

The Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mr F.C.G.M. Timmermans
Postbus 20061
2500 EB The Hague
The Netherlands

16 May 2013
Ref int-2013.06663/2

Subject: Advice on cultural representation in France

Dear Mr Timmermans,

You have requested the Counsel for Culture to advise on the future structure of the bilateral cultural relationship with France. The reason for your request for advice is the termination of the subsidy for the *Fondation Institut Néerlandais*¹. From that moment on, the bilateral cultural relations will be managed by the cultural department of the Dutch embassy, as is the case in, for instance, New York or Berlin.

In your request for advice (see appendix 2) you have indicated that you would appreciate it if the council would discuss issues such as where the priorities in the cultural relationship with France should lie, how limited means could be deployed as effectively as possible and the ways innovation and experiment could be included. You have indicated that France is, and will continue to be, a priority in the bilateral cultural relations.

After a short explanation of its working methods, the council will discuss the point of departure for the bilateral cultural relationship with France in section 3 below. In section 4 the council will indicate which principles were chosen to base its advice on.

¹ 1 Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Fondation Custodia. *News report: new structure for cultural activities in France*. The Hague: 8 February 2013.

In the concluding section the council will elaborate on some of the wider implications of this advice on the cultural relationship between the Netherlands and France.

These principles were used to conclude its recommendations for the development of the Dutch-French cultural relationship in sections 5, 6 and 7.

2. Working method and accountability

The council has asked a committee, chaired by Han Bakker, to prepare this advice. The composition of the committee has been included in appendix 1. The accountability for the contents of the advice lies with the council itself.

During the course of its duties, the committee has spoken with many people in the cultural field. At the request of the committee, the Dutch Centre for International Cultural Cooperation (DCICC) has carried out a “quick scan” of the Dutch cultural activities in France².

The council is grateful to the committee for its duties and would like to thank the discussion partners for their input and time.

3. Point of departure

International culture policy

On 24 April 2012, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science, elaborated on their vision of the international culture policy in a letter to the House of Representatives as a result of Parliamentary questions about the subject³. In this letter, the Minister and State Secretary indicated to opt for “a clearer focus and structural collaboration with local partners, with the foreign demand as the point of departure”. In the letter, the following objectives for the international culture policy are defined:

1. “an international level of Dutch upper end organisations by means of concrete choices within the cultural basic infrastructure;
2. contribute to a leading international market position for Dutch artists and organisations;
3. contribute to strengthening the Dutch economic policy by emphasising connections between culture, trade and economy;
4. cultural diplomacy: utilising art and culture for foreign relations.”

²Dutch Centre for International Cultural Cooperation (carried out by Y. Gieles with cooperation of R. Heijmen). *Quick scan France*: an overview of Dutch cultural activity based on ‘Abroad’. Amsterdam: 7 February 2013.

³ Letter to the House of Representatives of the States General ‘Vision on the international culture policy’, 24 April 2012, ICE-052/2012.

The cabinet also states that the diplomatic representations and cultural organisations abroad “play an important role in uniting the Dutch cultural supply and foreign demand. They also actively establish relations with the business sector and the foreign policy”. The diplomatic representations in so-called ‘focus countries’ are instructed to focus on the upper end and promising sectors.

Dutch cultural policy focused on France

France is an important European partner for the Netherlands: it is a prominent member of the European Community, a major trade partner and a connecting link with Southern Europe, Africa and the Arab world. Art and culture play a prominent role in France. In the opinion of the French, the image of a country is strongly associated with the quality and prestige of its culture. Collaboration with France, also on a political and economic level, therefore benefits from good cultural relations. France is a high-quality country with international prestige in the fields of art, heritage and media. If Dutch artists and cultural organisations want to relate to the international top, the presence on French platforms is vital. Moreover, France potentially has a large market for Dutch art and culture.

