

LAMMERT DE JONG

Lammert de Jong was resident-representative of the Netherlands government in the Netherlands Antilles (1984-1990 and 1993-1996). This paper draws on a book that has been published (in Dutch) in March 2002:

Lammert de Jong, *De werkvloer van het Koninkrijk. Over de samenwerking van Nederland met de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba*. Amsterdam, Rozenberg Publishers 2002.

A conference on: “Overseas pains and pleasures. A comparative analysis of the ”special relation” between motherlands and overseas countries and territories in the Caribbean”, is in the initial stages of planning.

The Society For Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers
edited by Sandra Courtman
Vol.3 2002 ISSN 1471-2024
<http://www.scsonline.freeseerve.co.uk/olvol3.html>

CRACKS IN THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS. AN INSIDE STORY

Dr. Lammert de Jong¹

Abstract

Many of the relationships within the Kingdom of the Netherlands concern cooperation between the Netherlands, in Europe, and the overseas countries in the Caribbean, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. This paper focuses on publicly funded cooperation between governments and of non-governmental organizations, i.e. projects and programs in the overseas countries that are financed by the Netherlands.

First a few core concepts of the relationships within the Kingdom are considered. The responsibilities of the Kingdom, on the one hand, and the autonomy of the Caribbean countries, on the other, are not well defined and do not always match each other comfortably. The official stance of formal equality of the partners in the Kingdom and the actual imbalances in many respects create a breeding ground for a sensitive, unproductive and unwieldy relationship. The empire is long gone; an umpire has taken over with regards to good government, democracy and human rights in the overseas territories.

The cooperation itself is analyzed by looking at the policy changes over the years 1985 – 2001, its principal institutions and its formal procedures and practical behavior. The application of the international development aid model has put the cooperation on a wrong footing. Self-reliance of the overseas countries is no longer a distinctive mark of the foundation of the Kingdom. Institutionally, the cooperation is complicated by the dynamics between the central government of the Netherlands Antilles and the individual island governments. The centrally defined format of the cooperation doesn't correspond with each and every island's aim of a *status aparte* in dealing with the former motherland. The overseas Representation of the Netherlands on the islands,

founded in 1970, has developed from an aid agency in its earlier years to an excellent escort service for the numerous delegations from The Hague at present. The overseas countries are highly sought after destinations by all kinds of delegations from the Netherlands.

Migration to the Netherlands is spawned by periods of socio-economic depression overseas. The (in-) significance of the Kingdom for social and economic development in the overseas countries appears to be its Achilles' heel. The founding charter of the modern Kingdom of the Netherlands (Charter 1954) intentionally gave a rather limited function to the Kingdom. The Kingdom's responsibility of safeguarding human rights and good governance in the overseas countries isn't matched with a formal responsibility for socio-economic development. The annual contributions to economic and social development projects in the overseas countries haven't prevented the rise of a social underclass, especially at Curacao. Through migration this problem has manifested itself in the European part of the Kingdom. The Antillean population in Holland figures disproportionately in unemployment and crime statistics.

Finally the question is broached as to what role the Kingdom should have, now and in the years to come. The Kingdom's limited function no longer fits the increased interaction between Netherlands' and Caribbean affairs; Antillean problems have become Netherlands' problems as well. This may call for a more inclusive and stronger integrated structure of the Kingdom at the expense of the autonomy of the Caribbean countries. At the same time, the European integration of the Netherlands constitutes yet another argument to bring the specific colonial legacy of the Netherlands in the Caribbean region to an end. As a result, the necessarily support structure of the individual European mother countries may become Europeanized as well. What will it be and how will it be brought about? Will the overseas territories and countries have a say in it?

CRACKS IN THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS. AN INSIDE STORY.

Great empire once, poor umpire now

End of empire

*West Indies claim autonomy
authority of the Kingdom
development aid*

A more or less permanent Kingdom

*areas of shared control
umpire without rules
self-reliance?*

What are the stakes nowadays?

*growing interdependency
historical obligations and homeland interests
abdication?*

Once upon a time the Netherlands ruled the waves; today it can hardly cope with what is going wrong in the remaining parts of the Kingdom, that being the Netherlands Antilles (Curacao, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten) and Aruba in the Caribbean. Four hundred years ago the Dutch East Indian Company became one of the world's first multinationals, encompassing a large part of the globe, forming the foundation of the Netherlands' colonial empire. Nowadays, the empire is gone; what is left is a Kingdom that is barely able to enforce right over wrong in its overseas countries. The Netherlands has minimal muscular power with regard to the Caribbean countries of the Kingdom, the last vestiges of its colonial past. Compared to the colonial period, the stakes have changed. In the Netherlands, today, a progressive self-image prevails, one that does not allow for any ambition to rule the waves once again. More significantly, a "never again" sentiment has taken hold, a consequence of repressed memories of a bloody colonial legacy in Indonesia (1945-1949) where the Netherlands lost its empire. The result of this is that the Kingdom of the Netherlands has begun to crack in several ways.

