

# Coalition agreement

Coalition agreement between the parliamentary parties of the Christian Democratic Alliance, Labour Party and Christian Union. 7 February 2007

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## Working together, living together

We want to work together to create a society of growth, sustainability, respect and solidarity. A society where people look out for each other and justice is done to each person's potential and talent. And a society where government draws a clear line between what it can and cannot do, where society's inner strength is drawn on as much as possible and where there is support for creativity and independent initiative.

We want to build a society where people know that they are enduringly bound together. We seek to give them the necessary confidence in each other and in the future. By investing in people and acting as their ally, in the realisation that we are stronger when we stand together. This is how we will build a better Netherlands.

We live in dynamic times. Dutch society is exposed to sweeping changes. Many people feel uneasy about the future. Many of them are doing better, but that does not alleviate their concern. Many people have a feeling that 'I'm doing fine, but society isn't'. Optimism and worry coexist. There is a great need for something to hold on to, a sense of security and a recognisable identity. This need was visible in particular in the outcome of the referendum on the European constitutional treaty on 1 June 2005 and in the results of the election on 22 November 2006.

We need to find a new balance between dynamism and security. There must be plenty of room for initiative and development, but at the same time people must not be pushed to the sidelines or feel left to cope in isolation. We all share the responsibility for striking the right balance. The public, civil society organisations and different tiers of government must work together on building confidence and respect and fostering growth and development. Our goal is a united society in which everyone can build a decent life in conditions of security.

The Netherlands has managed to strengthen its position in the past few years. We must maintain this strength and use it to achieve sustainable human, environmental and economic development. This will enable our country to face the future with confidence.

We want to work together to create this confidence in the future. We will tackle this mission on the basis of a clear vision of the direction our country should be headed in. The Netherlands needs:

- an active role internationally and in Europe, so that it remains a significant and constructive partner;
- an innovative, competitive and enterprising economy to safeguard prosperity in an increasingly competitive world;
- a sustainable environment to make the world better than we found it;
- social cohesion, because every person counts and everyone is needed;
- safety, stability and respect, the basis for mutual trust;
- a decisive government that stands by its citizens and binds them together, and a public sector dedicated to serving them.

These are the six pillars underlying the new government's policies. They need to be worked out in detail and reflected in an ambitious programme of investments for the government's period in office.

## **Dynamism and security**

People have many reasons for hope, but also enough to worry about or that they see as a threat. The second half of the 20th century was a time of rapid growth and progress. Not only prosperity but also people's quality of life increased dramatically. People are now living longer, are healthier and better educated and have more money to spend than ever before. Technological progress has given many people better lives.

At the same time, people wonder if this trend will continue. They doubt that their children or grandchildren will be better off than they are. And clearly not everyone is benefiting from growth. There are people who are lagging behind, and who do not or cannot take part in society. The environment is under threat, the climate is changing and natural resources are running out. In short, it is not certain that our well-being can keep pace with our prosperity.

Optimism and concern are also contending in the world around us. The European Union has brought us peace and prosperity, but do Europeans feel that that they can count on the enlarged Union and identify with it? Many countries in Asia are experiencing rapid economic growth, but in other regions stubborn, large-scale poverty predominates. Growing diversity, terrorist threats and a decreasing sense of shared values and standards are undermining social cohesion.

All of this contributes to the feeling that things are going well with each of us as individuals, but not so well with all of us together. Familiar patterns and associations are losing their hold. We are capable of much more than in the past, but have less control over our surroundings. Our society and the make-up of the population are changing fast; this makes many people feel less comfortable. The fact that the ties that bound people to one another in the last century are looser than they were undoubtedly plays a role in all this.

Without trying to be exhaustive, we can cite examples of those old ties: the feeling of unity and a common destiny during post-war reconstruction; the solidarity of the classic welfare state; the once intricate social networks; a public sector that was largely shaped by the principle of equality; and the shared values of a relatively homogeneous society. The things that worked in the second half of the 20th century will need to be supplemented and adjusted in the coming decades.

We are in a new phase of development. We are rapidly leaving the industrial society of the 19th and 20th centuries behind. The Netherlands is becoming an information and service society.

Hierarchical relations and fixed systems are losing their strength and meaning. People are increasingly living and working in networks that can quickly give way to different networks.

Emancipated and well-educated people have great opportunities in these networks. What they mainly need is the freedom to take advantage of their opportunities. But people who cannot keep pace with the changes on their own or don't feel comfortable in the midst of all the changes also have a right to opportunities and to the means to create good lives for themselves. They need to be better equipped, by the government in particular.

The changes in society have implications for the existing welfare state. New arrangements are needed to meet the demands of the present and future. They must increase people's opportunities and their quality of life. To achieve this, government will have to mobilise, link, support and equip people so that they can take responsibility for their lives and reshape society in all its diversity.

We can face these changes with confidence, vision and idealism. Community spirit, tolerance, entrepreneurship, creativity and perseverance have been typical Dutch qualities for centuries. They have enabled us to triumph over adversity and grasp new opportunities. The ideal of working together for the future is widely shared in our country. We have much to be proud of. All of this constitutes a solid foundation on which to respond to the challenges of the 21st century.

## **Tasks facing the Netherlands: six pillars**

To enable us to set about these tasks successfully, we need a forward-looking policy. This policy rests on six pillars.