From a historical perspective there have always been long and intense cultural ties between both countries, these were illustrated in a memorable exhibition in *De Nieuwe Kerk* in Amsterdam in 1985. From the seventeenth century onwards, French Protestants, the Huguenots, found refuge in the Netherlands; the French philosopher René Descartes resided in the Netherlands for a long time; Verlaine visited Amsterdam and inspired his Dutch colleagues; French and Dutch liberal thinkers found each other around 1900 – to name but a few aspects of the historic ties between the two countries. In the opposite situation, many Dutch artists still live in Paris. For instance, painters such as Karel Appel and Corneille; Pat Andrea, who, until a few years ago, was the first Dutch professor at the Académie des Beaux Arts. But also writers such as Adriaan van Dis and photographers like Ed van der Elsken and Johan van der Keuken.

There is, therefore, an intensive cultural exchange between the Netherlands and France. The quick scan by the DCICC shows that in the past years, France has continuously been in the top ten of countries with Dutch cultural activities, although the number of registrations increases more quickly in countries other than France.

The quick scan also shows that the cultural disciplines during these activities are represented in a ratio that matches the overall picture of the Dutch cultural export to the larger countries. The greatest contributor in this is music followed by theatre, fine arts and film.

To date, the Dutch cultural policy – focused on France – has been carried out by the Dutch embassy and the *Fondation Institut Néerlandais*.

Fondation Institut Néerlandais

At the moment, 46 foreign cultural organisations are based in Paris. In part, they are cultural departments of the embassies and in part they are independent organisations. The *Fondation Institut Néerlandais* (IN) is located at the Rue de Lille and enjoys a good reputation as one of these foreign cultural organisations. Since the 1950s, the IN has established an extensive network, with large art institutions, among others. In Paris, the IN is a familiar player among professionals, media and specific types of audiences.

Until now, the building on the Rue de Lille was used for presentations in the field of fine art, photography, fashion and design, for music, literature and debate. Fashion designers Viktor & Rolf took their first steps on the international stage here, as did couturier Iris van Herpen, who is popular in France at the moment. Partly due to a presentation on the Rue de Lille, design agency Thonik was included in the collection of the Centre Pompidou. During the annual Paris Photo event, links were sought with exhibits of work by Dutch photographers and the programme *Le Vent du Nord* showed graduation pieces of Dutch art academies. The location also played a part in introducing Dutch writers to French publishers, which is important seeing that the choice for Dutch fiction in France is not self-evident. Ever since its foundation, IN has organised exhibitions at the Rue de Lille in collaboration with the Fondation Custodia, which manages the internationally acclaimed collection by Frits Lugt, and with Dutch museums. The collaboration with Custodia has attracted French interest to this location and it responds to the association that the Netherlands evoke with French culture enthusiasts: the rich Dutch painting tradition.

4. Principles for advice

The council has based its advice for the structure of the bilateral cultural relationship between the Netherlands and France on the general objectives for the international cultural policy.

The council would like to point out, however, that these objectives are not all equally relevant and practicable for the development of international cultural representation. Therefore, the council has taken a number of guiding principles for the recommendations that have been included in the sections below:

1. Create a recognisable cultural profile to give content to a cultural relation in a country, make clear choices while doing so and link in with the key objectives of the Dutch cultural policy. Targeted investing is preferred to fragmented efforts with little impact.
2. Collaborate with local partners, for these partners have knowledge about the national and local institutions, customs and contacts. A successful diplomatic representation is all about building and maintaining a network in a country.
3. Make communication and marketing a primary task for diplomatic cultural representations, in addition to mediation and presentation.
4. Strive for flexibility when structuring the cultural representation in order to provide customised intermediary services and to be able to respond to local situations in a country.

The last principle implies that in its recommendations the council takes the French context of the international cultural policy into consideration. In doing so, the following aspects are important:

1. Paris is the centre of French cultural life and a global centre for art and culture. Success in Paris might pave the way for success in other places of the country (and sometimes even far beyond).
2. France boasts a lively festival culture. Apart from Paris, other cities also make their marks with a festival or event centred around a discipline and can therefore provide an important platform to present Dutch artists.
3. In France, the intellectual debate is essential. Artists, policy makers – in France you count for something when you participate in the public debate.

5. What should the cultural relationship with France focus on?

Although the council believes that there should be room to respond to current themes, it advises to focus the long-term cultural relationship with France on a limited number of subjects and large projects.