The first significant crack to appear has to do with the Kingdom's long-standing concept that each member country is autonomous and should be left to run its own business. The autonomy of the overseas countries was conceived as the forerunner of future independence. In the 1990s the prospect of independence was exchanged for a more permanent relationship with the Netherlands; the Kingdom was there to stay. The direct result of this changed relationship was that the Netherlands government got more involved in the overall affairs of the Caribbean islands.

Another crack may appear in the unrestricted right of abode for Antilleans in the Netherlands. For the Antillean people the open migration to the Netherlands is one of the most valuable assets of partnership in the Kingdom; it is valued as a lifeline.

Finally, but not insignificantly, is the process of the ongoing European integration. This process will by default further distance the Netherlands from its overseas territories. Some of the Netherlands' post-colonial support structures may give way to European arrangements which will, by necessity, not be as specific as the structures based on the history of a colonial relationship. The overseas territories may ultimately lose their "special relationship" with the Netherlands and its post-colonial perks such as generous financial support, familiarity and a strong problem-solving commitment on the part of the motherland, however paternalistic this may sometimes appear to be.² The current relationship is rooted in a long and specific historical process that has tied the parties together for better and for worse. What may come is difficult to say. In the worst case the infamous European bureaucracy may be blind and deaf to the needs of these fragile island communities, if they are to survive in a world of ever growing global competition.

End of empire

Indonesia's independence marked the end of the Dutch empire. After World War II ended and Japan had capitulated, Indonesia declared itself independent, an act that stunned the Netherlands. The old world was shaken to its core; a new international order was to be established. The Dutch, however, could not envision that its rule in the East had ended. The unilateral declaration of Indonesian independence was fought with the sword. Those new to world power, particularly the United States of America, did not agree and eventually forced the Dutch to negotiate with the Indonesian nationalists. Even then the Netherlands could not believe that "what God had once united, should now fall apart". Going to great lengths, the Netherlands attempted to keep Indonesia within the Kingdom by proposing a form of postcolonial federal union. It was thought that a free association of autonomous states could pacify the ambitions of the independence movement. The Indonesian nationalistic powers, however, would not compromise and after four years of war and several round table conferences the government of the Netherlands formally bent to the will of history. The strength and appeal of Indonesia's independence movement had been misread and could not be contained within a liberal post-colonial Charter that aimed to keep Indonesia within the Kingdom.

West-Indies claim autonomy³

At the time when the outlines of a post-colonial order were being drawn, during the end of World War II, the Netherlands did not distinguish between its different colonized territories: the nation being comprised of the immense Indonesian archipelago in the East and the small territories in the Latin American hemisphere including Surinam and the Dutch West Indies in the Caribbean. In the process of de-colonization they were simply lumped together. After Indonesia pulled out of the Kingdom, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles reaped the fruits of the Netherlands' attempts to keep Indonesia on board. The West-Indian countries had been party to the Netherlands promise, broadcast on 6 December 1942 by Queen Wilhelmina in exile in London, to de-colonize the Kingdom. The arrangements that were then conceived were not meant for these much

smaller countries. The Caribbean territories, however, did not budge on the concept of a free association of autonomous states as the heir to the colonial Kingdom and stuck to the original liberal terms of the Charter of the Kingdom-to-be. The Caribbean countries claimed autonomy, not independence. They aimed to be partners on equal footing with the Netherlands and succeeded, at least on paper, when in 1954 a new Charter of the Kingdom was enacted. The Charter designated the Kingdom as a federal state, comprising three autonomous countries, the Netherlands, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles, albeit with a rather asymmetrical internal structure.⁴ The Charter included the rule that any changes require the unanimous consent of the parties involved. The Netherlands gave in to the aspirations of these small island states, believing at the time that there was neither much to gain nor much to lose. The empire was already gone. Moreover, the Charter was not meant for eternity, it was then believed that one day the Caribbean countries would become independent.

Authority of the Kingdom

The Netherlands is one of the three partners in the Kingdom; at the same time the Netherlands supersedes the other partners when Dutch institutions and regulations are applied as institutions and regulations of the Kingdom. The designers of the Charter purposefully limited its authority. The Charter was a landmark document concluding the colonial period. Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles would, as autonomous countries, take care of their own business; neither the Kingdom nor the Netherlands would have a say in local affairs such as government finance, social and economic development, cultural affairs and education. The founding fathers of the Charter defined the Kingdom essentially as a federal institution whose formal authority was limited mainly to foreign affairs, defence, and nationality/citizenship. In addition, the Charter stipulated areas of communal responsibilities, which require the partners to cooperate. These communal areas are the rule of law, good governance, democracy and human rights. In these areas, the overseas countries are equally responsible but the Kingdom has the ultimate obligation of safeguarding these principles of good government. Finally, it was agreed upon that the parties should assist each other. In the years that followed this mutual assistance morphed into a format of international development aid.