### **Pillar 1: An active and constructive Dutch role in Europe and the world**

The international community is becoming increasingly interrelated. Countries need each other if they are to enjoy prosperity, sustainability, stability and security. The Netherlands is an open country with an international outlook. Our opportunities and possibilities depend partly on others. It is not in our national interest, either economic or otherwise, for the Netherlands to play a passive, inward-looking role. This is why we will seek to perform an active and constructive role in Europe and in the world.

The Netherlands can play an important part in promoting beneficial developments in the world. But this depends on the government, citizens and businesses adopting an active, constructive and open attitude. We must listen to those who fear the loss of their familiar surroundings.

The Netherlands works closely with international organisations such as the United Nations and NATO. It is also intensively involved in European cooperation. The European Union faces a new stage in its development. Further widening and deepening are not self-evident engines of European cooperation for the decades ahead. The European Union's institutions need to be adapted to give member states a stronger position in policy areas where this is possible and to increase European cooperation where this is necessary. Effective European governance based on subsidiarity should make it easier for citizens to identify with the Union and should increase confidence. People want a Europe that solves specific transnational problems.

### **Project: Getting closer to the Millennium Development Goals**

A strategy will be developed with public and private partners in the Netherlands to make up lost ground in our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Particular emphasis will be placed on the poorest countries and countries in a post-conflict situation. Specific initiatives will be carried out to this end.

### **Pillar 2: An innovative, competitive and enterprising economy**

Without a flourishing economy, a favourable investment climate and a healthy competitive position, there will not be enough jobs. Nor will there be enough room for high-quality care and public services. We know that our society is aging and that the average age of our workforce is rising. Our central challenge is to enable people to prolong their participation, their productivity and their engagement with society by investing in their knowledge and skills. This demands new ways of working and new ways of organising education, social security and care.

Together we must raise education, knowledge and innovation to a higher level. Coordination among universities, institutes of higher professional education, knowledge centres and the business community must be improved. The summit must be higher and the base must be broader. A substantially higher level of business investment in knowledge and research is indispensable.

Investment in people and freedom for entrepreneurs in both cities and countryside are the foundation for an innovative, competitive and enterprising economy. Social innovation, which unites employees with employers, is of great importance. Employees and employers must work together to create an open business culture, good labour relations and more enjoyment in both work and entrepreneurship.

### **Project: The Netherlands as a country of enterprise and innovation**

A long-term strategy will be developed for innovation and entrepreneurship through cooperation between government, the business community, researchers and educators. A relaunched Innovation Platform will support this strategy. It will include innovation in education, health care, energy and other public services.

### **Project: Tackling early school leaving**

The vigorous effort to cut early school leaving in half by 2012 will be continued and strengthened through cooperation among government, parents, schools, the business community (through work placements and working and learning places), social workers, youth care, local authorities and the police.

### **Pillar 3: A sustainable living environment**

Making the living environment sustainable involves far more than just cleaning it up. Climate change, rising energy consumption, pollution, water shortages and food scarcity pose a great number of questions. Stewardship - respectful relations with human, animal and natural life - is a precondition for a decent life now and in future.

The globalised economy risks ushering in a downward spiral. The danger is that every country will produce at the lowest possible cost and pass on the burden of environmental deterioration and

diminishing natural resources to the rest of the world and future generations. Individuals bear some of the responsibility for this problem, which they can address in their own lives by being responsible consumers. But the business community also manifestly has a task here - to assume its corporate social responsibility - as do governments and international organisations.

The government will have to ensure coherence among all the areas where sustainability can and must be realised. For example, there is a clear relationship between spatial planning, infrastructure, energy consumption, nature and landscape. Sustainability can be further enhanced through a coherent policy in all these areas. Innovation is the key.

### **Project: Cleaner and more efficient**

We would like the Netherlands to take big steps forward during this government's period in office towards having one of Europe's most sustainable and efficient energy supplies by 2020. This objective must be attained through conservation, alternative energy sources and CO2 capture and storage. An Energy Transition Project will set the direction in cooperation with the business community, knowledge centres, different levels of government and civil society organisations.

### **Pillar 4: Social cohesion**

As traditional ties lose their meaning, people go in search of new forms of community, security and certainty. People's commitment to each other determines the resilience and quality of a society. The motto must be, not 'everyone for himself', but 'look out for each other' and 'treat each other decently'. In a world in flux, a sense of community and solidarity gives people strength and confidence. Particularly in human-scale environments, people have many opportunities; the power of neighbourhoods and villages must be harnessed more effectively. On this scale people feel confident and capable of taking good initiatives.

In a country like ours, where people from different cultural backgrounds live, a solid foundation of shared values and standards, of respect and decency, is crucial. The Netherlands is a land of unity in diversity.

Social cohesion requires that everyone participate in the economy and society to the full extent of his or her ability. People that miss opportunities to participate must be given help. An obligatory approach to civic integration is necessary. Everyone's talents and skills are valuable and needed. People who come to the Netherlands for a long stay have the responsibility to make whatever contribution they can to Dutch society. Everyone who does that really belongs here. Different levels of government, companies and organisations will have to make a constant effort to remove the barriers to universal participation. Discrimination is unacceptable.

Problems and opportunities are tightly interwoven in people's lives, so rigidly compartmentalised policies must be abandoned. Policies on employment, education, family life, informal care, career and retirement planning and young people must be harmonised in the interests of the people concerned. Shared values, participation, equal opportunities and integration will make it possible to increase social cohesion.

