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The Netherlands and the Migration Crisis

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Małgorzata Pacek

The Netherlands and the Migration Crisis

Abstract: The Netherlands is a country with long-standing ties to migration. It once offered a new home to many people whose religious beliefs, political views or economic situation had forced them out of their countries of origin. For many years, the country implemented a model of a multicultural society, which essentially meant “live and let live”. But the external situation, the radicalization of sentiments in other European and non-European societies, and conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East that have triggered further waves of refugees, have sparked fears and the desire to shut oneself off from danger. This atmosphere provides fuel for populist politicians. Dutch society is moving away from the model it has been known for—tolerance. What the new model in the Netherlands will be, depends on how the Dutch authorities manage the dialogue with the Dutch public.

Keywords: The Netherlands, tolerance, immigrants, refugees, integration

Introduction

Every country is associated with some historically, socially or culturally established stereotypes. For the Netherlands, apart from windmills, cheese, clogs, tulips and bicycles, one of these stereotypes is related to tolerance. It can be analyzed in many aspects, but we are most interested in tolerance for the “others” who have come to this country in many migration waves. Throughout history, the Dutch experience with multiculturalism has contributed to the consolidation of this stereotype.

The years 2015 and 2016 were characterized by a huge influx of migrants to European countries. At the outset of these events were the Arab Spring, armed conflicts and people fleeing from war-struck regions in North Africa and the Middle East. The arrival of hundreds of

thousands of culturally different people has created fear in European societies, escalated by politicians and right-wing nationalist groups. It is worth reflecting upon and observing whether this has led to a departure from the traditional pro-multicultural mindset, perceiving unity built on diversity as added value, being proud of tolerance for otherness and emphasizing it.

1. "Others" in the Netherlands—a Brief History

The first immigrant group in the Netherlands were Sephardi Jews, who sought refuge in this country while fleeing the Holy Inquisition in Spain and Portugal.¹ The French Huguenots, who came to the Netherlands in the 17th century, were the next large group of immigrants that came into the Dutch society. Later, the Spring of Nations brought Germans, Belgians, Russians, as well as Poles. The next wave came during World War I, when around a million Belgian people found temporary homes in the Netherlands, and about 100,000 stayed after the war. When the Nazis took power in Germany and people of Jewish origin started fleeing the country, some of them also took refuge in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.² Many Poles who took part in the liberation of the Netherlands territory at the end of World War II found a new home there as well as gratitude of the locals, nurtured throughout the following generations.³

The end of the 1940s brought changes to the colonial order of many countries, including the end of the armed conflict between the Netherlands and Indonesia, and in 1956, the latter left the Netherlands—Indonesia Union. According to Ryszard Żelichowski, around 290,000 Indo-Dutch people⁴ arrived in the Kingdom of the Neth-

1 More on this subject: R. Żelichowski, 'Niderlandy' [The Netherlands], in: K.A. Wojtaszczyk and J. Szymańska (eds), *Uchodźcy w Europie—uwarunkowania, istota, następstwa* [Refugees in Europe—conditions, essence, effects], Warsaw: Aspra, 2016, p. 534.

2 More on this subject: J. Balicki and M. Bogucka, *Historia Holandii* [The History of the Netherlands], Wrocław, 1989.

3 More on this subject: A. Tijden, 'De Poolse bevrijders' [Polish liberators], *Nederland 2*, 5 May 2013, <https://anderetijden.nl/aflevering/150/De-Poolse-bevrijders>; A. Skibiński, 'Geschiedenis van Polen in Breda vanaf 1944 tot 2005' [History of Poland in Breda from 1944 to 2005], *BCV Polonia Breda*, October 2015, <http://www.polonia-breda.nl/nl/weetjes/geschiedenis-van-polen-in-breda> [2017-08-18].

4 R. Żelichowski, op.cit.

erlands as a result of these changes. The establishment of the South Moluccan Republic and its swift incorporation into the Republic of Indonesia had similar consequences, leading to the emigration of 12,000 people to the Netherlands.

The end of the 1950s and the 1960s was a period of economic boom in Europe, which generated huge demand for labor. Many European countries—Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands—reached out to the south of Europe (Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy, Yugoslavia) and beyond the continent (Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia) in search of labor. The Netherlands concluded intergovernmental agreements and invited Gastarbeiters from Turkey and Morocco, assuming that once their contracts ended, they would return to their home countries. However, as Max Frisch aptly said: “We asked for workers. We got people instead.” People, and thus their families too. Just as the other countries that had opened their doors to workers, the Netherlands did not expect them to stay for good and therefore did not develop any integration policy, thus leading to immigrants being left on the margins of the host society. The Dutch still remained open and tolerant; they were just indifferent.

