, the Anglo-Dutch multi-national, and other oil companies.⁹ In 1998, sanctions were eased by the



European Union after General Abubakar freed most political prisoners and established an election commission to prepare for elections in February 1999.

The EU sent election monitors, with Dutch participation, to observe the May 2000 presidential and congressional elections in Peru. However, when it became apparent that President Alberto Fujimori was employing media manipulation, fraud and intimidation to win re-election, the EU withdrew the observers before the second, run-off round, because “the elections could not take place in a credible manner and in accordance with international standards.”¹⁰

In June 2000, Alejandro Toledo, the opposition leader, traveled to Spain and Brussels, but obtained very little support for additional European pressure on President Fujimori. Ultimately, Fujimori was forced to call new elections after video evidence surfaced that his administration was bribing opposition politicians. These new elections were monitored by an EU election observation mission, which spent more than three months working both in rural areas and in Lima, and determined that they were in compliance with international standards.

PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

The Netherlands has been a strong supporter of international democracy, and an extremely generous donor to democratization programs.

Over a quarter of the Dutch development budget is channeled through multilateral agencies, such as the UN, EU, and World Bank. About a third of the development budget is allocated to NGOs, the majority to the large Dutch development organizations ICCO, NOVIB, HIVOS, and Bilance. Assistance to democratization programs is provided to Dutch political party foundations (*stichtingen*) involved in strengthening foreign political parties and to Dutch and foreign NGOs involved in a wide range of democratization activities, or donated directly to election monitoring missions and programs.

Since 1998, the Netherlands has decided to focus most of its foreign assistance efforts on fewer countries. Currently, about 50 countries receive Dutch government development assistance; 18 of these countries are categorized as Good Governance, Human Rights and Peace Building countries.¹¹ The development budget allocation for these countries in 2002 was 55 million euro.¹² Because many different assistance projects have multiple goals and separate

budgets are used to fund democratization projects, it is difficult to determine the exact amount of Dutch foreign assistance that is allocated to democratization. The Dutch Foreign Ministry estimates it spent 55 million euro on democratization in 2001.¹³

The Netherlands, as an EU member, also contributes a significant portion of the EU’s foreign aid budget (approximately 5.2 percent). The European Development Fund, which assists countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Region, spent 182 million euro in direct support for human rights and democratization projects between 1997 and 2000 and some 115 million euro on election assistance and monitoring between 1996 and 1999. In 2000 alone, almost 100 million euro was allocated to support human rights and democracy work, more than 60 million euro of which was targeted to support democratization, pluralist civil society, and technical assistance.¹⁴

In 1997, members of the European Union adopted the Treaty of Amsterdam, which strengthened support for democratization efforts both in EC development policy and the evolving CFSP. Since then, most political pressure for democratization is now applied by the EC, rather than through unilateral member initiatives. The EU has also adopted a model democracy clause -- guaranteeing respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights -- that must be included in all cooperation and partnership agreements concluded by the Union.¹⁵ This clause, incorporated as Article 96 in the Cotonou Agreement (the successor to the Lomé Convention), was invoked by the EC to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe in 2002, and on Haiti in 1999.

The Dutch government is also the third largest donor to the United Nations Development Fund, which implements most of the United Nations’ democracy assistance programs. Furthermore, the Netherlands is an active member of the OSCE. The OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) implements a wide range of democracy assistance activities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. In 1999, at the urging of the Netherlands, the OSCE created a register of democratization and human rights experts, who could quickly be called up to staff Rapid Expert Assistance and Cooperation Teams, to help prevent and ease conflicts. The Hague is also the base for the OSCE’s High Commissioner for National Minorities.

The Dutch government is also an active



supporter of pan-European NGOs, such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). In 2001, the Minister for Development announced it would assist the creation of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), as a branch of IDEA. The NIMD is a coalition of the main Dutch political parties, and will work to support political parties in developing countries.

POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIP

The Dutch government has supported a strong EU policy of condemnation of entrenched dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically regarding the rule of Slobodan Milosevic, in the Former Yugoslavia, and Aleksander Lukashenko, in Belarus. Dutch policy is, however, not entirely consistent, choosing “constructive engagement” with other dictatorships, such as China and Cuba.

