

Dutch Government Abandons Multiculturalism

Will place more demands on immigrants to conform to core values of Dutch society

Soeren Kern

The Dutch government says it will abandon the long-standing model of multiculturalism that has encouraged Muslim immigrants to create a parallel society within the Netherlands.

A new integration bill, which Dutch Interior Minister Piet Hein Donner presented to parliament on June 16, reads: “The government shares the social dissatisfaction over the multicultural society model and plans to shift priority to the values of the Dutch people. In the new integration system, the values of the Dutch society play a central role. With this change, the government steps away from the model of a multicultural society.”

The letter continues: “A more obligatory integration is justified because the government also demands that from its own citizens. It is necessary because otherwise the society gradually grows apart and eventually no one feels at home anymore in the Netherlands.

The integration will not be tailored to different groups.”

The new integration policy will place more

demands on immigrants. For example, immigrants will be required to learn the Dutch language, and the government will take a tougher approach to immigrants to ignore Dutch values or disobey Dutch law.

The government will also stop offering special subsidies for Muslim immigrants because, according to Donner, “it is not the government’s job to integrate immigrants.” The government will introduce new legislation that outlaws forced mar-

riages and will also impose tougher measures against Muslim immigrants who lower their chances of employment by the way they dress. More specifically, the government will impose a ban on face-covering Islamic burqas as of January 1, 2013.

If necessary, the government will introduce extra measures to allow the removal of resi-

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dence permits from immigrants who fail their integration course.

The measures are being imposed by the new center-right government of Conservatives (VVD) and Christian Democrats (CDA), with parliamentary support from the anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV), whose leader, Geert Wilders, is currently on trial in Amsterdam for “inciting hatred” against Muslims.

As expected, Muslim organizations in Holland have been quick to criticize the proposals. The Moroccan-Dutch organization Samenwerkingsverband van Marokkaanse Nederlanders, which advises the government on integration matters, argues that Muslim immigrants need extra support to find a job. The umbrella Muslim group Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid says that although it agrees that immigrants should be better integrated into Dutch society, it is opposed to a ban on burqas.

But polls show that a majority of Dutch voters support the government’s skepticism about multiculturalism. According to a Maurice de Hond poll published by the center-right newspaper Trouw on June 19, 74 percent of Dutch voters say immigrants should conform to Dutch values. Moreover, 83 percent of those polled support a ban on burqas in public spaces.

The proper integration of the more than one million Muslims now living in Holland has been a major political issue ever since 2002, when Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated for his views on Muslim immigration, and since 2004, when Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh

was stabbed to death for producing a movie that criticized Islam.

Muslim immigration to the Netherlands can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s, when a blue collar labor shortage prompted the Dutch government to conclude recruitment agreements with countries like Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey. In the 1980s and 1990s, Muslims also arrived in the Netherlands as asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Somalia.

There are now an estimated 1.2 million Muslims in the Netherlands, which is equivalent to about 6 percent of the country’s overall population. Moroccans and Turks comprise nearly two-thirds of all Muslims in the Netherlands. Most Muslims live in the four major cities of the coun-

try: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

As their numbers grow, Muslim immigrants have become increasingly more assertive in carving out a role for Islam within Dutch society. For example, a documentary aired by the television program Netwerk in June 2009 reported that Dutch law was being systematically undermined by the growth of Sharia justice in the Netherlands.

In December 2004, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior published a 60-page report titled From Dawa to Jihad. Prepared by the Dutch intelligence agency AIVD, the report says that the Netherlands is home to up to 50,000 radical Muslims whose key ideological aim is to target the Western way of life and to con-

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front Western political, economic, and cultural domination.

The report concludes that Dutch society is poorly equipped to resist the threat of radical Islam because of “a culture of permissiveness” that has become synonymous with “closing one’s eyes” to multiple transgressions of the law.

As for Interior Minister Donner, he has undergone a late-in-life conversion on the issue of Muslim immigration. In September 2006, while serving as justice minister, Donner provoked an outcry after saying that he welcomed the introduction of Islamic Sharia law in the Netherlands if the majority wants it. He also said Holland should give Muslims more freedoms to behave according to their traditions.

After applauding Queen Beatrix for respecting Islam by not insisting that a Muslim leader shake hands with her during a visit to the Mobarak Mosque in The Hague, Donner said:

“A tone that I do not like has crept into the political debate on integration. A tone of: ‘Thou shalt assimilate. Thou shalt adopt our values in public. Be reasonable, do it our way.’ That is not my approach.”

Fast forward to 2011 and Donner now says his government “will distance itself from the relativism contained in the model of a multicultural society.” Although society changes, he says, it must not be “interchangeable with any other form of society.”

Soeren Kern is a Senior Fellow, Transatlantic Relations at the Madrid-based Strategic Studies Group. A political scientist by training, Soeren specializes in European politics as well as US and European defense- and security-related issues. Soeren is a contributing analyst for Jane’s Information Group on Basque and Islamist terrorism in Spain. He writes for Jane’s Intelligence Review, Jane’s Intelligence Weekly and Jane’s Terrorism and Security Monitor.



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