NEW KNOWLEDGE about
The Netherlands

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about The Netherlands.
We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

Until the 1950-1960s, the Netherlands were characterized by more emigration than immigration but by the late 1960s in addition to incoming flows from its citizens from the former colony of Indonesia, the Dutch government was recruiting unskilled workers from Southern Europe, Turkey, and Morocco. The idea that immigration was temporary only lasted until the mid-1970s, when a number of factors convinced the political elite that the benign neglect of immigrant communities was counterproductive. It became clear that immigrants were here to stay, so throughout the 1980s the Netherlands developed an active ethnic minority policy aimed at promoting the participation of immigrants in social and economic life, and stimulating good inter-ethnic relations, with a focus on equal opportunity and the fight against discrimination.

Thus, for long, the Netherlands had a reputation as a country welcoming to other cultures and respectful of the rights of immigrants. At present, it is often mentioned as illustrative of the crisis of multiculturalism and of the challenges arising by immigrant integration debates in Europe. Religious groups, and in particular Muslim communities, and immigrants tend to be at the heart of most public debates that focus more on defining the boundaries of what is tolerable and what is intolerable, rather than moving from tolerance to genuine recognition and acceptance.

A major issue in Dutch public debates on diversity relates to the relationship between, on the one hand, the cultural and institutional legacies of pillarisation and, on the other hand, immigrant integration policies and the ways ethnic organisations and institutions have been recognised by Dutch authorities. In public debates, Muslims occupy centre stage, but depending on the events or issues that set off debates, other religious groups (Orthodox Calvinists or Jews) or other immigrant groups enter the picture. A major concern is whether the existence of special religious institutions and networks of ethnic organisations may result in a highly segregated society in which different groups lead "parallel lives". Another major concern is whether there is 'too much room' for conservative religious groups and immigrants to adhere to extremely illiberal ideas and values and to uphold forms of behaviour and cultural practices that violate liberal norms of equality and individual freedoms that are characteristic of Dutch society. **Some argue that at present, the Dutch context provides too many associational freedoms and grants too much collective autonomy to conservative religious and immigrant groups.** There is thus much **debate in the public sphere on what practices and ideas should not be tolerated in a liberal society.**

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project, we investigated how ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: **education** and **political life**:

o We examined the on-going debate on **religious schools in the Dutch education system**;
o We studied the approach to the way in which **citizenship education** is taught and the values it aims at instilling; and
o We looked at the debate on how, when and in what circumstances **asylum seekers should be tolerated.**

Evaluation of discourses and practices in our case studies:

	Institutional and legal framework	**Practical situation**	**Public discourses**
Religious schools in the Dutch education system	Recognition of religious schools in constitutional rights and statutory equality	Recognition of moderate religious schools, but directors of Orthodox and Islamic schools feel their schools are merely "tolerated"	Concentrate on the limits of tolerance and the need to identify practices of Reformed and Islamic schools deemed intolerable
Teaching, tolerance and citizenship education	Formally schools are obliged to touch upon these issues in their curriculum, but no time or money has been allocated to make this genuinely possible	Schools focus on learning tolerance and recognition in behaviour and around focussed projects and activities.	Political and public discourse stress the need for adaptation to Dutch values, schools opt for more pragmatic strategies
Protest and debate around failed asylum seekers	Strict and muscular immigration and asylum policy: "those who cannot stay must leave"	Important number of rejected asylum seekers who *de facto* are residing in the Netherlands and growing unease around individual "lamentable" cases	On the one hand, continued political support for strict immigration and asylum policies, on the other hand, municipalities and the general public protest against suffering in individual cases

RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS IN THE DUTCH EDUCATION SYSTEM

State funding for confessional schools is still in place but over the past decade there is more and more debate on the structure of the Dutch educational system. There is an on-going discussion on secularism and whether or not the state should finance faith-based schools, as well as on the degree of associational autonomy of denominational schools, for example with regard to curriculum, the hiring of teachers and the right to refuse to admit pupils.

The Principals of Reformed and Islamic schools that we interviewed during the ACCEPT PLURALISM project expressed a concern about existing stereotypes and misconceptions about their schools. Principals of Reformed schools wanted their schools to be positively recognized as a part of Dutch society and objected to the image of their schools as "abnormal" or "isolationist". However, the concept of tolerance also plays an important role for the way the Reformed view their position in Dutch society. Even though the majority of the Dutch population may disapprove of the ideas and ways of living of the Reformed, they feel they have a right to exist and not to be discriminated against. In this context, **tolerance means they should have the opportunity to live according to their convictions and rules, also in the domain of education**. **For Islamic schools this appears to be different**.