Social cohesion cannot be achieved without a functional public sector and a shared sense of values. Everyone is responsible for them, beginning with parents and educators but including countless others, from police officers to ambulance drivers, from teachers to mayors, from football club volunteers to informal carers, from journalists to spiritual leaders. A high standard of integrity can

therefore be expected of them. For their part they must be able to count on public support in difficult situations.

**Project: From problem neighbourhoods to great neighbourhoods**

The government will go on the offensive to turn problem neighbourhoods into great neighbourhoods. Plans for the offensive will be coordinated with municipalities, housing associations, the business community, the police, welfare agencies and schools, including agreements about ends, funds and means. Central government will act as co-financer and a source of inspiration and unity.

**Project: A Delta Plan for civic integration**

Waiting lists for civic integration and Dutch courses will be eliminated. Civic integration will be made more comprehensive, to embrace participation in the fullest sense of the word. Everyone who participates really belongs here. Central government will craft this Delta Plan in coordination with municipalities, civil society organisations and educational institutions.

**Project: Give children a chance**

A project will be designed with a broad approach to caring for and protecting children and young people. The underlying idea is to reject compartmentalisation and take account of the recommendations of Operation Young People. Youth and Family Centres will be established where youth care, parenting support and other organisations will encounter each other and join hands.

**Project: Everyone takes part**

An effort will be made to broaden and deepen participation in the labour force and in society (as in informal care and volunteer work). The details will be decided partly through discussion with the social partners expressed in a social accord.

**Pillar 5: Safety, stability and respect**

Safety is a precondition for a happy life and part of the core business of government. Safety, certainty and reliability are increasingly important in an open society. At the same time they are increasingly vulnerable, particularly because of the threat of international terrorism.

There can be no guarantees of absolute safety. One of the greatest challenges of the coming years is to safeguard a climate of safety, legal certainty and legal protection that instils confidence in people. This requires not only combating crime and violence but also preventing them.

Safety is not the exclusive task of the police and criminal justice system. Citizens, businesses and civil society share in this responsibility. Treating other people with respect in public spaces makes an indispensable contribution to a country where people feel safer and more comfortable.

**Project: Safety begins with prevention**

Efforts to prevent crime, including juvenile delinquency, recidivism, radicalisation, antisocial behaviour and fraud will be intensified. People who go too far will face a resolute response. Government will remind citizens, schools, businesses, public institutions and services of their

responsibilities. The various government initiatives in this area will be combined, including plans for antisocial behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts.

## **Pillar 6: A government that stands by its citizens and a public sector that serves them**

The times demand a government that acts as an ally of society, strives to be reliable and works with citizens to solve problems. Professionals in the public sector are the ones who translate government policies into action.

People and their potential, not systems, should take centre stage in the government's thinking. The government must give people confidence, leave them room to act and equip them to participate fully and take responsibility. Human scale must be the guiding principle and quality the central theme. This all requires a decrease in excessive layers of government, better working methods in government and an intensive dialogue with society. Rather than imposing blueprints from above, government needs to build wide support, be open to civic initiatives and strive for tailor-made, decentralised solutions.

The civil service functions well in most respects. Further improvements and savings are possible with an ambitious programme. Reassessment of political priorities, a different way of working and improvements in management go hand in hand in this process. Compartmentalisation must be eliminated. Responsibility for coordination without the authority to back it up must be avoided.

Government supervision must be based as much as possible on trust. Teachers, doctors, police officers, care providers and other professionals are precious assets and deserve our full support and confidence. Government must put itself at the service of the public. Rules are necessary and must be complied with, but they must be continually reassessed to see if they are still useful.

### **Project: Emergency programme for the Randstad (western conurbation)**

Through discussions with the municipalities and provinces concerned, the minister in charge will draw up an emergency programme for the Randstad. This programme will make the region more accessible and improve its living and working environment, in particular by decreasing excessive layers of government and by more decisive government action.

### **Investment agenda**

These six pillars are the basic supports of the government's policy agenda. On them rest a substantial investment agenda and ten projects. The investment agenda is based on the existing budgetary rules. The 0.2% budget deficit in 2007 will be transformed into a structural 1.0% surplus (an actual 1.1% surplus) in 2011. Savings, mainly through increased efficiency, will provide the resources for investments that will increase to 7 billion euros in 2011. Fiscal restructuring (including introduction of environmental taxation) will make tax cuts possible that will increase to 3 billion euros in 2011, in the interests of greater economic participation, a more solid economic structure and increased purchasing power.

## **A government at work in society**

The government will begin a dialogue with the public, civil society organisations and other government authorities to create broad support for its policies. Government has its own sphere of responsibility. Nevertheless, people feel more attached to policies that take shape through dialogue. Dialogue makes policies easier to carry out and leads to better results.

Human scale will be the guiding principle for both our policies and their implementation. People are more comfortable and more dynamic working in smaller units. They take initiatives more readily in neighbourhoods, organisations and businesses than in large-scale, anonymous structures.

This way of working demands a government that is visible, accessible and communicative. Government policy can be made more visible by presenting it unambiguously and thematically. In the next four years we will do our best to work cohesively and transparently.

The government will draw up a policy programme based on this coalition agreement, to be presented by the summer of 2007, with further details being announced at the state opening of parliament in September; the programme will flesh out the six pillars and ten associated projects. The ten projects are meant to integrate policymaking and policy implementation in different areas as well as the different ministries. The projects should break down compartmentalisation and foster coherence. One minister will be responsible for each project, including discussions with Parliament.