The beginning of the 21st century saw two appalling events take place in the Netherlands, both of which had considerable impact on the Dutch public’s approach to the local Muslim minority. The first one was the murder of Pim Fortuyn, an extreme-right politician who had been known for his controversial views. He demanded restrictions on migration flows from Muslim countries, claiming that they were “backward” and intolerant. He opposed the “Islamisation” of Dutch society, seeing Islam as the Trojan Horse of intolerance, which his country allows to exist in the name of the idea of multiculturalism. He was one of the first politicians to speak about the growing problems of a multicultural society, in stark contrast to what the omnipresent political correctness dictated. Just after it had been established, his party succeeded in the elections of 2002, which showed that a part of Dutch society was critical of the government’s migration policy. His emotion-charged public speeches expressed what many people thought but never had enough courage to say. To many Dutch people, the assassination of Fortuyn was a shock, an attack on democracy and the freedom of expression. Their country, which until then had been perceived as a safe haven, a place where all conflicts were resolved by

means of long, mature debates, where political discourse was an integral part of communication with the society, suddenly became a place of aggression and brute-force solutions. The murderer turned out to be a “white” Dutchman, so the country was spared the “hunt” for immigrants along with the sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment, but peace and security had been damaged. The second event was the assassination of Theo van Gogh, a descendant of the famous painter Vincent van Gogh. It took place on 2 November 2004, two years after Fortuyn’s death. Van Gogh was a director who dealt with controversial subjects, spoke harshly, criticized the right and the left, Jews and Muslims. His film *Submission* was a sharp criticism of Islam and triggered a storm in the Netherlands. It tells the story of humiliation, beatings and sexual abuse of women in the Muslim world. Van Gogh created it together with Hirsi Ali, a Somali woman living in the Netherlands since 1992. Raised in a Muslim family, in the Netherlands she became one of the sharpest critics of Islam. She served as a member of the Dutch parliament and introduced a prominent voice to the political discussion in the country, home to over 800,000 Muslims. The creators of the film chose a provocative form to convey their message: half-naked female bodies tattooed with fragments of the Koran. It was indeed meant as a provocation. In the opinion of the majority of the population in any free, democratic, tolerant country, one can freely express his or her views. But there were many who believed van Gogh had gone too far, crossing the limits of freedom of speech and thought. In Islamic circles and in the Muslim world, the film was considered blasphemous. Van Gogh received multiple threats and was eventually brutally murdered by a young Dutchman of Moroccan origin, brought up in the Netherlands, which he considered too tolerant. The tragedy naturally sparked great outrage throughout the country.

The year 2007 brought about the opening of the Dutch labor market to people from the member states that had joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, including Poland. Thus, the country faced another migration challenge—a less severe one owing to much smaller cultural differences than in most earlier migratory waves but a more serious one in terms of the number of new arrivals. According to official Dutch figures (Netherlands Statistical Office, or CBS) in mid-

2016 there were 150,000 Poles in the country,⁵ but the actual number oscillates around 300,000, as confirmed by data from the Polish embassy in The Hague and from a number of internet sources.⁶ The reason why the data differ so significantly is that many Polish citizens fail to register in Dutch municipalities and frequently change residence. They have generally always been welcome there, but 2012 brought the first signs of irritation. In February 2012, in order to improve the ratings of his Freedom Party (PVV), the founder and leader of the party, Geert Wilders, created on a dedicated website a subsite where people could inform on Poles and other Europeans from the then-new EU countries. Obviously, he received a positive response from anti-immigrant circles but also met with criticism from many Dutch employers who value Polish workers since they are willing to do work that many Dutch people simply do not want to do.

The migration/refugee crisis, which peaked in 2015-2016, brought new challenges to the member states of the EU, including the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This time, the subject of discussion was the refugees arriving in the hundreds of thousands from war-struck North Africa and the Middle East. They arrived in the southern parts of Europe—Spain, Greece, the Balkans—but their aim was most likely to reach the wealthier countries of Western Europe. In this case, however, their entry is regulated only by one sector of migration law—the asylum law, as defined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, supplemented by the New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967.