The Netherlands, along with the United Kingdom, played a key role in maintaining EU sanctions on the Milosevic regime. Only when Vojislav Kostunica was elected president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on October 5, 2000, and Zoran Djindjic was elected prime minister of the Serb Republic in December 2000, did the EU lift sanctions. The only sanctions that remained in place were those on Milosevic and those intended to compel his extradition to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), based in The Hague.

The deteriorating political environment in Belarus in 1996 provided another test for European commitment to democratization. During the November 1996 referendum, President Lukashenko manipulated, through fraud and intimidation, the vote to consolidate his authoritarian regime in Belarus. On 14 September 1997, the European Union decided to deny Belarus’ request to join the Council

of Europe. The EU further decided to suspend the completion of any joint agreements, to deny bilateral ministerial contacts (except through the EU-Troika of the Chairman), and to halt any technical assistance, except for humanitarian, regional and democratization assistance. Since September 1997, the Netherlands has held no bilateral meetings with Belarus (the Netherlands does not have an ambassador in Minsk).

In 1998, the OSCE established an “Advisory and Monitoring Group” to create a dialogue between the Belarus government and the opposition, and to attempt to promote democratization, the rule of law and adherence to human rights principles. To date, there has been little improvement in the political environment. Flawed elections, in September 2001, resulted in Lukashenko’s re-election to the presidency.

Despite strong Dutch positions with regard to Yugoslavia and Belarus, Dutch policy, like that of the rest of Europe, is far from uniform. While the Netherlands has strongly condemned dictators in Europe, it does little to promote democratization in states like China and Cuba. The Dutch government has been a strong proponent of “smart sanctions” against dictators and their cronies. For example, the Netherlands has called a number of times for lifting of the broad United Nations sanctions on Iraq, and replacing them with more targeted sanctions on the Iraqi leadership and military.

The Netherlands has been very supportive of political refugees, particularly those escaping repressive regimes. Political asylum seekers are generally treated well and not forcibly repatriated if they are at risk in their home countries. The Dutch government is also a major donor to the UNHCR.¹⁶ Lately, however, Dutch popular opinion has become more anti-immigrant. Fortunately, *prime facie* political refugees are still almost always granted political asylum.

¹ “Foreign Aid.” The Economist. 1 Mar. 2001. Under an agreement of the former governing coalition in 1998, the Dutch development budget is set at 0.8 percent of its GNP. This also means that the actual amount increases and decreases in sync with the economy.

² Otto, Jan Michiel. “Development Cooperation and Good Governance.” International Spectator 51.4 (April 1997).

³ Randal J. and German T, eds., The Reality of Aid: an Independent Review of International Aid. London: Actionaid, 1994. p. 91.

⁴ Crawford, Gordon. Foreign Aid and Political Reform. New York: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 199 and 205.

⁵ Bergsma, Evelein. General Netherlands News Agency 13 Oct. 1999. “...Second Chamber is concerned about developments in Pakistan.”



⁶ Ibid.

⁷ General Netherlands News Agency. 15 Sep. 1994. Albeit they sent only a frigate and an Orion surveillance aircraft, [there was] “Little enthusiasm among allies for U.S. invasion of Haiti.”

⁸ Email from Marieke van der Sar, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Good Governance and Peace Building Division, 10 June 2002.

⁹ Black, Ian and Stephen Bates. “Britain, Netherlands veto EU Embargo against Nigeria.” The Guardian 21 Nov. 1995.

¹⁰ Patten, “EU electoral observation & assistance in Peru.”

<www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/peru/intor/comm_patten.htm>.

¹¹ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <www.minbuiza.nl>. Currently these countries are: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Georgia, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, El Salvador, Kenya, Moldova, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Palestinian Occupied Territories, and Zimbabwe. 4 Oct. 2002.

¹² Email from Marieke van der Sar. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Good Governance and Peace Building Division. 10 June 2002.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ EuropeAid. Report on the Implementation of the European Commission’s External Assistance, Situation 01/01/01: Staff Working Document, pp. 17-18. <www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/index_en.htm>.

¹⁵ Vinas, Angel. Center for Democracy Research. “External Democracy Support: Challenges and Possibilities.” 14-16 Dec. 2000.

¹⁶ UNHCR. Donor Information: Government of the Netherlands. <<http://www.unhcr.ch>>. The government donated \$47,920,561 to the UNHCR in 2000.