The policy programme will embody our intention to work with goals ('What are we trying to achieve?'), instruments and financing ('What will it cost?') that are formulated as concretely as possible. It will contribute to coherent policy, transparency and accountability.

This is how we mean to work: in dialogue, coherently, transparently, with a government that unites people and a public sector that serves them. Our goal is a prosperous, sustainable, social and secure future for the Netherlands, Europe and the world.

## **I. An active international and European role**

The Netherlands has long had an open and positive attitude towards Europe and the rest of the world. This spirit of openness has brought us prosperity, stability and a high standard of living. Many issues transcend national boundaries and are becoming increasingly intertwined. Economic development, poverty reduction, energy supply, the need for a cleaner environment, security, and the development and dissemination of knowledge are very closely connected.

This is why the Netherlands is committed to strengthening international cooperation and the international legal order and investing in the sustainable development of countries blighted by poverty. This is why the Netherlands plays an active role in international organisations and European institutions. The Netherlands wishes to continue to project itself as a constructive and creative international partner. Our contribution is needed for international security and solidarity, and for a result-oriented Europe. The government is committed to building strong support for European cooperation, in dialogue with the public.

## **Europe**

1. We will seek an amendment and possible consolidation of existing European Union treaties to safeguard subsidiarity and democratic scrutiny. The outcome should be manifestly different from the previously rejected constitutional treaty in terms of its content, scope and name. The opinion of the Council of State will be sought on these and other aspects of these treaty changes. At European level the Netherlands will work for effective cooperation and a clear division of responsibilities between member states and the European Union based on the principle of subsidiarity. In this context we will aim to conclude agreements on the compatibility of the internal market concept with the organisation of the public sector (including pensions, social security, taxation, education and health care), and on greater European cooperation on measures to make European economies more competitive, transboundary environmental problems, energy policy, asylum and migration policy, external policy and the fight against terrorism and cross-border organised crime. National parliaments should be given a stronger position in relation to the subsidiarity test (a 'red card' procedure for example).

2. The European Union has undergone significant enlargement in recent years. The important thing now is to work first to ensure that the new members are fully integrated and that the organisation of the EU is tailored to the new situation. Current candidate countries will only be given an accession date when they have satisfied all the Copenhagen criteria. In addition to or in anticipation of candidate country status, countries could be accorded new forms of partnership status.

## **Foreign policy and defence**

3. The Netherlands continues to call for a comprehensive agreement to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. An agreement of this kind will only hold if it brings secure and recognised borders for Israel and a viable Palestinian state. Working with its partners in the UN and the EU, but also bilaterally, the Netherlands will pursue a policy that helps promote peace and stability across the entire region.

4. The Netherlands will align its security policy with the new global situation and will focus on peace missions, the fight against terrorism, conflict prevention and reconstruction. Participation in missions involving the deployment of Dutch troops requires a proper mandate under international law. The Frame of Reference for decision-making on the deployment of military units abroad will be used as a guide, thereby ensuring parliamentary consent.

5. The capability of the armed forces needs to be strengthened in specific areas in order to resolve operational problems and implement the recommendations of the Staal Committee.

6. In 2007 the MoU on JSF test aircraft will be signed. In 2008, the business case will be reassessed before a decision is made in 2009 on signing a contract for the definitive purchase of test aircraft. Based on the reassessment and a comparison in terms of price, quality and delivery time with possible alternative aircraft, the government will present decisions on the replacement of the F16s to the House of Representatives in 2010.

7. Aftercare for troops deployed and veterans will be improved. The government will examine whether legislation needs to be prepared on this question.

## **Development cooperation**

8. Europe must make a concerted effort to promote the position of poor countries within international organisations such as the WTO. Developing countries should be encouraged and helped to play a much greater role in the world trade system.

9. In the sphere of development cooperation, there will be a stronger focus on achieving the Millennium Development Goals, harmonising bilateral aid and pursuing new Dutch initiatives for substantial debt relief.

10. Over and above the 0.8% of GDP, additional funds will be made available for development cooperation and earmarked for sustainable energy during the government's term in office.

11. The Development-Related Export Transactions Programme (ORET) will be adapted to make it more relevant to the potential SME target group in the Netherlands and developing countries.

## **II. An innovative, competitive and enterprising economy**

A vital, innovative economy is the basis of sustainable development and prosperity. The Netherlands will have to continue to work on maintaining and strengthening its competitiveness. Our ability to compete increasingly depends on our capacity to innovate and produce added value and quality. The essential requirements are a well-educated and well-equipped labour force, high-quality knowledge and information, an entrepreneurial spirit, a favourable business climate and wage restraint. Creativity is the source of innovation.

### **Economy and entrepreneurship**

1. Firms, civil society organisations and institutions and the people who work for them deserve the trust and freedom that will allow them to flourish.

2. Self-employment will be stimulated. It will be made easier for employees to become entrepreneurs and vice versa. There will be incentives, including tax incentives, for people starting new companies, especially people who continue to be employees. Special attention will be paid to new businesses in long-time deprived neighbourhoods.

3. Existing venture capital schemes will be combined and used more effectively to ensure good access to capital markets for new and expanding companies. The availability of micro-credit for new businesses will also be increased.

4. This government will pay more attention to and put more emphasis on small and medium-sized businesses. Their position will be improved through greater access to innovation grants, innovation vouchers and government contracts.

5. Schools will pay more attention to entrepreneurship and be encouraged to include it in the curriculum. Cooperation between vocational education and the business community will be fostered to make education link up better with professional practice.

