

## Summary

### Evaluation of the naturalisation ceremony

#### Background

Since 1 January 2006, all municipalities in the Netherlands are obliged to organise a naturalisation ceremony at least once a year. During this ceremony, new Dutch citizens are awarded the decision on their request for acquiring the Dutch nationality. The holding of a ceremony is intended to enhance the significance of Dutch citizenship for new Dutch citizens. In doing so, it should reinforce the meaning of Dutch citizenship, and the rights and duties that come with it. The ceremony should also express, in a suitable way, connectedness and engagement with the Netherlands. It must contain a certain number of fixed elements: receiving the announcement of the award of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation<sup>79</sup>, a speech (most often given by the (deputy) mayor) and – since 1 March 2009 – the Declaration of Solidarity, in which new Dutch citizens confirm to respect the fundamental laws of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the freedoms and rights for which it stands, and promise to fulfil the duties that citizenship entails. The booklet entitled *Welkom* (Welcome) may also be handed out. Individual municipalities are free to decide on the further details of the ceremony itself.

The policy aim of the ceremony is to reinforce connectedness among new Dutch citizens with Dutch society, the final objective being: (the enhancement of) more active citizenship in the sense of participation in the Dutch society. According to the policy theory, which is based on policy documents, the naturalisation ceremony makes a positive contribution to this aim. Key factors in this respect are: receiving the announcement of the award of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation, the speech and making the Declaration of Solidarity.

Since the Minister of Immigration and Integration had promised an evaluation to the Dutch House of Representatives, the *Monitor Naturalisatieceremonie* [Naturalisation Ceremony Monitor] was set up in 2006 by INDIAC, the Information and Analysis Centre of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service<sup>80</sup>, to monitor the way in which municipalities administer naturalisation ceremonies. In addition, the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) carried out a research on how people who apply for naturalisation or option perceive the ceremony and the relationship between this perception and their connectedness with the Netherlands.

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<sup>79</sup> A non-Dutch citizen can receive the Dutch nationality by making use of the naturalisation or option procedure. The latter procedure, which is a simpler procedure than the former, is meant for non-Dutch citizens who have been living in the Netherlands for a long time, but who are not born here. A difference between the two procedures is that passing the civic integration exam is a prerequisite for the application of naturalisation. Furthermore, the new Dutch citizen has to give up his original nationality (see Appendix 1, in Dutch).

<sup>80</sup> In collaboration with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (*Vereniging Nederlandse Gemeenten* or *VNG*), the Dutch Civic Affairs Association (*Nederlandse Vereniging voor Burgerzaken* or *NVVB*) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Research questions and methods

The two central research questions were:

- 1 How did the municipalities implement the legislation relating to the naturalisation ceremony in practice?
- 2 How do applicants for naturalisation or option of non-Western origin<sup>81</sup> perceive the naturalisation ceremony, and is it possible to say something about a possible change in their connectedness with the Netherlands due to their attendance at the ceremony?

Answers to these questions are based on two independent researches. The answer to the first question can be found in Part 2 of the report based on the Naturalisation Ceremony Monitor for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. The monitor contains both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was used from INDIS, the automated information system of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND). Furthermore representatives of Dutch municipalities and Consulates or Embassies were asked to fill out a (digital) questionnaire which contained questions on the organisation and design of the ceremony and their perceptions of the ceremony. Also data were collected on the naturalisation ceremony through participant observation at different municipalities during the 'national naturalisation day' in 2006, 2007 and 2008<sup>82</sup>. Lastly, the first rapport contains information from the Ministry of Justice, which requested *Postbus 51* (an information service which supplies general information related to the legislation of the central Dutch government) to call all municipalities with questions concerning the naturalisation ceremony on the 'national naturalisation day' in 2006.

The second question was explored by the WODC and will be addressed in part 3. The WODC conducted individual face-to-face interviews with 40 people who had made use of the naturalisation or option procedure and who attended a naturalisation ceremony between 1 May 2009 and 31 September 2009. They were interviewed on two separate occasions: a few weeks before and after the ceremony. The respondents differ strongly in age, social economical background and country of origin. They came to the Netherlands for various reasons: family formation (n=14), family reunification (n=10), asylum (n=8), work (n=3) and study (n=2). Approximately half the respondents have been living in the Netherlands for over ten years (on average 16 years). Half the respondents have completed secondary- or higher education (including vocational training), while one in five has only completed primary education or has had no education at all. According to the interviewers, most of the respondents generally have good language skills,

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<sup>81</sup> The need for information about new Dutch citizens with a non-western cultural background was bigger due to the expectation of a relatively larger social distance to the Dutch, in comparison to those with a western background.

<sup>82</sup> The 'national naturalisation day' was originally set on August 24th. However, due to a low attendance percentage during the summer holidays, it takes place on December 15<sup>th</sup> since 2008.

## Results

### Findings from the Naturalisation Ceremony Monitor

#### *Implementation of the naturalisation ceremony by municipalities*

The *Naturalisation Ceremony Monitor* shows that the naturalisation ceremony has been adopted by nearly all municipalities. Nearly all awards of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation are presented during such a ceremony. The attendance percentage at naturalisation ceremonies is high, which is logical, as applicants for naturalisation and option are obliged to attend a naturalisation ceremony since 1 October 2006. The number of ceremonies organised each year by individual municipalities varies. Large municipalities organise ceremonies more often than small ones. At the majority of ceremonies, the mayor or his/her deputy or an alderman holds a speech and presents the awards of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation<sup>83</sup>. Most of these ceremonies often go hand in hand with some form of reception or informal gathering, the presentation of documents and the giving out of (a) gift(s). In fewer cases a photo is taken of/with the 'new' Dutch citizens or one of them may hold a speech or engage in a 'Q&A' session. Sometimes, the Dutch national anthem may be sung.

A majority of the municipalities is (very) satisfied with the ceremony in general, and with the aspects such as the organisation of the ceremony, the programme of events, the atmosphere, the response of participants in particular and, in recent years, also the level of attendance. As a result, a number of municipalities, whose numbers have increased with time, do not feel the need to change the way the ceremony is organised, or any of its intrinsic elements.

Besides regular ceremonies, a 'national naturalisation day' is organised once a year. Nearly three quarters of the municipalities held a ceremony on this day. Municipalities that did not, are mainly small. They sometimes choose not to organise a ceremony on this day when there are no awards of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation to present.

### Results from the WODC-research

#### *Naturalisation motives*

Most respondents (almost three quarters) have both instrumental (practical and/or legal) and emotional motives for applying for Dutch citizenship. Well over a quarter of all respondents have exclusively instrumental reasons for applying, and not a single respondent has merely emotional reasons. Regarding the instrumental motives, the respondents mention particularly practical motives such as the simplification of travelling abroad with a Dutch nationality. For over half the new Dutch citizens, primarily for those following the naturalisation procedure, legal motives are of importance for applying for a Dutch citizenship. They believe that they are entitled to Dutch citizenship and the rights that go with it, primarily the right to vote. Some also say that they would feel safer and more secure once they have acquired the Dutch citizenship because of the change in their legal status (as they could not be expelled from the Netherlands). The respondents with emotional motives – almost three quarters – are mostly women, those following the naturali-

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<sup>83</sup> The Declaration of Solidarity was not brought into force during the implementation of the Monitor. This is the reason why it was not yet a fixed element of the naturalisation ceremony at that time.

sation procedure and older applicants (aged 50 and above). Frequently specified emotional motives are the acquisition of the same nationality as other family members, the desire to 'belong' to the Dutch society, and the fact that it seems a logical step given their long period of residence in the Netherlands.

#### *Perception of the ceremony*

By and large, the 'new Dutch citizens' interviewed list the same elements in the ceremony as those highlighted by the Naturalisation Ceremony Monitor, plus the making of the Declaration of Solidarity. Three quarters of all respondents claim that the ceremony made them feel welcome. The majority of the respondents are generally positive about the ceremony and its individual elements, namely the speech, making the Declaration of Solidarity and receiving the announcement of the award of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation. However, there are also respondents who have perceived certain elements of the ceremony in a negative way. These are relatively often well-educated and socio-economically active citizens. They state that their criticism is the result of the (hasty and non-interested) manner of acting by the mayor or municipal official during different elements of the ceremony. Two important elements of the ceremony, the speech and the making of the Declaration of Solidarity, were not understood properly by all respondents because of a lack of concentration on what was being said, language/communication problems or poor sound quality in the room where the ceremony was held. As the respondents remember it, the fundamental rights in the Dutch constitution did not play a major role in the speech. They do report that the right to vote was often mentioned. The majority of the respondents do not know precisely what they were swearing/affirming with the Declaration of Solidarity; some of them found the making of the Declaration of Solidarity less than adequate (garbled or too hasty). Besides this, there were a number of respondents who had difficulties with the making of the Declaration of Solidarity due to language difficulties. Receiving the announcement of the award of Dutch citizenship or the option confirmation was important to many: for nearly half of the respondents it was the highlight of the ceremony. Opinions on the national anthem, sometimes an element of naturalisation ceremonies, are divided. The reception after the ceremony was an element that was generally appreciated, although many did not attend, or, if they did, did not stay long. The expectations that respondents had in advance of the ceremony appear to have played a role in their ultimate evaluation of the specific elements.

#### *Connectedness with the Netherlands and changes herein due to the naturalisation ceremony*

Are there indications that the perception of the naturalisation ceremony stimulates the connectedness with the Netherlands? Inspired by the report on national identity by the *Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid* (WRR) (Scientific Council for Government Policy) the term connectedness was operationalized as: 1) emotional connectedness 2) normative connectedness and 3) functional connectedness.

*Emotional* connectedness appears to be already high among most of the 40 respondents prior to the naturalisation ceremony. Almost all respondents feel 'at home' at national, city and neighbourhood level due to their social contacts – sometimes these are solely contacts with family members or compatriots – and due to their feeling of already being 'integrated'. They feel they are a part of the Dutch society because they play an active part in and contribute to this society. Most respondents feel they are an inhabitant of their place of residence. Apart from mostly identifying with their country of origin, three quarters of all respondents also feel Dutch (self-identification with the Netherlands).

There is a slight positive change in applicants' feelings of being 'at home' in the Netherlands after attending the ceremony. Self-identification with the Netherlands before the ceremony was the lowest of all forms of emotional connectedness, and that was what changed most after the ceremony. Although most respondents still identify themselves mainly with their country of origin, this is not generally seen as an obstacle to self-identifying with the Netherlands.

Although emotional connectedness was thus already high among most respondents, for a number of respondents it increased further after attending the ceremony. It seems that among some respondents, attending the ceremony had a modest role to play in this regard.

*Normative* connectedness also appeared to be relatively high prior to the ceremonies. Respondents generally subscribe to the fundamental rights and can name all sorts of norms, values, rules and regulations they generally agree with. Little has changed in this regard, after attending the ceremony. If anything, a number of respondents seem to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between these fundamental rights and the prominent role they play in society. A number of respondents are also somewhat more positive about the principle of equality after having attended the ceremony; for some respondents, this may have (partly) something to do with attending the ceremony. Many respondents cite the right to vote as a newly-acquired right, and the right to travel without a visa. For them, these were also among the most significant reasons for applying for a Dutch citizenship; so many respondents already seem to have known a number of rights conferred by acquiring the Dutch citizenship.

*Functional* connectedness was equally high among the respondents prior to the naturalisation ceremony. The desire to have a stake in the decision-making process within the Dutch society tends to be strong, even before the ceremony. Similarly, most respondents work, do voluntary work or are studying. Most respondents also participate in social activities in their spare time. However, a few respondents mostly spend their time with their family or people from their country of origin. A similarly small number of respondents spend almost all of their time among their own family. They seem to have little functional connectedness with the Netherlands. After having attended the ceremony, there is little change in the number of respondents that want to join in the decision-making process in the Netherlands, although some do seem to have a greater awareness of their right to vote. Respondents' social and economic participation in the society and the social contacts they have, hardly changed after the ceremony.

The new Dutch citizens say to have a range of intentions with respect to work, volunteer work, study and leisure-time activities. These *behavioural intentions* appear, in general, to have little to do with the attendance at the ceremony.

There rarely appears to be a link between specific background characteristics of the respondents and their connectedness with the Netherlands. According to the policy theory, connectedness leads to participation; however, there are some respondents who barely participate in the society socio-economically and have little, if any social contacts, yet they cite their emotional and normative connectedness with the Netherlands on almost all points. In a number of these cases – mainly old women – feel at home because of contacts with family and compatriots from their country of origin.

Applicants tend to appreciate the effort that the municipality makes for such ceremonies, which makes them feel welcome. However, the question remains how significant the role of the ceremony is in stimulating the applicants' bond with the Netherlands. A large number of applicants already expressed their feelings of emotional, normative and functional connectedness with the Netherlands before the ceremony. According to them, this is the result of participation: participation generates contacts, which make a person feel more at home in the Netherlands. Given that this is a qualitative study on a scope that cannot pretend to be representative and which does not include a control group<sup>84</sup>, it is hard to draw any firm conclusions. However, it appears (for a number of reasons) that the naturalisation ceremony has very little influence on the connectedness with the Netherlands. A few changes may have to do with the respondents' perception of the ceremony, but it very much remains to be seen whether the impact of the ceremony can also cause (major) changes in participation and active citizenship, especially because the results of this research show that the connectedness changes little as a result of attending the ceremony. Among the respondents who mainly spend time with people from their country of origin, what makes them feel at home, the ceremony did not lead to any changes in their connectedness.

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<sup>84</sup> Since 1 October 2006 all applicants for naturalisation or option are obliged to attend a naturalisation ceremony.