Muslims are not (yet) an established religious minority and are still fighting for the right to be seen as Dutch (i.e. not "foreign"). At Islamic schools the management seems to be primarily

concerned with improving the performance of the school, both in terms of teaching and in terms of management.

The debate about Reformed and Islamic schools deals with defining **whether some of their practices and regulations are beyond what is tolerable in a liberal-democratic society**. The most sensitive issue in this respect is when these schools select pupils or staff in such a way that they violate norms of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Some Reformed schools want to be able to refuse teachers on grounds of their sexual orientation, their civil status (e.g. being divorced), or of their religion. There is less and less understanding for religious schools to discriminate in this way for three reasons. First, because they are faith-based organizations that employ regular personnel (i.e. teachers) and not core religious organizations (such as churches) that employ religious personnel; second, because they are publicly financed; and, third, because as educational institutions they should exemplify, not violate, key legal norms, such as non-discrimination.

For more orthodox religious groups, "tolerance" remains an important trope, because they argue that **the fact they deviate strongly from some of the mainstream norms still obliges that majority to tolerate them, even if it is with "gritted teeth"**.

CHANGING IDEAS ABOUT TEACHING AND TOLERANCE

In the Netherlands, the general and increasing insistence on defending "shared values" has been associated with a call for **citizenship education**. Citizenship education should help install liberal-democratic values in children and teach them about the norms enshrined in the Dutch constitution and in mainstream, so-called liberal-secular society. The presumed need to teach about Dutch cultural values and Dutch history, important in putting citizenship education on the political agenda, was quickly diverted in the policy process.

Researchers and experts involved in its implementation are framing citizenship education in the direction of **trying to increase debate, critical thinking and reducing prejudice, far more than aiming to teach "Dutch norms and values"**. The experts we interviewed underlined that in order for citizenship education to be successful in increasing social coherence, schools should **not just teach tolerance but they should practice tolerance** and clearly focus on non-discrimination.

It is obvious that in political rhetoric, public debate and at the level of "policy declarations" concepts such as the "need for integration", "ending multiculturalism and cultural relativism", "pride of Dutch culture" or "good citizenship" have gained tremendous popularity. However, it is also obvious that they have largely contributed to a "politics of symbolic action." Policy goals such as "teaching good citizenship and respect for constitutional values" have remained extremely vague and effective instruments to introduce cultural assimilation top-down do not exist.

THE DEBATE ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

The hardening of asylum policy discourse and practice had resulted in individuals and groups finding themselves in situations that are deemed "intolerable" by many citizens, NGO's and even public authorities, notably at the local level. Thus, concepts such as respect, recognition or tolerance become important because they are no longer about engagement with (cultural and religious) practices, they have become related to issues such as the basic right to be a part of a society and have access to rights (of residence, housing, employment).

Should one should accept, tolerate or not tolerate rejected asylum seekers?

It appears that the answer depends on the policy framing that goes with the wider discourse used by actors speaking in favour or against a more supportive approach towards asylum seekers. We have identified four discourses in the Netherlands: (1) asylum authenticity discourse, (2) global injustice discourse, (3) duty of care discourse, and (4) accomplished cultural inclusion discourse. All four discourses offer a possibility for a "victim" categorization, which can be drawn upon to argue that some "failed asylums seekers" deserve to reside in the Netherlands. These four discourses lead to very different opinions as to the right of a (rejected) asylum seeker to stay or leave, or his/her entitlement to (some) government assistance, e.g. while waiting for a decision. Victims are more likely to be granted access than intruders, thus critics of a strict asylum policy try to push the categorization of an individual out of the "intruder" category and into the "victim" category.

The ways in which shifts can occur and attitudes can be transformed was illustrated by the **cases of Sahar and Mauro**, who both risked expulsion. When public attention shifted to the human dimension and the moral standing of the subjects, even public opinion that tends to be critical of asylum seekers, were supportive of the two youths. There was thus a shift away from non-toleration in public opinion which felt it was wrong to evict someone who is well nested in a local community.

The importance of the accomplished cultural inclusion discourse to justify the use of discretionary powers in the treatment of asylum applications by the Dutch authorities raises important questions. In the first place, the emphasis on successful cultural assimilation implies that it is both easier and more just to grant asylum to people who "belong in the Netherlands". Indeed, it would be very unjust to expel fully assimilated young adults. Cultural assimilation, "rootedness" and a demonstrated willingness to "embrace Western values" are thus being legitimized as grounds to decide who can stay and who should leave.