2. Legal Aspects of Receiving Refugees in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

The aforementioned international instruments are binding on all the parties that have signed them, which means over 100 countries, including the Netherlands. The Refugee Convention determines who may be granted refugee status:

5 '150 duizend inwoners van Poolse herkomst' [150 thousand inhabitants of Polish origin], CBS, 13 June 2016, <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2016/24/150-duizend-inwoners-van-poolse-herkomst> [2017-08-19].

6 Information collected by the Author during her stay in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

[a person who] as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.⁷

The Convention also formulates a principle that is crucial in view of the steps to be taken today by European countries in the face of the refugee crisis, namely the *non-refoulement* principle, under which people who have been denied refugee status cannot be sent back to their home country if there is a threat of persecution. In such cases, host countries are required to provide them with another form of protection (in Poland, for example, it is “tolerated stay”).

The authority responsible for the entry and stay of migrants on the territory of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is the Office for Immigration and Naturalization (IND, *Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst*). Anyone who wants to apply for asylum must first come to the central reception center in Ter Apel or submit an application at Schiphol Airport, if he or she has arrived to the Netherlands by plane. Then, the applicant learns when and where the asylum procedure will start, provided that the IND decides that the procedure would be initiated for the person concerned. The conditions to be deemed an asylum seeker are as follows:

- In their country of origin, they have real reasons to fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political convictions or because they belong to a particular social group.
- They have real reasons to fear the death penalty or execution, torture or other inhuman or humiliating treatment in their country of origin.
- They have real reasons to fear that they will be a victim of random violence due to an armed conflict in their country of origin.

7 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Geneva, 28 July 1951, <http://www.unhcr.org> [2017-10-13].

- Their husband/wife, partner, father, mother or minor child has recently received an asylum residence permit in the Netherlands.⁸

The claims in the application for asylum are examined by the IND. The service takes into account various aspects of the case in question. The time needed for the IND to initiate an asylum procedure is often prolonged due to the need to verify the credibility of the data provided by the applicant. There are numerous cases of refugees with no proof of identity or country of origin, using false documents or stating false facts in their curriculum vitae. Often the country of origin does not cooperate in verifying the applicant's personal details.

A person who receives a temporary residency permit in the Kingdom of the Netherlands as part of an asylum procedure is informed of his or her rights and obligations. The temporary stay can last up to five years.

Those who have been denied asylum may appeal this decision to a court, then to the Supreme Court, and in the final step to the European Court of Human Rights.⁹ Once they have exhausted all possibilities of legal recourse, they must leave the country within 28 days. If they fail to do so, they may be deported, which is a financial burden for the state. It happens that after receiving the final refusal, the migrant disappears off the radar of the Dutch authorities and mixes into the country's society. Currently, Dutch institutions pay more attention to such people and try to pilot and control them until they leave the country. In the absence of internal borders in the EU, however, many migrants are able to remain in other member states—illegally—using the know-how and experience of their compatriots, friends and family, and social media. They cannot resubmit an asylum application, which is forbidden under the Dublin III Regulation of 2013,¹⁰ which replaced the Dublin II Regulation of 2003, which in turn replaced the Dublin Convention signed in the European Community on 15 June

8 Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst [Immigration and Naturalization Service], <https://ind.nl/en/asylum/Pages/Asylum-seeker.aspx> [2017-08-20].

9 More on this subject: R. Żelichowski, *op.cit.*

10 The Dublin III Regulation lays down the criteria and mechanisms of identifying the EU Member State responsible for the processing of the request for protection in the European Union. Usually it is the first Member State the border of which the asylum seeker has crossed. The Regulation is a basis for returning refugees to the countries responsible for processing their applications.

1990 (it came into force on 1 September 1997) laying down the rules for examining asylum applications by EU member states.

The first stage of integration in the new environment is monitored by the Central Authority for Receiving Asylum Seekers (COA, *Centraal Orgaan opvang Asielzoekers*), which “matches” the needs of the asylum seeker to the adaptation capacity of individual communities.