Development aid

As long as future independence was a dominant prospect, a system of development aid formed the core of the Kingdom relations. The Dutch aligned their aid to the development priorities as determined by the autonomous Caribbean government. At that time a socialized world vision prevailed in the Netherlands, which included the belief that the aid of rich countries could help poor countries to develop so that they would ultimately be able to stand on their own. Following this line, it was believed that, with the help of development aid, the islands would eventually become viable self-governing units. Whatever the outcome, the Dutch felt they were serving the well-being of the island communities, which made for a “one big happy family” feeling in the post-colonial era. Nevertheless, the Dutch parliament and media did occasionally scrutinize this aid to the Antilles as the islands fell into the category of high-income countries.⁵ Not much happened though; as long as the prospect of independence prevailed, the development aid would eventually come to a natural conclusion and so end this debate. The effectiveness of the aid was also occasionally questioned. Did it really make a difference? This question itself mattered little since the cost of aid to the

Antilles was insubstantial in relation to the total government budget. Financially it made little difference for the Netherlands.

The Netherlands opted for an overseas policy of non-interference. One of the Kingdom ministers in those years, Jan de Koning, qualified the baseline of his policy as “three times lucky”, suggesting that he would almost always comply with Antillean proposals when these were repeated over and over again. In his view the Antilles, not the Netherlands, must set the priorities for how the Netherlands’ aid budget was to be spent. Moreover, he was reluctant to enter the autonomous purview of the Netherlands Antilles: “Even when they make a mess of it, it is still their mess”. A sentiment of “let it be” prevailed. This changed when the prospect of independence faded for the overseas territories. For the islands as well as for the Netherlands, independence is no longer the ultimate goal.

A more or less permanent Kingdom

In the early 1990s the winds changed and requirements of good governance and democratic law and order took precedence over the concept of future independence. A political consensus emerged that the Caribbean islands were too vulnerable to become sovereign self-governing states; they needed external support structures. This change manifested itself after Aruba seceded in 1986 from the Netherlands Antilles and obtained a separate status as an autonomous country in the Kingdom on similar and equal terms as the Netherlands Antilles. Aruba’s secession was initially granted on the condition of its becoming an independent country after a period of 10 years. As soon as Aruba obtained its separate status, however, it began to renegotiate the independence clause. Aruba had never intended to become independent; it wanted to remain a partner in the Kingdom. Without much ado the Netherlands gave in. Consequently the prospect of independence was exchanged for a more or less permanent relationship, both for Aruba and for the Netherlands Antilles. The Kingdom was here to stay; the moment for independence of the overseas countries had passed.

As a result the Netherlands has become more involved in the affairs of the Caribbean islands. The need for this involvement with the islands’ governance has been reinforced by changes in the international order. Crimes, such as international money laundering (through fiscal loopholes) and the drug trade, have been trying to find footholds in places outside the dominant formal international powers. Terrorism can now be added to this list. Left on their own, the Caribbean islands are considered defenceless, sub-scale territories, which could easily fall prey to international lawlessness. How the affairs are run on the islands has thus become an international concern as well. As the Kingdom represents the Caribbean countries in international affairs, the Netherlands is held accountable. A stronger involvement of the Netherlands in the local politics of the island governments took over, particularly in the areas of justice and human rights, prison conditions, government finances, the acquisition of loans on the international financial markets, the offshore financial sector, the overstuffed government bureaucracies, the patronage system of government administrations, etc. Consequently these countries began to feel that the Netherlands overruled the Kingdom’s concept that each country was autonomous and had the authority to run its own affairs.

The Netherlands’ motivation to be more involved in the overseas countries is not only driven by the Kingdom’s international obligations of good governance and the rule of

law. How the affairs on the Caribbean islands are run, has definitely become a domestic Netherlands' issue. Social degeneration and economic downturn on the islands ripple over to the Netherlands. The open borders within the Kingdom facilitate a strong migration to the Netherlands. Migration itself has always been a dominant Caribbean phenomenon but had been mainly consigned to migration among the islands themselves. Against the backdrop of the social and economic depression at home, the Netherlands is perceived as an overseas paradise. The good life in the European part of the Kingdom as put forward by the mass media and the large Antillean population in the Netherlands (who are all relatives) creates a strong impetus for many people to leave the islands for *Olanda*. This migration is accompanied by a score of social problems migrating to the Netherlands as well. In the media, in parliament and in social perception an Antillean problem has arisen.

The old system of development aid eventually became obsolete as recognition of the obligations of good governance and democratic law took precedence. In former years, the Antillean development policy, if any, directed the Netherlands aid, which resulted in big budgets spent on infrastructure such as harbors and airports, roads, houses, the restoration of monuments. Now the nature and direction of the aid has come under serious scrutiny. The obligation of the Kingdom to safeguard the principles of good government in the overseas countries has become a more significant rule of conduct with regard to the appropriation of the aid budget. As a result technical assistance from the Netherlands to the Caribbean islands jumped from a mere Hfl 10 mln in 1986 to fivefold that amount in 1995. Many officials and advisors from the Netherlands were, literally, flown into prominent advisory or executive positions on the islands, especially those with expertise in the fields of public finance, government administration and justice.⁶ One former prime minister of the Netherlands Antilles referred to this influx of European Dutch as "the re-whitening" of government. The share of technical assistance in the total aid budget to the Antilles increased from 9% in 1990 to almost 30% in 1995. This influx of Dutch technical assistants with their overseas allowances jacked up the rent on the islands' housing market to levels never seen before.

Areas of shared control

In the early 1990s when the reality of an extended Kingdom with partners in the Caribbean region became a permanent phenomenon, the Charter's original definition of limited authority and responsibilities was not revised to reflect the new status quo. The social and political elites in the Caribbean countries had always opposed such an overhaul, as it did not serve their interests. Running their own affairs has always been of paramount interest to them. Autonomy was there to stay! As a result, the intervention of the Kingdom in areas where the local governments are failing has become a very complex and very trying issue. A paradoxical situation has surfaced. The emphasis on local autonomy had not resulted in a relaxed relationship with the Netherlands. On the contrary, the wide-ranging autonomy created a very laborious and unwieldy partnership. In significant areas where the Caribbean governments are not able to perform according to standards of good governance, the Kingdom lacks the instruments necessary to safeguard these standards and to change the situation. Half a century after the inauguration of an enlightened post-colonial order, these limitations now result in serious cracks in the very existence of the Kingdom. What was once a progressive liberal concept has become unworkable in the 21st century.

The rule of the Kingdom is limited and differentiates according to various government functions. However, the different functions are interrelated and therefore cut through any formal distinctions made between Caribbean and Kingdom controls. In actual reality good governance is not limited just to the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Sub-standard education, high levels of youth unemployment, poverty, family deficiencies and neighbourhood slums call for good governance as well! The social disintegration of more and more neighbourhoods on the island of Curacao is out of control, not only for the local government that is responsible for this state of affairs but also for the Kingdom. According to its formal Charter, the Kingdom does not have authority to intervene in these areas. At the same time, the Kingdom cannot safeguard the rule of law when it does not adequately control a minimum level of social and economic development in the Caribbean countries. Pourier, prime-minister of the Netherlands Antilles, once contrasted the enforcement of the rule of law in terms of the creation of a Coast Guard (“very appropriate”) with the urgent need for funds to fight poverty: “When more and more people sink below the poverty line, the trade and smuggling of drugs (to the Netherlands) becomes an attractive and devastating alternative”. Devastating not only for the people concerned but also for the rule of law. Hirsch Ballin, a former Kingdom minister, recently raised the question of whether the growing interdependencies in the modern world still allow for a distinction between internal (Caribbean) and Kingdom affairs.⁷ The boundaries between the formally defined responsibilities of the Kingdom and the affairs under local Caribbean government control have become rather porous.

Umpire without rules

Being no superpower, the Dutch do not want to be an umpire in faraway regions. Development aid is fine and befits a progressive self-image. But wielding control in overseas territories, which once were under Dutch colonial rule, contradicts this progressive image. As a consequence, Dutch policy is half-hearted and, in the long run, may not stand up to the requirements of modern times. On one hand the Netherlands is being held hostage by the liberal order of the Kingdom while on the other the demands of the international community now require that these countries be supervised and taken to task when necessary. In modern times small sub-size island states do not fit into the old-fashioned system of separate territorial states⁸. Former colonial mother countries are being held accountable for how affairs are run in these parts of the world.

Equally important is that the Netherlands is not keen to fall back upon the mores of the colonial era. In 1969 the Dutch Marines had to restore order on the island of Curacao because there was rioting, burning and looting due to labour and racial unrest. This experience stunned the Dutch post-colonial consciousness. The bloodshed of the colonial war in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 had been erased from the Netherlands memory as soon as the Dutch military were back home. For the Netherlands government it was traumatic to realize in 1969 that its colonial legacy might still require the use of military force. Prior to the incidents in 1969, a romantic idea of “islands in the sun” had defined what a post-colonial Kingdom was about. In reaction to the military operation on Curacao, the Dutch government pressed the Caribbean countries of the Kingdom to become independent. Surinam agreed and was rushed into independence in 1975 with a majority of only one vote in the Surinamese parliament. With the benefit of hindsight, Dutch politicians today agree, though not outspokenly, that the way Surinam’s independence was handled has not been a grand

act of post-colonial stewardship. The Caribbean islands have not wanted to follow Surinam's agreement to become an independent state, and that for good reasons.⁹

The Dutch are left with the uncomfortable feeling of being stuck with the islands. The social disintegration on Curacao has manifested itself overseas in the form of high levels of migration to the Netherlands. So-called "Antillean" neighbourhoods have sprung up with high levels of unemployment and crime. Antillean affairs have obviously now become part and parcel of the domestic affairs of the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the Kingdom lacks the authority to intervene in much of the local Antillean island affairs.

These days the Netherlands does not know how to deal with this last colonial legacy especially now that the international context has fundamentally changed.

Self-reliance?

To rid itself of the unruly household of the Kingdom, the Dutch government proclaims, since the end of the 1990s, to be pursuing a condition of *self-reliance* for the Caribbean countries. The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba should be able to run their own public affairs. *Self-reliance* would add maturity to the governmental and financial relations within the Kingdom and bring the turbulent times of: "the Dutch – Antillean Relationship: Sensitive, Unequal and Laborious"¹⁰, to an end. This is easier said than done; it is also against better judgment. In actual practice, relations between the Netherlands and the overseas Caribbean countries are miles apart from what is proclaimed. For instance, just two years ago the island administration of Curacao had accumulated large arrears in the payment of the pharmacy bills of civil servants and low-income groups that qualify for such benefits. The pharmacies insisted that their customers pay in cash before receiving any medicine. The government of the Netherlands had to step in to pay off these arrears in order to safeguard the supply of medicine. Another example is the ruckus around the migration of youngsters with criminal records from Curacao to the Netherlands. The rumor was that Antillean public officials had actively supported such migration in order to get rid of some of the problems they, themselves, could not solve. The fierce resistance of the Antillean government to proposals by the Netherlands to better regularize the migration of minors, e.g. by means of a mandatory civics course, is further evidence of the mounting discord within the Kingdom. Finally, a further disintegration seems unavoidable now that Sint Maarten wants to secede from the Netherlands Antilles to obtain the status of an autonomous country like Aruba did more than 15 years ago.

What are the stakes nowadays?

The stakes have changed and some of the perceived stakes never existed. The transfer of monies has never been the principle binding power of the Kingdom. Early on the Spaniards dubbed the islands "islas inutiles". Contrary to popular belief in the Antilles, the Caribbean islands have never been significant in economic terms for the mother country. The proceeds of the slave trade of the Dutch West Indian Company did not finance the Golden Age (as the 17-th century is labelled in Holland); the Dutch East Indian Company saw to that.¹¹ These days the Netherlands' overseas interests do not play a role in the world of economics and capital. For their part, the Antilles did not surf on the historical wave of independence in the 1960's and '70's. In their decision to remain a partner in the Kingdom, the transfer of monies did not play a dominant role.

By all accounts, the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba are high-income countries; in the 1950's they were even better off than post-war Holland. When in 1952 heavy storms hit the southern part of Holland and thousands of people drowned, the Antilles provided some substantial aid to the disaster areas.

For some the idea of a Kingdom that extends to the Caribbean region, serves the Netherlands' ego. Post-colonial relations with France and the United Kingdom are reminiscent of the days of empire. The Kingdom shares borders with Venezuela, with mutually visiting heads of state: the Queen of the Kingdom to Caracas and the President of Venezuela to The Hague. The United States of America is a partner in Caribbean affairs and the US Coast Guard works together with the Kingdom's Coast Guard in the Caribbean region. The Kingdom still does count in foreign affairs however small its European homeland. Van Aartsen, Foreign Affairs minister of the Netherlands, bombastically expressed these sentiments when opening the Ambassadors Conference in 2000: "The Kingdom is located strategically in Europe and in the Western Hemisphere. The Netherlands is the portal to Europe, Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles constitute the core of the Western Hemisphere". These inflated sentiments may not be very significant but they do count.

Growing interdependency

The Netherlands' overseas commitment has by necessity increased because of a growing interdependence between the partners in the Kingdom. Migration to the Netherlands increased dramatically. Between 1985 and 1992 the number of Antilleans and Arubans in the Netherlands tripled to 90.000. Van der Hulst estimated that in 1997 around 104.000 Antilleans would live in the Netherlands. In 2001 this figure reached 115.000. The Curacao census in 2001 shows that the populace of Curacao dropped from 150.000 in 1997 to 130.000 in 2001, a negative growth of almost 15 % in just a few years. If the population of the Netherlands had dropped by a similar percentage in such a short time, deafening alarm signals would have been triggered in politics and Dutch society. The impact of so many islanders migrating to the Netherlands on the morale of the people who stay put on the island, should not be underestimated. The large Antillean population in the Netherlands entails heavy comings and goings of persons between the European and Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. The frequency of flights of KLM, the Royal Dutch Airlines, between Amsterdam and the Netherlands' Antilles rose to figures never seen before. In just one year, 1998/1999, KLM flew about 800 flights between Amsterdam and the Antilles.¹²

As for the Antillean migrants to the Netherlands, they find themselves no longer living in a country where representatives of their own culture and language run the government system. For them the hotly debated tenet of Antillean autonomy has been exchanged for residence in the Netherlands. That said, it is interesting to note that during a lecture at the Caribbean Institute in Leiden, the Netherlands, almost everyone there disagreed with the thesis that the Antilles would eventually become an institutional part of the Netherlands in the form of a province or municipality. Only very few of the predominantly Caribbean audience half-heartedly accepted this premise. While many of this audience had chosen to live in the Netherlands, they still could not envisage a future development where the autonomy of the Antilles would be exchanged for a stronger integration of their Caribbean island into European Holland.

In a Kingdom with open borders for its inhabitants, the mutual dependencies between the partners have at present sharply increased. As stated before, the social disintegration on the island of Curacao has rippled over to the Netherlands. The new wave of young Antillean immigrants appears to have difficulty integrating into Dutch society. The Caribbean immigrants are of Dutch nationality; they hold Dutch passports and they supposedly speak the Dutch language, although these days very often they do not. Many of them feel they are entitled to the same domestic and welfare subsidies as their Dutch counterparts, which in fact they are. Generally speaking they arrive lacking the immigrant's ambition to make it in a "new" world; the Netherlands is not seen as a "new" world but rather as an overseas part of their home country. Illustrative is that the Netherlands and the Antillean government could not even reach agreement over a mandatory civics course (including Dutch language, basic politics, social customs) for these youngsters prior to their departure to the Netherlands. The Antillean government fiercely opposes any distinction of a mandatory nature between European and Caribbean Dutch passport holders.

Today the Netherlands' homeland interests are more intertwined with Antillean politics than ever before. The formal safeguards of the Kingdom cover only a limited number of government principles and are difficult to activate; their operational value is rather weak. Added to these limitations, the economic and social performance in the Caribbean countries increasingly affects the Netherlands homeland interests because of the open borders between the countries of the Kingdom.

Historical obligations and homeland interests

As part and parcel of its historical legacy, the Kingdom must continue to safeguard the principles of good governance such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights in the overseas countries in the Caribbean. The Caribbean countries no longer claim, nor does the Netherlands insist, on full independence in the foreseeable future. Concomitantly the Netherlands has exchanged its overseas freewheeling policy for a more structured format. The Dutch have become more involved in the affairs of the Antilles, not for reasons of financial gain or territorial ambitions but because of historical obligations and the requirements of international law and order in modern times.

At the same time the Dutch post-colonial readiness to provide support to these high-income countries, let alone to set things right on these far away islands, is eroding fast. The generation in the Netherlands that still remembers the historical watershed between colonial empires and Third World independence is retiring. Maybe even more important is that Dutch nationals are losing a sense of responsibility for the colonial past, as the Netherlands has become a country of immigrants. What once was Dutch is no more. In 1998 almost half of the youngsters in Amsterdam and Rotterdam (5 – 14 years) are of foreign and non-Western origin.¹³ A conservative prognosis tells that in 2015 ethnic minorities will take up a share of 40% to 45% of the population in the major cities; most likely the sum of these minorities will have become a majority by then in these cities.¹⁴

Immigration and integration were paramount issues in the dramatic parliamentary elections of 15 May 2002 in the Netherlands, which included the murder of Fortuyn, a prominent candidate. The outcome upset the political establishment and dramatically changed the balance of power between the political parties. A wave of relief passed through both the immigrant communities as well as the old-time Dutch establishment when a few hours after the murder, the suspect was caught and described as a white Dutchman in his 30s with a red baseball cap. Two weeks later, during a debate on future Kingdom relations in a prominent political clubhouse in The Hague¹⁵, one of the new 'Fortuyn' members of parliament stated that he would no longer accept that the Netherlands cannot overrule the Caribbean partners in the Kingdom, to make amendments to its Charter. Even before the current situation, Antillean politicians sometimes lamented that they have lost their friends in Dutch politics. Some feared that the open borders between the countries in the Kingdom might close. Recently the Netherlands' Kingdom minister, De Vries, foresaw a growing distance between the Netherlands and the Caribbean countries.¹⁶

Abdication?

Will Dutch self-interest eventually become the determining factor in the stance it takes towards the Antillean partners in the Kingdom? As if foreshadowing a possible affirmative answer to this question, a new category of professionals who have lost confidence in the island governments, are now also migrating to Holland. They do not want to be stuck on a Caribbean island and thus opt for a better future in Europe. The migration of the professional class makes for a further erosion of the self-governing capacity of the islands. Little can be done to change this course of events, as the Kingdom of the Netherlands lacks both the formal authority and the Dutch lack the political will to step in. Earlier attempts to arrive at a stronger integration of the Caribbean islands in the Kingdom of the Netherlands have failed. The formal structure of the Kingdom appears to fail in times of economic and social depression in its Caribbean parts.