In addition**, cultural rootedness is made important to the detriment of social rootedness** and the respect of emotional and affective ties. In a human rights perspective it makes much more sense to argue that it is wrong to destroy families and inflict suffering on individuals, than to say that migrants should stay because of cultural attitudes. Simultaneously, however, the cases of Sahar and Mauro have shown what kind of support undocumented migrant and asylum seekers can find in local communities and how local identifications and connections can induce people to stand up and protest against unjust consequences of asylum policy. As one of our respondents said, this kind of social mobilization based on strongly felt ideas about "moral wrongness" is fundamental to democracy and demonstrates that citizens will not tolerate a situation of lawlessness and the violation of basic human rights of others.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We began this research with the assumption that tolerance and toleration continue to constitute important concepts and practices to deal with "deep pluralism". Whether or not there is a need to move "beyond" tolerance very much depends on the issues at hand, the minorities involved and the broader social and political circumstances. Both "liberal intolerance" and the "celebration of diversity" risk to undermine basic institutional guarantees and practices that, on closer look, have allowed for substantial space for cultural difference, including "institutional pluralism", some degree of "parallelism" in society, and "gritted teeth toleration". Tolerance is usually defined as "putting up with something one disagrees with". It requires the ability (power) to do something against it, but deciding not to act upon it in order to avoid conflict or other negative outcomes.

The Dutch case studies in the domain of education studies demonstrate that **the search for shared liberal-secular values challenges all orthodox religious groups** (Christian included) to operate their institutions and organizations according to their interpretation of the Scriptures.

Our case studies have shown that in order to present everyday forms of tolerance in discourses and practices in Dutch schools we need **to go beyond the sometimes alarmist tone of public debate.** In our interviews, we found school principals who are able to negotiate between educational goals, religious dogma and more pragmatic concerns.

This finding by and large confirms what is known from the literature on the teaching of tolerance. **The emphasis should be less on cognitive change or on the need to assimilate into the dominant values of the host society, but on learning to cope with diversity in practice, learning restraint in action and creating safe and respectful environments for social interactions.** School environments in particular should be shielded from unfriendliness, hostility and outright racist, ethnocentrist or religious discrimination. Introducing assimilationist policy discourses and instruments risks undermining the practical learning of tolerance and respect in schools.

We witness a **radical change in prevailing Dutch conceptualisations of tolerance.** For a long time, 'principled acceptance' was crucial to Dutch governing traditions. Its philosophical foundations were developed in the second half of the 19th century, amongst others by Abraham Kuyper. It was institutionalised in the course of the 20th century, especially in the form of church-state traditions, in the model of consensus-democracy and in the educational system. However, at present, **secular voices demand less room** for religious schools, a ban on ritual slaughtering and less accommodation of religiously motivated demands with regard to dress. Other elements of Dutch traditions of tolerance are also criticised. The notion that a majority in society may well disapprove of the ideas and practices of a religious minority whilst still "tolerating" them, has lost much of its appeal in public discourse. The same applies to the idea that "pragmatic toleration" or "condoning" is an adequate governing strategy in a deeply plural society. At present, public discourse on toleration centres around the ideas that tolerance should not mean value relativism and avoidance, but confrontation, **defining what is acceptable and combating that which is intolerable**. Interestingly, the autochthonous majority often expresses its unwillingness to 'put up with' or 'tolerate' other cultures and religions.

Conceptions of tolerance and toleration should be discussed in the context of distinct Dutch traditions and political culture. Seen in this light, **five conceptualisations of tolerance** structure the discursive space in which ideas about tolerance, respect and recognition are articulated in the Netherlands:
(1) Tolerance signifies the need to tolerate minorities, even if their religion and practices are disapproved of by the majority;
(2) In a free society, there should be "principled tolerance" of other groups based on normative ideas about pluralism and building on the image of the Dutch nation as composed of various minorities;
(3) Tolerance signifies "pragmatic toleration" or "condoning" (*gedogen*) of practices and forms of behaviour that transgress social and legal norms, in order to create a "live and let live" climate;
(4) Tolerance can evolve into genuine acceptance and "multicultural recognition", based on the belief that immigrant communities can retain and develop distinctive cultural practices and identities and on normative principles such as equal treatment and non-discrimination; and
(5) There should be limits to tolerance, focusing on the need to identify clearly the non-negotiable core of liberal values and principles, and arguing that religious groups and immigrants should respect these values in their daily lives as well as in their cultural and religious practices and institutions.

FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in the Netherlands
By Marcel Maussen with Thijs Bogers and Inge Versteegt (University of Amsterdam)

Download your copy from:
http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23514

Other relevant publications include:

2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe
Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)
Download your copy from:
http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx

PROJECT IDENTITY

Acronym	**ACCEPT PLURALISM**
Title	**Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe**
Short Description	ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.
	Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.
	In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.
	The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.
Author	Marcel Maussen, University of Amsterdam
Web site	www.accept-pluralism.eu
Duration	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
Funding scheme	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
EU contribution	2,600,230 Euro
Consortium	17 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator	European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
Scientific Coordinator	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission