

### 11.3 Minorities in the Netherlands

*In the early 1980s, the Netherlands adopted an official 'minorities policy' that in many ways resembled Canadian or Australian multiculturalism. Subsequently, this approach was publically criticised for its perceived inability to achieve socio-economic and cultural integration of some immigrant groups. In the last few years, immigration and ethnic diversity have become heated political themes, and Dutch politics have taken radically different directions compared with the recent past.*

In 2005 there were 1.7 million foreign-born persons in the Netherlands, 10.6 per cent of the total population. The top five countries of origin were Turkey, Suriname, Morocco, Indonesia and Germany (see *The Age of Migration*, p. 259). The foreign resident population of the Netherlands in 2005 was 691 000 (4.2 per cent of total population). The difference between the two classifications shows that many immigrants have become citizens. By 2005, there were estimated to be more than 1 million dual citizens, of whom nearly half had Turkish or Moroccan nationality in addition to Dutch citizenship.

In the 1970s, ethnic minorities became concentrated in the four biggest cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), where they often lived in distinct neighbourhoods. Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean workers mainly got unskilled jobs and they bore the brunt of economic restructuring in the 1980s, with unemployment rates of 20-40 per cent for some groups. Unemployment rates fell in later years, yet by 2004, people with a 'non-western background' were still three times more likely to be unemployed than native Dutch people (Statistics Netherlands, 2005).

In the 1980s, the Netherlands passed laws against racism and discrimination at work and in public places. Municipal voting rights for resident non-citizens were also introduced. The 1983 Minorities Policy was based on multicultural principles, declaring the need for social policies to integrate minorities as groups and to maintain their cultural identities. This policy covered Mediterranean workers and their families, people of Surinamese and Antillean origins, Moluccans, refugees (but not asylum seekers), gypsies and caravan dwellers.

But the Minorities Policy was criticized for doing little to overcome

unemployment, poor educational performance and social disadvantage. In 1994, a new Integration Policy was introduced. This had two elements. The 'newcomers policy' consisted of courses on Dutch language, social orientation and vocational training, plus individual case management to secure entry into further education or the labour market. 'Integration policy' was concerned with improving the educational and labour market position of minority youth, and ameliorating living conditions in mixed neighbourhoods.

In recent years, there has been a major shift in attitudes and policies towards immigrants. A first step was the 1998 Civic Integration of Newcomers Act, which made integration courses compulsory. Then politician Pim Fortuyn shocked many observers by rapidly gaining popular support with strong anti-immigrant rhetoric. When Fortuyn was assassinated in 2002, the Pim Fortuyn List (PFL) became the second strongest party, forming part of a coalition government where it held the immigration portfolio. However, the PFL fell apart and lost most of its seats in 2003. The Christian Democrats and Social Democrats returned to power – but with an anti-immigration agenda.

New restrictive policies on immigration - especially on family reunion - led to a sharp fall in entries: the 2005 inflow of foreigners was only 63 000 – the lowest since 1988. The government also announced measures for compulsory repatriation of failed asylum seekers. The traditional Dutch tolerance of cultural difference was being replaced by accusations that immigrants had not met 'their responsibility to integrate' and constituted a threat to Dutch society – Muslim minorities were the main targets. Things got worse in 2004 when filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, who had made a film about Muslim women's experience of domestic violence, was murdered by a Muslim of Moroccan background.

In 2006, the government introduced new rules requiring immigrants to pass a 'civic integration examination' on Dutch language and society before being allowed to enter the country. The new Integration Act, which came into force in January 2007, introduced a further integration examination as a precondition for obtaining an unlimited residence permit. Preparatory courses are provided on the free market, at the immigrants' own expense. Persons acquiring Dutch citizenship must attend a compulsory naturalization ceremony.

The Netherlands seems to be moving from the multicultural policies of the 1980s towards a new form of compulsory assimilation. This rapid turnaround in policies is seen by many as emblematic of a broad crisis in approaches to immigration and minorities throughout Europe.

## References

- CBS (2006) *Over one million Dutch citizens have dual nationality*. (Voorburg/Heerlen: Statistics Netherlands) <http://www.cbs.nl/>, accessed 20 April, 2007
- Entzinger, H.B. (1985) 'The Netherlands' in Hammar, T. (ed.) *European Immigration Policy: a Comparative Study*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
- Entzinger, H. (2003) 'The rise and fall of multiculturalism: the case of the Netherlands' in Joppke, C. and Morawaska, E. (eds.) *Towards Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigration in Liberal Nation-States*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan).
- EUMAP (2007) *The Netherlands: Executive Summary* (Vienna: EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program). <http://www.eumap.org/>.
- Muus, P.J. (1991) *Migration Minorities and Policy in the Netherlands: Recent Trends and Developments - Report for SOPEMI* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Department of Human Geography).
- Muus, P.J. (1995) *Migration Immigrants and Policy in the Netherlands - Report for SOPEMI 1995* (Amsterdam: Centre for Migration Research CEMIO).
- OECD (2007) *International Migration Outlook: Annual Report 2007* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).
- Statistics Netherlands (2005) *Unemployment growth rate among foreigners slowing down*. (Voorburg/Heerlen: Statistic Netherlands) <http://www.cbs.nl/>, accessed 19 April, 2007.
- Vasta, E. (2007) 'From ethnic minorities to ethnic majority policy: multiculturalism and the shift to assimilationism in the Netherlands'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30:5, 713-40.