The Dutch authorities have delegated to municipalities the competences necessary to provide direct assistance to refugees who are subject to the asylum procedure and have been granted a temporary residence permit. The number of refugees to arrive in each municipality is regulated by refugee quotas. The municipality is supposed to find accommodation for the asylum seeker within a relatively short period of three months, since prolonged stay in the reception center is considered undesirable and detrimental to his or her adaptation to the new environment. Those who have been granted the status of asylum seeker have the right to bring their families, which is considered a threat by those politicians and social activists who are reluctant to accept refugees. Dutch law also allows asylum seekers to work legally; it provides for health insurance and financial support in the form of development loans. In addition, asylum seekers are required to take an integration course and learn Dutch.¹¹

The ultimate goal of the majority of asylum seekers is, of course, to obtain Dutch citizenship. The requirements for this include: being an adult, having continuously stayed in the territory of the Netherlands for five years, obtaining an unlimited residence permit and completing an integration course.¹²

As a party to the Refugee Convention, the Netherlands recognizes the need to accept refugees as an obligation under the Convention. The procedures described above demonstrate that Dutch authorities have carefully prepared themselves, both technically and institutionally, to receive refugees. Many of these procedures have been developed with a view to handle occasional events that may require their application. This way, both logistical and financial issues, as well as social percep-

11 More information on the rules of receiving refugees, the asylum procedure, and rights and obligations of asylum seekers can be found at the IND website, <https://ind.nl/en/asylum/Pages/Asylum-seeker.aspx> [2017-08-20].

12 More on this subject: R. Żelichowski, *op.cit.*

tion, seem to be manageable. How might this change, however, in the face of the refugee crisis?

3. The Netherlands in the Refugee Crisis

The beginning of the 21st century brought changes to Dutch migration policy. The model that had been functioning so far—one of tolerance, multiculturalism and openness—was deemed ineffective and slowly became history, replaced by the “New Style”,¹³ which is more restrictive and requires newcomers to become more involved in the host society, to accept its values, learn its culture and language, and to pass the integration exam.

In July 2010, the Netherlands introduced an “improved asylum procedure”, with many procedural changes (PIVA, *Invoering Verbeterde Aasielprocedure*).¹⁴ The change was designed to accelerate the decision-making process on asylum, while emphasizing greater diligence in the handling of asylum applications. Under the revised procedure, applicants whose applications are rejected must leave the Kingdom of the Netherlands instead of resubmitting the application and remaining in cities as homeless people, disappearing into grey zones. In this respect, improved means simplified, providing quick tools to “get rid of” unwanted refugees, who are unlikely to integrate well.

From the beginning of the 21st century until 2013, each year between 10,000 and 20,000 asylum applications were filed in the Netherlands. In 2014, the number went up to 30,000, including first-time submissions and re-submissions. The highest number of applications (60,000) was registered in 2015.¹⁵ In 2015, the applicants came mainly from Syria (around 40%) and Eritrea (around 17%), but also from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Albania and Ukraine. Table 1 shows how the number of applications submitted in the Kingdom of the Netherlands changed between 1975 and 2016.

13 See further: V. Gul-Rechlewicz, ‘Polityka imigracyjna Holandii i Szwecji—analiza porównawcza’ [The Dutch and Swedish Migration Policies—A Comparison], *Drohiczynski Przegląd Naukowy*, no. 7, 2015, p. 106.

14 D. Thränhardt, *Asylum Procedures in the Netherlands*, Guterlsloh, 2016.

15 J. Klaver, *Local responses to the refugee crisis in the Netherlands. Reception and integration*, Warsaw, 2016.

Table 1. Asylum Requests; By Citizenship, 1975-2016

Subjects	Total requests for asylum and family members																First requests for asylum (persons)																Family members (persons)																	
	1975	1985	1995	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	1975	1985	1995	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	1975	1985	1995	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	1975	1985	1995	2005	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016														
Period	Number																																																	
Citizenship																																																		
Total nationality	390	5 645	29	12	15	16	29	58	32	390	5 645	29	12	13	9 840	21	43	19	3 630	5 355	13	11																												
Total, citizen of the former Yugoslavia	15	6 150	450	520	515	515	1 380	2 180	15	6 150	450	505	490	495	1 365	2 160																																		
Total, citizen of former Soviet Union		1 885	1 185	1 775	1 050	1 205	1 500	1 380		1 885	1 185	1 640	770	1 015	1 320	1 230																																		
Afghan	135	1 910	900	1 585	1 520	975	2 945	1 445	135	1 910	900	1 365	455	450	2 550	1 025																																		
Algerian		650	55	30	40	20	55	990		650	55	20	30	15	40	980																																		
Chinese		475	335	320	180	145	240	130		475	335	305	105	105	205	95																																		
Eritrean		55	205	410	1 055	4 100	8 435	3 235		55	205	395	850	3 835	7 360	1 860																																		
Ethiopian		155	175	80	85	105	165	190	215	155	175	80	75	60	95	135	155																																	
Iraqi		20	2 430	1 620	1 905	1 410	1 570	3 450	1 240	20	2 430	1 620	1 380	535	615	3 010	960																																	
Iranian		510	2 700	555	865	1 080	745	2 075	1 035	510	2 700	555	785	595	505	1 885	885																																	
Moroccan		15	60	25	30	70	70	100	1 285	15	60	25	25	60	55	80	1 270																																	
Somali		20	3 975	1 315	3 670	3 185	1 525	865	500	20	3 975	1 315	3 370	965	350	265	155																																	
Sri Lankan		2 090	1 315	95	235	225	150	110	75	2 090	1 315	95	200	85	55	35	30																																	
Surinamese		555	5	5	5	5	5	5	10	555	5	5	5	5	5	5	10																																	
Syrian		115	255	280	150	2 620	11	27	11	115	255	280	125	2 230	8 750	18 2865	675																																	
Turkish		1 030	700	290	105	85	80	70	260	1 030	700	290	90	45	45	55	235																																	
Stateless / unknown		740	1 365	800	760	3 890	5 685	690		740	1 365	655	600	3 125	2 910	525																																		

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Source: CBS Statistics Netherlands, <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/publication/?DM=SELEN&PA=80059eng&DTI=0-13&D2=0-3,5,14,19,21,29-30,43,62,64-66,72,1&D3=0,10,20,30,35,38-41&LA=EN&HDR=-1,G2&5TB=G1&VW=T> [2017-10-13].

The influx of asylum seekers, which has been increasing since 2014, has encouraged the institutions responsible for migration and asylum, IND and COA, to take steps to streamline their procedures and measures. In 2014, COA, which is responsible for receiving asylum seekers, established 20 new reception centers with a total capacity of 10,000 places. The number of refugee officers has increased as well. The influx of refugees was not evenly distributed over time, which is why at its peak—in the second half of 2015—crisis centers were established in addition to regular centers.¹⁶ This period required extremely efficient cooperation between central and local authorities because, as mentioned previously, the main burden of receiving asylum seekers in the Netherlands rests with municipalities and local communities.

In accordance with the decisions on relocation and resettlement of refugees from the most affected countries¹⁷ taken by the EU in the autumn of 2015, total relocations were to cover 160,000 refugees who came to Greece, Italy and other countries in the south of Europe. The relocation quotas for individual EU member states, which, under the EU solidarity principle, were supposed to receive the relocated refugees, were based on the number of inhabitants, the national income, the number of applications already submitted in the country concerned and the unemployment rate. According to this formula, the Netherlands was to accept 7,000 refugees,¹⁸ but in summer 2015 the Dutch government pledged to receive 2,047 refugees.¹⁹

The mass influx of refugees into the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the peak of the migration/refugee crisis, although unmatched with the situation in Germany at the same time, has divided politicians and the society and polarized attitudes towards the problem. Violent protests and demonstrations took place in many places where

¹⁶ See further: J. Klaver, *op.cit.*

¹⁷ Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32015D1601> [2017-08-21].

¹⁸ Official website of the Government of the Netherlands, <https://www.government.nl/topics/asylum-policy/refugees-in-the-netherlands> [2017-08-21].

¹⁹ 'Gemengde gevoelens na verhit debat over opvang vluchtelingen' [Mixed feelings after heated debate on refugees], *Trouw*, <https://www.trouw.nl/home/gemengde-gevoelens-na-verhit-debat-over-opvang-vluchtelingen~ac548def/> [2017-08-21].

refugees were supposed to settle. In December 2015, riots broke out in Geldermalsen, a town with 27,000 inhabitants where a reception center for 1,500 refugees was to be established, leading to the evacuation of a local government session.²⁰ As a result, the town's authorities abandoned the plan to set up the center. In Rijswijk, unknown perpetrators attacked the town council members who had voted for the admission of newcomers from Africa and the Middle East. In the municipality of Aalburg, in the south of the Netherlands, residents threatened to burn down the town hall if the town council agreed to accept immigrants. In Steenbergen, there were violent street clashes between supporters and opponents of immigration. These are just a few examples of the protests that have taken place in various parts of the Netherlands. The participants in these events justified their actions with fear for their social security, the risk of increased crime and potential presence of Islamic terrorists among the new arrivals. The protesters felt that decision-makers were ignoring their fears. This feeling probably resulted to a large extent from the lack of time for the reliable social dialogue to which Dutch society is used. King Willem-Alexander thought it necessary to speak out in the face of the growing conflict. He referred to Dutch tradition and values by saying that the way to solve problems in the Netherlands was to talk, not fight. He also stressed that although he could understand the fear of the influx of immigrants, using threats and intimidation was against the values on which the Netherlands is based.²¹

At the same time, regardless of the clearly negative attitudes, in many places local residents brought blankets and clothing, volunteered to help refugees in reception centers and to assist them in learning Dutch.

20 M. Mikulska, 'Holandia: Nie chcą ośrodka dla uchodźców' [The Netherlands: They do not want a refugee centre], *Rzeczpospolita*, 17 December 2015, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-ze-swiate,2/imigranci-w-ue-protest-w-holandii-nie-chca-osrodka-dla-uchodzcow,603713.html> [2017-08-21].

21 'Bójki, podpalenia i ostry spór o uchodźców w Holandii. Król apeluje o spokój: "Przemoc nie jest rozwiązaniem!"' [Fights and arson and a violent dispute over refugees in the Netherlands: 'Violence is not a Solution'], *wPolityce.pl*, 29 October 2015, <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/270147-bojki-podpalenia-i-ostry-spor-o-uchodzcow-w-holandii-krol-apeluje-o-spokoj-przemoc-nie-jest-rozwiazaniem-wideo> [2017-08-21].

For a fuller picture of refugees in the Netherlands, we should also discuss the situation in the refugee centers. One of the people who decided to comment on this subject is Kader Abdolah, a Dutch writer of Iranian origin (his real name is Hossein Sadjadi Ghaemmaghami Farahani). He bases his story on his own experience of arriving in the Netherlands in the 1980s under the 1951 Refugee Convention. He presents refugee centers as soulless and chaotic places, providing shelter in a physical sense but forcing complete strangers of different cultures, with different experiences, family situation, and physical and mental health, to live together for months, or even years.²² With no work, no privacy, not knowing how long it will take, they remain there in limbo. Then, they are often deported after they have not obtained refugee status. Similar images emerge from many refugee centers in various countries: they are overcrowded, underfinanced, left on their own. In her account for Polish Radio in January 2016, Magdalena Skajewska speaks of suicide and crime in refugee centers in the Netherlands.²³ According to official data, two people living in Dutch centers committed suicide and more than three hundred have threatened to do so. There were also nearly 370 cases of self-inflicted injury. The author quotes a report submitted by the Dutch Ministry of Justice according to which the centers recorded almost 2,400 cases of aggressive behavior among migrants and more than 5,000 cases of violation of the rules of the centers. The report triggered a lot of criticism of refugees but also many comments in their defense. When hundreds of stressed people, fearing for their own future after having gone through dramatic events, are placed together in an enclosed area, they cannot be expected to live in peace, understanding and unity based on their shared fate.

Dutch society faced the huge migration/refugee crisis completely unprepared. The unknown, or that which is known only from stereotypes, gives rise to fear, anxiety and reluctance. However, the measures

22 E. Dynarowicz, 'Holendrzy wbijają uchodźcom nóż w plecy. Kader Abdolah o holenderskiej tolerancji' [The Dutch put a knife in the refugees' backs. Kader Abdolah on Dutch tolerance], *Czas Kultury*, no. 1, 2013, p. 93.

23 M. Skajewska, *Holandia: raport o życiu w obozach dla uchodźców* [The Netherlands: A report on the life in refugee camps], *Polskie Radio*, 31 January 2016, <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1577113,Holandia-raport-o-zyciu-w-obozach-dla-uchodzcow> [2017-08-22].

taken later by the Dutch Refugee Council with the goal to help people get used to the existing phenomena are beginning to bring the desired results. Publishing personal stories of refugees, showing their way of life, organizing open days in refugee centers—all this takes time but can prevent later negative reactions.