It is not yet clear yet if the Kingdom of the Netherlands "as is" can be redesigned into some kind of a bilateral union, which would be able to safeguard a law and order system in its Caribbean parts as is nowadays is required. The colonial history of the relationship as well as the postcolonial longstanding and strong doctrine of autonomy may obstruct any radical reorientation of the Kingdom. Still, in bad times the Netherlands feels overrun by Caribbean problems it cannot control. As a result, historical benevolence may give way to a stronger sense of self-interest.

In a world of free enterprise, globalisation and international competition, the detritus of these last stages of decolonisation no longer appeal to the public and its representatives in Dutch politics. What is so particular about these islands? The relationship seems to be moving further apart than closer together. The "special relationship" of the partners in the Kingdom is held sway by *globalization* and *free market* forces in the international arena. These days the Caribbean islands have to compete not only with the world's economic blockbusters but also with the poorest countries of the Third World. The shadows of these international trends have become visible. For the Netherlands Antilles, the International Monetary Fund has been contracted to spell out the terms and conditions of the assistance Curacao should get from the Netherlands. The World Bank has been invited to make an economic study while the Organization for Economic

Cooperation and Development will analyze the educational system in the Antilles and Aruba. Equally significant is the aim of the Dutch government to contract out the administration of the Dutch monies going to the Antilles to an independent regional agent. It has become obvious that the government of the Netherlands is edging to the wings; more and more of the charges of the Kingdom are being contracted out to international agencies.

On the other hand, the interdependencies of the parties in the Kingdom have grown significantly. The Caribbean population in the European part of the Kingdom is larger than ever. The numerous KLM flights are almost always fully booked; an Antillean airline now also connects between Curacao and Amsterdam. Curbing future migration will be a hell of a job with a bridgehead of over 100.000 Antillean “relatives” already living in the Netherlands. In the Dutch parliament and media, Antillean affairs now receive much more attention than in the last quarter of the 20th century, though mostly in negative terms. This complex of dependencies makes for the real tasks to administer by the offices of the Kingdom and forms the core content of the Kingdom relations. It is not so much *self-reliance* that forms the *raison d'être* of the Kingdom but rather an adequate administration of the mutual interests of the participants.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is under strong cross-pressures. What will it be? A stronger formal integration of the European and Caribbean parts in an updated Kingdom with more functions and more authority? If not, will the borders remain open and migration uncurbed? Or, will the Dutch try to close the books and hand over significant parts of the provisions of the Kingdom to European Union rule and regulations, possibly in unison with the United Kingdom and the French Republic and their overseas territories in the Caribbean? For the Antilles the stakes are high. Due to changes in the political balance in the Netherlands and the on-going integration of the European Union, a new partnership will be required. Can the Antilles budge on the doctrine of autonomy in order to save full partnership?

Amsterdam, 8 July 2002

¹ The author was resident-representative of the Netherlands government in the Netherlands Antilles (1984 –1990 and 1993 – 1996). This paper draws on a book that has been published (in Dutch) in March 2002: Lammert de Jong, *De werkvloer van het Koninkrijk. Over de samenwerking van Nederland met de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba*. Amsterdam, Rozenberg Publishers 2002. A conference on: *Overseas pains and pleasures. A comparative analysis of the “special relation” between motherlands and overseas countries and territories in the Caribbean*, is in the initial stages of planning.

² See Paul Sutton about the British ‘special relationship’ with the Caribbean: “The major effect (...), along with reduced British interest, is an inevitable further erosion of the British ‘special relationship’ with the Commonwealth Caribbean. The direction is clear: the Caribbean is in the Americas and for British foreign policy it will increasingly be seen, as it is in the EU, as part of Latin America”, pag. 56. In: *Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Britain and the Commonwealth Caribbean*. In: *Itinerario*, volume xxv. *European Journal of Overseas History*, 2000/2. And David Jessop, Executive Director of the Caribbean Council for Europe: “As matters stand, the collective official memory of Britain’s relationship with the Caribbean is now close to being lost. So much so that any deeper engagement with Europe may diminish this to the point of extinction”. In: ‘The Week in Europe’, 11 June 2001.

³ This paragraph draws on the work of dr. Inge Klinkers, *De weg naar het Statuut. Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid in de Caraïben (1940-1954) in vergelijkend perspectief*. Dissertation. University of Utrecht, 1999.

-
- ⁴ E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin, "The Netherlands Antilles, Aruba and the Netherlands have their own parliaments, governments, judicial structures and constitutions, with responsibilities at federal level (or "Kingdom level as it is called in the Netherlands) being limited to foreign policy, defence, nationality, safeguarding human rights and good governance, and a few other areas". The constitutional relationship between the Caribbean Overseas Countries and Territories and their mother countries, p. 25/26. In: Conference Report. The economic development of the Caribbean overseas countries and territories: the role of their European partners. The Hague, 20–21 June 2001.
- ⁵ In the Netherlands Antilles is the GDP per capita (1998) around \$ 11.000 and in Aruba \$ 16.000. Pitou van Dijck, Opportunities in the region, table 1. In: Conference report. The economic development of the Caribbean overseas countries and territories: the role of the European partners. The Hague, 20 – 21 June 2001.
- ⁶ Netherlands Antilles. Elements of a strategy for economic recovery and sustainable growth. Interim report, World Bank Mission, December 5-20, 2001, page 10: "Technical assistance has been provided on a large scale, from both public and private sources in the Netherlands, over many years. This assistance has contributed to a relatively high level of development of key institutions, the legal system, social services and education. The assistance has inevitably also contributed to a strong European (Dutch) orientation in the development systems and programs in the Netherlands Antilles". The World Bank. Latin America and the Caribbean Region. January 2001.
- ⁷ E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin, Herdenken van 1648 in een veranderde wereld, pag. 17 t/m 20. In: Breekbare banden. Feiten en visies over Aruba, Bonaire en Curaçao na de Vrede van Munster. 1648-1998. Maritza Coomans-Eustatia e.a. (red.). Stichting Libri Antilliani, 1998.
- ⁸ E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin, Conference report, page 26. The Hague, 20-21 June 2001.
- ⁹ Helen Hintjes: 'For a long time, the French Caribbean was a haven of relative calm and prosperity in the Caribbean. The Dutch Antilles and Aruba and the British dependent territories (now renamed UK Overseas Territories) have also generally shared this good fortune. Today the relative prosperity of the non-independent territories is becoming more marked as independent Caribbean states slit into economic recession and growing poverty, so that their political systems and leaders face an endemic crisis of political legitimacy'. In: Itinerario, volume xxv, 'What is Freedom? Comparing Notions of Right & Responsibilities in the French Caribbean, pag. 23. European Journal of Overseas History, 2/2001. Also: Gert Oostindie, Caribische dilemma's in een "stagnerend dekolonisatie proces, pag. 11. KITLV Uitgeverij 1994. And: Gert Oostindie en Peter Verton, Ki sorto di Reino? What kind of Kingdom? Visies en verwachtingen van Antillianen en Arubanen omtrent het Koninkrijk, pag. 32/33. Sdu Uitgevers, Den Haag 1998.
- ¹⁰ Alfons van Marrewijk, Internationalisation, Co-operation and Ethnicity in the Telecom Sector. An Ethnographic study of the Cross-Cultural Co-operation of PTT Telecom in Unisource, the Netherlands Antilles and Indonesia, pag. 190. In particular Chapter 8: 'Unsuccessful Cross-Cultural Co-operation in the Netherlands Antilles: Unbalanced Power Relations', pag. 188 – 231. Eburon Delft, 1999.
- ¹¹ Gert Oostindie, Het paradijs overzee. De 'Nederlandse Caraïben en Nederland, pag. 306. Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1997.
- ¹² In: Besluit van de directeur-generaal van de Nederlandse mededingingsautoriteit tot afwijzing van een verzoek tot toepassing van art. 56 van de Mededingingswet. Betreft zaak: Zaaknr. 273 en 906; Vrije Vogel/KLM en Swart/KLM. D.d. 8 november 2000.
- ¹³ Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, Rapportage minderheden 1999. Positie in het onderwijs en op de arbeidsmarkt, pag. 45. P.T.M. Tesser, J.G.F. Merens, C.S. van Praag. Den Haag, september 1999.
- ¹⁴ Ibidem, pag. 50. Ethnic minorities are defined as residents in the Netherlands who are born in foreign non-western countries or born in the Netherlands out of foreign non-western born parents. For 1998 the numbers of non-western residents in the Netherlands (x 1.000) are: Turkey 280, Morocco 234, Suriname 257, Netherlands Antilles 71, Asia, Africa, Latin America 316. The total number of non-western residents is 1.159; this is 7,4% of the total population. This number doesn't include immigrants of Indonesian origin; they are separately categorised and number 215.000 (1998). Immigrants of Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles are a minority in the total non-western immigrant population.
- ¹⁵ Sociëteit De Witte's Koninkrijkstafel, 17th May 2002.
- ¹⁶ Speech at the University of the Netherlands Antilles, 24 October 2001.

This paper was given at The Society For Caribbean Studies Conference held at The University of Warwick, 1st – 3rd July 2002

Copyright remains with the author.

PLEASE USE YOUR BROWSER BUTTON TO GO BACK