6. The growing shortage of engineers and scientists demands a targeted approach. A Task Force on Technology, Education and the Labour Market will be established and asked to make recommendations and take action.
7. The project to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses will be continued, with the target of an additional 25% reduction in the administrative burden.
8. By combining permits and fully applying the principle that silence gives consent, the procedure for granting permits to companies will be adjusted so that permits are granted much more quickly.
9. Improper use of the tourism provision of the Shop Opening Hours Act to increase Sunday openings will be prevented.
10. Promising initiatives and significant sectors of the Dutch economy will be targeted for support, in part by means of knowledge and innovation policy, as part of the key areas approach.
11. In international trade policy (the WTO Doha Round), the government will aim to decrease tariffs further, in the agricultural sector in particular.

## **Knowledge and innovation**

A healthy, dynamic economy cannot do without the development and application of high-quality knowledge. New processes, products and services are a precondition for maintaining a strong competitive position and healthy growth rates.

1. Cooperation and exchanges between universities, institutes of higher professional education, knowledge centres and the business community enhance our capacity for economic innovation. Employers and educational institutions, particularly vocational education institutes, have a major social responsibility in this area.
2. There will be additional investment in independent, pure scientific research - with special emphasis on development of sustainable energy - and in research funded via research organisations.
3. Innovation will be stimulated through additional funding for the Research and Development (Incentives) Act and more innovation vouchers.
4. The possibility of promoting new, innovative technologies will be taken into account in awarding central government contracts. Government's role as an initial customer for innovative products and services will be increased.
5. The policy document Towards a modern migration policy will be fleshed out in a multi-year programme to adjust regular immigration policy to meet the needs of the labour market. Immigration policy will also be adapted by continuing and improving knowledge migrant policy. An assessment will be made of the extent to which fee levels form unnecessary obstacles for these groups; if they do, fee levels will be adjusted.
6. The Innovation Platform will continue to exist and will be reorganised for the tasks facing it in the coming period, with special attention to care, energy and water management. The composition and involvement of the ministries will be examined more closely.

## **Mobility and infrastructure**

1. The government will strive to meet mobility needs in a way that puts less strain on the quality of the living environment.
2. To increase accessibility by road in general and of the Randstad (western conurbation) in particular, this government will institute the system of kilometre levies, possibly in phases, differentiated by time, place and vehicles' environmental parameters, on condition that existing taxes (car and motorcycle tax (BPM), motor vehicle tax (MRB) and eurovignette) be eliminated proportionally and that system and collection costs amount to no more than 5% of revenue.
3. The net revenue from the kilometre levy will be used exclusively for the Infrastructure Fund, from which national and regional investments in transport infrastructure are financed.
4. Schiphol Airport can continue to grow within the current environmental and noise standards. Dwellings at a greater distance from Schiphol will be protected better from noise pollution. In the near future the possibility will be evaluated of developing Lelystad Airport to decrease the burden on Schiphol, with due regard for other regional airports.
5. Shares in Schiphol will not be sold on the stock market. The attempt to overturn the Amsterdam municipal council decision on the sale of shares in Schiphol will not be pursued. The government will begin discussions with Schiphol Airport and the Amsterdam municipality about other ways to free up resources from the government's share in the airport without giving up government control, and other ways for Schiphol to attract outside capital. Extra revenue from the government's share in Schiphol will be used first and foremost to increase access to the north wing of the Randstad. A definitive decision will be taken no later than the end of 2007.
6. Experiments with varying fares will be allowed in local and regional passenger transport, including free public transport for specific groups.
7. We see the Dutch rail company NS as a social enterprise whose task is to meet the greatest possible share of the public's mobility needs and improve the quality of rail transport.
8. The target for annual growth in rail passenger transport will be adjusted to 5%, the growth realised in the past two years. The frequency of trains in and around the big cities will be increased to offer the best possible alternative to cars. Efforts will be made to catch up on overdue railway maintenance. Account will be taken of these more ambitious goals in drafting the Multi-Year Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport (MIRT).
9. To improve road traffic flow, major road corridors for passenger and freight transport will be widened and a limited number of road links will be built.
10. The Policy Document on Mobility will be the guideline in further implementation of mobility and infrastructure policy. This does not rule out limited reassessment of priorities, particularly in the interests of regional development.

## **Regional economic development**

1. Supplementing existing policy, agreements will be made with the regions on strengthening regional economic development.

2. Extra resources will be found for regional economic policy, including access.
3. The agreements with the Northern Netherlands about strengthening its economic structure by building a rapid Zuyder Zee Line will be kept. If this rapid rail link does not make a sufficient contribution to the regional economy and/or cannot be operated in a viable way, an alternative, coherent package should be put in place on the basis of the agreements, in coordination with the northern provinces and Flevoland. Infrastructural measures will be a substantial part of this package.

## **Education**

Good education is in the interests of pupils and society alike. Every person has talents and potential. Nurturing people's talents is beneficial for society as well for them. No one may leave school without completing their education.

For this reason, we will invest in the quality of education and forcefully tackle the problem of early school leaving. As the economy is increasingly becoming a knowledge economy, there is a growing need for well-educated people. We mean to make Dutch research among the best in Europe. The summit must be higher and the base broader. Giving educators more freedom to improve educational quality means giving parents and student's freedom to choose. Educational institutions will be given more opportunities to shape their programmes; we will show confidence in the professionals in the field, imposing fewer rules and less supervision.

