

# Table of Contents

<b>6</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Chapter 1: Political Room for Dutch Nationals Abroad</b>
16	France
19	Italy
21	Croatia
24	Portugal
27	Switzerland
31	Preliminary Conclusions (I)
<b>32</b>	<b>Chapter 2: Economic (added) value of Dutch Nationals Abroad for The Netherlands Itself</b>
33	Indicators 1 and 2: Population Numbers and Registration for Elections
37	Indicator 3: Emigration
38	Indicators 4 and 5: Trade and Tourism
43	Preliminary Conclusions (II)
<b>45</b>	<b>Conclusions and Recommendations</b>
<b>49</b>	<b>Acknowledgments</b>
<b>51</b>	<b>Annex I: Economic (added) value value as a concept, and Chapter 2 resources research accountability</b>
<b>55</b>	<b>Annex II: Country Selection, and key trade information per country</b>
<b>63</b>	<b>About the Author</b>

# *Introduction*

## **Dutch nationals abroad should have more political room in the Dutch democracy.**

This, of course, is a statement that does not come out of the blue, but which in stead is the result of a process that unfolded organically, and which began two years ago.

In 2010, a national discussion originated on the topic of dual nationality, after the then Cabinet had tried to restrict this as much as possible for Dutch nationals all over the world, by way of a bill proposal. A public online petition, combined with political lobbyists behind the scenes, resulted in the repeal of the heavily criticized bill proposal.<sup>1</sup> Even more importantly, Dutch nationals abroad as well as former Dutch nationals who had lost their Dutch citizenship involuntarily, were for the first time able to organize via the internet, and thus became the topic of discussion in The Hague politics. A similar event took place earlier this year when full withdrawal of subsidies for Dutch education abroad loomed. Although major cuts turned out to be inevitable, here too a similar strategy had a dampening effect on the Cabinet's original plans.<sup>2</sup>

Through the ages, emigration has been a fact of life, and especially of Dutch life. Waves of emigrating Dutchmen date back to the nineteenth century and the nineteen-fifties. Also, more recently, (since 2002, despite a small dip in 2008 and 2009) there is again an increasing emigration trend, consisting of 100,000 to 103,000 emigrants annually;

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1 <http://nederlandersoverzee.petities.nl/> for the petition, and [www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2012/11/27/kamerbrief-met-een-overzicht-van-wetsvoorstellen-die-zullen-woorden-ingetrokken/kamerbrief-met-een-overzicht-van-wetsvoorstellen-die-zullen-woorden-ingetrokken.pdf](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2012/11/27/kamerbrief-met-een-overzicht-van-wetsvoorstellen-die-zullen-woorden-ingetrokken/kamerbrief-met-een-overzicht-van-wetsvoorstellen-die-zullen-woorden-ingetrokken.pdf) for the letter in which the government announces the withdrawal of the bill proposal. Organizing the petition was handled by the 'Staying Dutch' movement ([www.NiederlanderBlijven.com](http://www.NiederlanderBlijven.com)).

2 <http://nederlandsonderwijsinbuitenland.petities.nl/>

it should be noted that, unlike previous waves of emigrants, this one is not driven by any deliberate governmental policy.<sup>3</sup> Until recently, unlike other West-European countries, The Netherlands was temporarily a net emigration country – it has been only as recently as 2007, that more immigrants are entering the country than emigrants leaving it.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the current emigration numbers have already surpassed the 2006 emigration peak.

It is important to note that ‘emigrants’ from The Netherlands cannot automatically be assumed to be Dutch nationals, just as ‘immigrants’ coming into The Netherlands should not automatically be considered *not* having Dutch citizenship. The distinction used by CBS of ‘foreigners’ (Dutch: ‘allochtonen’) and ‘native people’ (Dutch: ‘autochtonen’) is often confusing: foreigners can certainly have the Dutch nationality only.<sup>5</sup> The estimates (outdated by now) of the number of Dutch nationals abroad range from 700,000 to more than one million.<sup>6</sup> An estimated 500,000 of these are eligible to vote.<sup>7</sup>

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3 “Leaving the Netherlands, *Emigration at the beginning of the 21st century*,” Harry van Dalen and Kène Henkens, 2008. See also <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/bevolking/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2012/2012-3547-wm.htm> and <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37296NED&D1=63-64&D2=a&HDR=T&STB=G1&VW=T> for CBS statistics on recent immigration and emigration.