On 15 March 2017, parliamentary elections took place in the Netherlands, with a turnout of over 80%, the highest in the last 30 years. According to many commentators, this high turnout was what ensured such a good result for pro-European and liberal parties. This election was viewed across Europe as a test of the strength of populist groups in European countries. It ended with the victory of Mark Rutte, who had been leading the government since 2010. His party, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), won 21.3% of votes, at the same time losing eight seats in parliament. Many political commentators spoke about the failure of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV), which had 13.1% of the votes; in fact, however, it won five more parliamentary seats than before. Wilders, the leader of the populist Euro-sceptic, anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant party, won voters over with the slogan "The Netherlands Ours Again" and promises to lead the country out of the EU and to close down mosques throughout the land (there are 450 of them in the Netherlands). He did not win 30 seats in parliament as he had expected, but he still strengthened his position by getting the second-best result in the 2017 elections, with 20 seats.

The outcome of the Dutch elections has calmed the European political scene, agitated by the US election results, the British decision on Brexit and the political situation in Poland and Hungary. Migrants in the Netherlands have also felt relieved. Undoubtedly, however, the emphasis in the debate on immigration has clearly shifted from tolerance and values inherent to multiculturalism to cultural differences and the resulting conflicts that are difficult to solve.

Conclusion

The Netherlands is a country with a long tradition related to migration. It offered a new home for many people whose religious beliefs, political views or economic situation had forced them out of their countries of origin. Paul Scheffer, a Dutch philosopher and journalist, in his excellent book *Het land van aankomst* (published in English

as *Immigrant Nations*) quoted the American chronicler of migration Oscar Handlin: “The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences.”²⁴ This sentence seems to sum up the essence of each migration. Reaching the dream destination means the beginning of a hard road for the migrant. For those in the Netherlands, this road is even harder because of the underlying cultural differences. For many years, the country implemented a model of multicultural society, which essentially meant “live and let live”. It also meant that culture can be divided into “ours” and “alien”. If only the aspirations of immigrants and the host country in terms of coexistence had coincided, this model could have been successful.²⁵ However, the cultural differences between the migrants and the host society proved to be too difficult to overcome. Fundamental European values, such as democracy, human rights or gender equality, are not fundamental for Muslims, who constitute the majority of immigrants and refugees in the Netherlands. In addition to problems with finding a job or a place to live, life in the new country leads to the collapse of the authority of the father, to dependence on children, who learn the language more easily, or a change of role of the women in the family.

The best social model for the adaptation of the “others” is integration, which is a reciprocal process: we give them something and we take something from them, and *vice versa*. In practice, however, we can observe a clear lack of identification with the host country among the “allochtones”.²⁶ A survey conducted on a group of Turks in the Netherlands shows that 75 percent of the respondents feel more strongly connected with their own ethnic group and country of origin than with their new homeland,²⁷ even though they have lived there for many years. Various political and social events, just as, for example, the assassinations of Fortuyn and van Gogh, radicalize their attitudes and serve as a pretext for aggressive and extreme behaviors. Many of the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in various countries have been raised

24 P. Scheffer, *Immigrant Nations*, Malden: Polity Press, 2010, p. 5.

25 See further: Ł. Zweiffel, *Dynamika zmian społecznych w Holandii i ich odzwierciedlenie w systemie politycznym XX i XXI wieku* [The dynamics of social change in the Netherlands and how it is reflected in the political system of the 20th and 21st centuries], Katowice, 2013.

26 The Dutch word *allochtoon* refers to a person who is not a native inhabitant of the Netherlands.

27 Ł. Zweiffel, *op.cit.*

or even born in those countries. For young people, who belong to the third generation of immigrants, the feeling that they are second-rate citizens (often as a result of less education and the reluctance to leave their own ethnic group) makes them look for support in their own religion, even if only in its external aspects (headscarves, burkas, active participation in discussions on Islam).

Dutch society is moving away from the model it has been known for—tolerance. This shift is clearly affected by the external situation, the radicalization of sentiments in other European and non-European societies. Conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East, which have triggered further waves of refugees, have sparked fears and the desire to shut oneself off from danger. This atmosphere provides fuel for populist politicians. In October 2016, after riots in Maassluis in the south of the Netherlands, Wilder expressed his opinion on Twitter: “Moroccan scum must disappear from the streets. They have to go to jail and leave this country. This is our country!”²⁸ How many supporters he will win in the next elections depends largely on the events in cities and towns across Europe in the coming years and on how the Dutch authorities manage the dialogue with the Dutch public.

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