1. The quality of Dutch education must be guaranteed. Clear expectations will be laid down for what pupils and students must know and be able to do at the end of their educational careers. Schools will be given more freedom to decide how to reach these goals, and will be accountable to parents, students and the minister for the results. When the quality of instruction is insufficient, the minister must be able to take swift and effective action. When educational institutions achieve good results, they will be supervised less.

2. Schools have the right to enforce and protect their ideological bases and traditions.

3. School segregation must be combated. We will strive to do so, but without requiring schools to enrol pupils. Partly to achieve this end, the policy on eliminating educational disadvantage that recently took effect will be energetically carried out, efforts to ensure ethnically mixed urban neighbourhoods will be accelerated, and consultations between big cities and suburban municipalities on common housing problems will be encouraged and facilitated. As an additional measure to help ensure that every child has an equal chance of being admitted to school, fixed enrolment times for primary education will be established beginning in 2008, possibly supplemented by a lottery.

4. Organisation of small-scale schools will be promoted, possibly within existing large-scale consortia. The incentive for secondary schools to merge will accordingly be eliminated.

5. School books in secondary education will become free. They will be paid for through block grant funding.

6. We will endeavour to decrease the workload and increase the quality of education. An action plan will be drawn up with short and long-term targets. A broadly based committee will be asked to provide the building blocks for it. Subjects that the committee should examine include: the teacher

shortage, the quality of teacher training, salary and function differentiation, career prospects, the number of teaching hours, the number of hours for teacher-pupil interaction, scope for individual pupil guidance, educational development and teacher professionalism, and freedom for tailor-made solutions.

7. In working out further plans for integrating problem pupils into regular educational programmes, account will have to be taken of schools' capacity to find places for pupils who demand a great deal of care. The presence of the necessary facilities and sufficient expertise among the teaching staff is therefore an important precondition for ultimately implementing these plans.

8. Special education will continue to be a necessary adjunct to regular education. Eliminating waiting lists and further simplifying the needs assessment, if possible in cooperation with the youth care system, will be a priority.

9. After consultations with the education sector, a new integrated bill will be introduced in the near future on funding and management of higher education and research. This bill will devote attention particularly to improving the quality and position of vulnerable courses. It will also include uniform, simple and enforceable funding rules that prevent inappropriate forms of funding and do justice to the position of students. The bill on study entitlement will be put on hold while this bill is being prepared.

10. Extra money will be invested in higher education, through direct government funding and funding via research organisations.

11. Early school leaving will be energetically combated, on the basis of the policy document Tackling dropout in the Netherlands. To prevent early school leaving, the contribution per pupil in secondary vocational education (MBO) will be increased to fund better guidance. The business community also has a great social responsibility in this respect: companies must provide enough work placements and working and learning places. Vocational education must be sure to link up with professional practice.

12. The 6.4% threshold in the policy on eliminating educational disadvantage will be lowered to 3%.

13. Laws that impede pupils' progression from pre-vocational secondary education (VMBO) to secondary vocational education (MBO) to higher professional education (HBO) will be eliminated.

14. The concept of community schools will be promoted.

### **III. A sustainable living environment**

Respect for human life, animal life and the natural environment is the principle that guides us. We need to adjust the balance between ecology and the economy to engender a close connection between economic dynamism and ecological development. We need to change the way we produce and consume to avoid causing further harm to the ecosystem and ease the pressure on the environment. Using new innovative technologies and altering our behaviour will benefit people and the environment enormously. It will also create major opportunities for generating new economic activity and strengthening our competitiveness in a way that enables the Netherlands to continue building on its strong, innovative tradition as a water expert.

## **Developing markets for sustainable products**

1. All available resources will be put into accelerating the introduction of new clean technologies, in part to gain an economic edge for our country in sectors where the Netherlands traditionally leads: energy, water and food (e.g. Food Valley). Knowledge and innovation policies will focus more sharply on these areas.
2. During our term in office we want the Netherlands to make great strides in transforming its energy supply into one of the most sustainable and efficient in Europe by 2020:
  - a. The targets are an annual energy saving of 2%, an increase in the share of sustainable energy to 20% by 2020 and a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, preferably at European level, by 2020 relative to 1990. A cost-effective combination of measures will be sought to realise CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions. Within Europe we are committed to pooling our efforts in the follow-up to the Kyoto Protocol.
  - b. A new scheme under the Electricity Production (Environmental Quality) Act (MEP) will be introduced to offer incentives and investment guarantees, particularly to small businesses. The scheme will focus on innovation and making sustainable energy competitive sooner.
  - c. Incentives will be introduced to encourage investment in making existing homes energy efficient.
  - d. No new nuclear power plants will be built during this term. The Borssele plant will remain open.
3. Water is a dominant, fundamental factor in how the Netherlands is organised. In the light of climate change we are rethinking water management in our country, and this includes securing our dykes and reinforcing coastal defences. Flood safety needs to be improved by strengthening weak dyke sections along the coast and implementing the 'room for the river' programme. A long-term flood-safety strategy based on the most recent scientific insights is in preparation.
4. Where market prices fail to reflect a product's true environmental impact or friendliness, financial incentives and disincentives in the form of levies, differentiated taxes and grants will be introduced where possible to stimulate sustainable production and consumption. The need for a level playing field in Europe will remain an important consideration. The guiding principle is that taxes will be imposed only if environmentally friendly alternatives are available to consumers and companies.