4 For an effective discussion about defining “emigrants”, see <http://www.flipvandyke.nl/2013/02/loopt-nederland-leeg-record-emigratie/>. It is obvious that one does not need to be born and raised in The Netherlands to have and maintain ties with The Netherlands after having left the country.

5 See <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/dossiers/allochtonen/methoden/begrippen/default.htm?ConceptID=37>. Often a distinction between ‘western’ and ‘non-western’ foreigners (“allochtonen”) is used. In 2009 there were 112,000 emigrants, 54,000 of whom holding the Dutch nationality. According to the definition used by the CBS, a quarter of these 112,000 people were ‘native Dutch’. In 2009 there were approximately 146,000 immigrants, a majority of whom (64 percent) was western and 19 percent Dutch. See also <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLNL&PA=37946NED&D1=0-1,3&D2=0&D3=0&D4=0&D5=1-2&D6=28-40&HDR=G1,G2,G3,T,G4&STB=G5&VW=T> and <http://www.flipvandyke.nl/2011/11/hoer-zit-t-nu-echt-met-de-immigratie/>.

6 See <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/themas/bevolking/publicaties/artikelen/archief/2005/2005-1659-wm.htm> as well as the ACVZ rapport “*Multiple nationalities from a European perspective*,” 2008 (<http://www.acvz.org/publicaties/VS-ACVZ-NR19-2008.pdf>). These CBS figures (based on OECD data) were compiled in 2001: therefore they do not include the figures of the recent emigration peak. Since there is no mandatory registration for Dutch emigrants, the government has no way of knowing how many Dutch nationals are living abroad; there are only estimates available, (e.g. on the basis of the number of passports issued to Dutch nationals abroad). An important note is that “*many emigration movements are not on the policy and science radar. Many temporary emigrants or persons who live in two countries, and in that way try to unite the best of two worlds, are not being measured or, if measured, they are not attributed to these phenomena. This may involve large numbers. The ratio between permanent migration versus workers who spend part of the year working abroad*”

This manifesto is based on two developments that I think should get actively connected.

## New Emigration

The first development has to do with ‘evolving’ Dutch nationals abroad: the new emigrant. What type of Dutch national leaves, why do they leave, where do they go, and do they ever return? According to Van Dalen and Henkens, it is mostly “*single people, men, people in their twenties, independent entrepreneurs, and people in the higher income brackets (...) who are more likely to take the step to emigrate. (...) Most emigrants (70 percent) leave for another country in Europe. (...) Especially the quality of the public space (nature, quiet, space, and the pressure of high population density) and the existence of specific social problems (pollution, crime, multi-cultural society) constitute a powerful stimulus for emigration.*”<sup>8</sup>

Despite these ‘push factors,’ it is important to note that to many “emigration is not forever,” as Van Dalen and Henkens state: “within two years, one out of five native Dutch nationals returns to The Netherlands; within seven years, 45 percent has returned”. This is a sign of a new development: where in the nineteen-fifties Dutch nationals would wave a last goodbye from aboard the steamer to their beloved on the quay, now Dutch nationals more often travel back and forth to The Netherlands, are able to stay in touch with The Netherlands much more easily during their travels via modern communication devices, and emigration is often short-term. That is why the word “emigration” has, in addition to its original meaning, gotten a new, wider meaning. The ties modern-day Dutch emigrants maintain with The Netherlands are not only strong, but are continuously updated through regular contact with The Netherlands. In stark contrast to the actualized ties of the emigrant with The Netherlands is the Dutch democratic system – this system has not

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*is roughly one-to-one.*” (Van Dalen and Henkens). In short, the figures presented, most probably only reveal part of the real picture. See also footnot 44 (Non-Resident Registration).

7 <http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Buitenland/Artikel-Buitenland/Op-zoek-naar-een-rood-potlood.htm?forum=1063&message=34799&post=true>

8 It should be noted that the already existing local presence of Dutch emigrants is therefore not a special “pull factor”.