This way, fragmentation of capacity and means is prevented. To determine the priorities for France, the council would like to stress the importance to further map out the French cultural field in the near future. Work that has already been done to this effect by the embassy, the Dutch Theatre Institute and Muziekcentrum Nederland (Dutch Music Centre) can be utilised.

Mapping should provide information on the fields with the best opportunities for collaboration and presentation – against a backdrop of the objectives for the international culture policy.

The council advises to have this mapping carried out by the cultural department of the embassy in collaboration with partners: the funds, the Dutch Centre for International Cooperation, such supporting organisations as Bureau Promotie Podiumkunsten (Agency for the Promotion of the Stage Arts) and their French partners such as the Institut Français in Amsterdam and Paris. Involve the French network in this mapping and also request input from artists themselves. The council recommends to enter into collaboration with Flanders in this matter and to mutually utilise each other's network and channels. Flanders has a strong representation in France in the field of performing arts, fine arts and a number of large festivals.

In anticipation of the outcome of this mapping, the council would like to put forward several recommendations:

- In addition to the more traditional cultural elite, a younger generation of culture enthusiasts is also emerging, who are outwardly focussed and well-travelled, speak their languages, are active on the social media and are receptive to other cultures. Various platforms in France tap into this new audience, like, for instance, the new and innovative art centre 'Centquatre' in the North-Eastern part of Paris. It is this audience that can be appealed to when it comes to contemporary art and culture, especially where the more multidisciplinary expressions are concerned that are currently being produced in the Netherlands. Therefore, the council suggests to focus more attention and means on innovative artists and talents – and not just on the established upper end organisations.
- In light of the importance of public debate in France, the council advises to put forward Dutch cultural en scientific thinkers, more than is the case now, in order to generate relevant media attention. To French intellectuals the Netherlands is a guiding country and a laboratory in many fields, such as the law on same-sex marriage, the regulation of voluntary termination of life, the tolerance policy regarding the sale and use of soft drugs, but also in the field of cultural disciplines (design and architecture in particular). The Erasmus debates in the Maison Descartes in Amsterdam between Dutch and French representatives are a successful example.

- In the field of the creative industry a solid infrastructure has been established between the two countries. The council recommends intensifying the collaboration in this field between the Economy and Culture departments of the embassy, for instance, by drawing up a mutual working programme for the next few years.
- France hosts festivals with a great international significance. For instance, the Festival d'Automne, the theatre festival in Avignon, the Cannes film festival, the Festival de la Musique Sacrée, the international festival of short films in Clermond-Ferrand or Jazz à Vienne – but also smaller festivals, such as dance in Montpellier, photography in Arles, Perpignan and Hière, literature in Lyon en Cognac, documentaries in La Rochelle, the Rennes theatre festival or the opera festival in Aix-en-Provence. These are platforms for experimentation and breeding grounds for young talent. The council advises to strongly stimulate the participation of Dutch artists and cultural organisations in such festivals, it goes without saying that this needs to be done in collaboration with French organisations. Where cultural activities are concerned that centre around the Dutch language (literature, theatre), the council advises collaboration with Flanders.

6. What is the best way to structure the cultural representation in France?

The cultural department of the embassy plays a key role in structuring the cultural relationship with France. This department is instructed to contribute to the objectives of the international cultural policy through its activities. The council advises to attach the following duties to it:

- serve as an active intermediary between Dutch and French parties in the cultural fields in both Paris and the regions;
- financial and logistic support for the realisation of Dutch contributions to French cultural events;
- active mediation in the participation in festivals, debates and fairs in the field of the arts, heritage and the media;
- communication about and marketing of Dutch artists and cultural organisations in France.

In keeping with its prior advice on the international cultural policy to the House of Representatives, the council advises to flexibly employ the means for de cultural representation in France, if possible. In other words, not an extensive permanent staff, but sufficient scope for action. Knowledge and maintenance of local networks is essential, as well as a presence on the Internet and on social media.

This can be carried out by a small number of qualified staff composed of staff members who have been assigned abroad and local employees, to guarantee the continuity of the networks. A communications specialist is also required for the press, public relations

The IN should be phased out carefully to retain its network and expertise for the cultural department of the embassy. Continuing and developing high-level networks after the IN has ended its activities, requires many qualities of the cultural department manager: an autonomous person with vision, who should be granted sufficient freedom of movement and freedom to act.

In addition to the current embassy budget and the IN programme budget of an average of € 400,000 per year, the council advises to make a budget of approximately € 200,000 available to assign intendants and experts. Recourses also need to be made available for their activities. By ending the subsidy for the IN, 2 million will become available. The council advises to employ this amount for the international cultural policy, including France.

7. Where in France?

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs intends to use the location on the Rue de Lille in Paris as the place of business for the embassy's cultural department. This location is associated with the Netherlands and enjoys a good reputation with some target groups. It is therefore suited as a meeting place for professionals from the cultural world and the media. However, activities in Paris should by all means not be limited to the rooms of the building on the Rue de Lille.

The council advises that the cultural department will particularly endeavour to grant artists and cultural organisations access to those French platforms that matter in the various disciplines. Especially where debates and presentations for upcoming talent are concerned, to which the council attaches great value, are other platforms and cultural meeting places better suited to reach new target groups.

To be able to fully appreciate the use of the location on the Rue de Lille in this new situation, the council suggests carrying out an evaluation in two years' time.

The Dutch residence in Paris is, incidentally, one of the most beautiful backdrops for cultural diplomacy conceivable. Recently, the location was used in the film *Les intouchables* and has been viewed by a large audience. The council emphasises the importance of the residence and the

opportunities it offers for private receptions and meetings for the business sector, governments and civil society organisations. Dutch artists can be involved in those activities, as is currently the case.

In the DCICC quick scan it was established that in recent years Paris has been the main location for many cultural activities from the Netherlands. Only a small part of these activities take place outside of the capital. However, in an extremely competitive environment such as Paris, success is not self-evident for Dutch artists. Introduction and support on building a reputation can also lead to success outside the capital. The council would especially like to point out cities such as Lyon, Marseille, Nantes or Lille. The latter has developed into an important cultural centre in the North of the country⁵. Its location, halfway between the Netherlands and Paris, offers possibilities for exchange programmes between both countries and with Flanders.

8. Concluding remarks

In brief, this advice deals with the future cultural representation in France. The council concludes that the international cultural policy in general is under pressure. In practice it is the sum of everything happening on the posts, it is a mixed business in which everyone tries to make do. Manpower, financial resources, expertise and the attention for the international cultural policy in the departments concerned have been reduced over the past years. Many supporting instruments, such as the Dutch Theatre Institute and Muziekcentrum Nederland (Dutch Music Centre - OCW), were lost due to budget cuts. New initiatives have not yet been able to fill that gap.

The council encourages the cabinet to reflect on the question how to culturally position the Netherlands in the world and what means could be used best to do so. Quality often will find its own way to international fairs, events and festivals – but mediation and promotion through funds and cultural representation give it just that extra push. For new talent this support is particularly crucial.

From a diplomatic and social perspective there is also reason to (re)evaluate this positioning. In addition to ‘hard’ economic and geopolitical factors, a country’s image is also determined by *soft powers* that include the arts and culture of a country and the way these are highlighted. ‘Nation branding’ is a strategy that is being employed both by established and up-and-coming economies. A proper presentation of its art and cultural organisations is essential to the position of the Netherlands as discussion partner, trade partner and as an attractive country to live and work in.

The title of the book by Richard Arndt about American cultural diplomacy aptly summarises this role as: 'Culture is the first resort of kings'.

The council will continue to consider the question of what the exact role of art and culture is in the international position of the Netherlands and how the government and cultural organisations can strengthen this position. This issue falls outside the scope of this advice. Therefore, the council will come back to this issue in a following advice.

Kind regards

Joop Daalmeijer
Chairman

Jeroen Bartelse
General Secretary

Appendix 1: Composition of the committee for cultural representation in France

- Han Bakker (chairman)
- Jeroen Bartelse (for the secretariat of the Council for Culture)
- Inez Boogaarts
- Dorian van der Brempt
- Margot Dijkgraaf
- Yolanda Ezendam (for the secretariat of the Council for Culture)