## **Spatial development**

1. While land-use planning is largely determined at local level, central government provides framework visions for supralocal and supraregional spatial planning issues and projects. The new Spatial Planning Act and the Spatial Policy Document make this possible and define the position and responsibilities of local and regional authorities in connection with spatial planning in the Netherlands. Adaptation to the effects of climatological developments will play an important role in spatial development in future.
2. Spatial planning projects, such as the development of the National Landscapes, Schiphol Airport, the north and south wings of the Randstad (western conurbation) and the further development of Almere, southeast Brabant and north Limburg are viewed in connection with infrastructure and

public and private transport. The Multi-year Programme for Infrastructure and Transport (MIT) will be replaced by a Multi-year Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport (MIRT).

3. The port of Rotterdam's function as a 'mainport' is very important to our national economy. Good hinterland connections are vital, so additional funds will be made available to promote water-based goods transport and innovation in inland waterway transport.

4. Implementation of the National Air Quality Cooperation Programme will continue and local problems will be tackled faster, wherever possible.

5. Rural development aimed at creating a vital and multifaceted countryside is a high priority.

6. Small rural centres will receive support to help them retain the public services they need. With a view to keeping the countryside vital, the Housing Allocation Act will be amended to enable rural municipalities to build for their own residents.

7. The European agreements on agricultural policy reform serve as the framework for Dutch policy in this area. During the 2008/2009 mid-term review the government plans to advocate linking current EU income payments to farmers more closely to social values like food safety and security, landscape protection and care for the environment and animal welfare. These payments should be financed within a Community framework. Innovation, diversification, organic farming and management of nature and landscape will provide the inspiration the agricultural sector needs to continue developing.

8. In consultation with the fisheries sector, the government will look at how the reorganisation prompted by recent EU decisions should be modelled and supervised by the public authorities.

## **Animal welfare**

1. The government is committed to continuing improvements in animal welfare. A new animal welfare policy document will be published this year.

2. A strong push will be made to tighten legal requirements at EU level.

3. There will be a strong emphasis on stimulating innovation and investment in livestock-friendly husbandry systems and consumer demand for livestock-friendly and sustainable products. There will also be support for investments in livestock-friendly husbandry systems that surpass the legal requirements.

4. Penalties for animal abuse will be increased and perpetrators will be banned from keeping animals. Enforcement of existing animal protection and welfare regulations will be intensified in the coming years.

## **IV. Social cohesion**

The strength and quality of society are determined by engagement. Engagement begins with participation, in paid work, in volunteer work, in caring for others. It is socially unacceptable and economically irresponsible for people to be excluded from society. We want to work with the social partners to actively support people who are far removed from the labour market and help bridge that

gap. We will make it easier and more attractive for seniors to retire later. And in the public sector, the strongest shoulders will bear the heaviest burden.

The family is an important setting for cultivating social engagement. Family-friendly policies help instil self-confidence, resilience and a sense of responsibility in children from a young age. Neighbourhoods afflicted by problems require special attention. We want to work with everyone involved to transform ailing urban areas into attractive neighbourhoods that offer residents opportunities.

## **Participation**

Work is more than just a way to earn a living. It is a way to stay involved in an ever-changing society, an opportunity to acquire new knowledge and skills. More than a mere source of income, work enables us to improve ourselves, integrate into society and gives us a sense of purpose.

Participation is also expressed in care for others, in volunteer work and in informal care. These forms of care must receive the attention they deserve in our policies.

Demographic aging is one of the many phenomena that colour and change society. Senior citizens make an important contribution to the development and functioning of society. They are a source of social capital that is extremely valuable in addressing the social questions facing us today.

There are too many people on the fringes of society: people who are on social assistance benefit, long-term unemployed or partially unfit for work; women returnees; young people without basic qualifications and older workers with little prospect of finding a job. A person's low productivity potential, distance from the labour market and personal work history can stand in the way of finding a job. The poverty trap keeps some people dependent on benefits. We want to give everyone fair job opportunities. This is a task that the government and the social partners have to tackle together.

1. When it takes office, the government should talk to the social partners and municipalities as soon as possible to set a common agenda and make working agreements for a 'participation summit' before the summer. The aim is to agree on a joint approach with the social partners, which recently committed to an ambitious participation objective in the SER's medium-term advisory report. The approach includes a social accord that should lead to a substantial increase in employment. The goal is to find solutions together for the problems at the lower end of the labour market and ways to help the marginally employable find jobs. To achieve this goal attention must be given to at least the following issues:

- a. types of jobs for people who will otherwise be dependent on benefits long term:
  - i. participation jobs
  - ii. participation places
  - iii. bridge jobs
  - iv. step-up jobs
  - v. investment jobs;
- b. development of a personal services market;
- c. blueprint for wage subsidies for employers and/or wage supplements for employees;
- d. the future of the Sheltered Employment Act (WSW).

The vital question is how these arrangements can offer people who are difficult to employ access to the labour market or enable them to be of use of society in another way. Implementation of legislation such as the Work and Social Assistance Act (WWB) and the Sheltered Employment Act will also be given attention. In the context of the intended shift from job and benefit security to work and income security, the issues that will need to be examined are labour market policy, education and training (employability), unemployment benefit and flexibilisation and the significance of termination law.

The following measures will also be taken to foster participation:

1. We want to ensure that the state old-age pension (AOW) remains tied to the cost of living in the future. For that to be possible, it is essential that as many people as possible stay in the workforce as long as possible. With respect for their freedom of choice, we ask seniors on a relatively high income to make a contribution to help keep the AOW index-linked, either by working longer (to the age of 65) or by paying an extra tax. Starting in 2011, everyone born after 1945 will be asked to make a means-based contribution to ensure that the AOW remains inflation-proof. A tax will be levied on the portion of second-tier pensions that exceeds €18,000 up to the maximum in the second tax bracket. [Note: This exemption corresponds to a pre-65 income of approx. €38,000 for married couples and €43,000 for single persons.]

The tax will be increased annually by 0.6% until the maximum of 17.9% is reached in 2040. For those who retire at 65 the tax will be offset by a working bonus. [Note: An income of €31,000 corresponds to the income limit for a second-tier pension of €18,000 plus AOW.]

For every month they work after turning 63, people who earn more than €31,000 a year will receive this bonus. The maximum amount of the bonus for those who work until 65 is equal to the tax, which means that on balance the tax is zero. Consultations will be held with the social partners to discuss implementation with respect to income from business profits and physically demanding professions.

2. In addition, the specific supplementary employed person's tax credit for older workers will be increased to promote participation among people aged 57 and older. Tax and employment law barriers that make it difficult for seniors over 65 to work will be removed. The possibility of giving seniors access to facilities for entrepreneurs will be explored.

3. The transferability of the general tax credit will be reduced by five percentage points a year over twenty years. This measure applies to people born after 1971 who have no children under 7 years of age.

4. An income-related employed person's tax credit (EITC) will be introduced to encourage low-wage earners to work. Households with children in which both partners work will receive an income-related combination tax credit on top of the EITC. Both measures will be financed by freezing the general tax credit.

5. The social security system will be developed and used in a way that fosters the acquisition of new skills, employability and capacity for work.

6. Financial incentives for volunteer work and informal care will be augmented.

7. Two-earner households that make use of informal childcare will have better access to financial support.

8. Municipalities will be given more budget security concerning Work and Social Assistance Act funds so that they have more freedom to create participation-fostering policies tailored to their specific needs.

9. To enable municipalities to take a cohesive approach, the partitions that currently divide the various budgets aimed at fostering reintegration and participation, including the civic integration budgets, will be removed.

10. Performance agreements will be made with the Centres for Work and Income (CWI), the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) and the municipalities to encourage them to coordinate their activities with each other and improve the quality and effectiveness of service and reintegration. Labour market policy and reintegration will be merged at local level.

11. A vigorous push forward will be made to broaden the scope of the Equal Treatment of Disabled and Chronically Ill People Act.

12. For people with minor mental disabilities, work offers structure and meaningful activity. It is of the utmost importance to give them the chance to work. Additional funding will be used to intensify supervised employment and sheltered workshops by, for example, shortening waiting lists (Sheltered Employment Act budget).

13. The life-course savings scheme will be expanded and redesigned to support continuous employment over a person's entire working life (more than it does now) and to enable people to start a company, bridge the gap between two jobs or switch to part-time work. In consultation with the social partners, we will examine whether and, if so, how the salary savings scheme can be incorporated into the life-course savings scheme and be made available to self-employed people and business owners without personnel. Study entitlements for education and training facilities and saving towards longer parental leave will be linked to the life-course savings scheme. Use of the scheme to finance early retirement will be geared more towards part-time retirement. People on lower incomes will be given better access to the scheme.

14. Incapacity benefits under the Invalidity Insurance Act (WAO) and the implementation of the Work and Income (Capacity for Work) Act (WIA) will be modified as follows:

1. Like the WIA benefit for people who are fully and permanently unfit for work, benefits for existing cases of full incapacity for work under the WAO, Incapacity Insurance (Self-employed Persons) Act (WAZ) and Incapacity Insurance (Young Disabled Persons) Act (WAJONG) will be raised from 70% to 75%.

2. The age limit of 50 (reference date: 1 July 2004) for exemption from the reassessment operation under the amended Assessment Decree will be lowered to 45.

3. Those are now exempted but have already been reassessed under the amended Assessment Decree will be reclassified in accordance with their old incapacity percentage. This measure will in fact restore the standard WAO benefit rules and the old Assessment Decree for people aged 45 and older on 1 July 2004.

4. Reassessed benefit claimants whose earning capacity was adjusted upward but who are unemployed and have no immediate prospect of finding work are entitled to take part in a reintegration procedure.

5. The temporary benefit to offset the effects of incapacity reassessment (TRI benefit) will be extended from 6 to 12 months for claimants who engage in reintegration.
6. A total of 10,000 one-year bridge jobs will be created primarily for members of the aforementioned groups who, after 12 months, still have no prospect of work.
7. In consultation with the social partners, a package of measures will be presented to improve the employment position of people who are partially unfit for work (35% or less). The no-risk policy and contribution discount for employers who hire or keep on employees who are partially unfit for work will be expanded.
8. Implementation of the work resumption benefit for those partially fit for work (WGA) will be fully privatised.
9. The Invalidity Insurance (Differentiation in Contributions and Market Forces) Act (PEMBA) will be repealed.

### **Incomes policy**

Balanced income development is the objective and special attention will be devoted to vulnerable groups, households with children and middle-income groups. The strongest shoulders will bear the heaviest burden. It is important for us to see our country's incomes policy in its international context.

1. Special attention is needed for real disposable household income. First and foremost, it is essential to look at fixed expenses for housing (rent), care and children and the related benefits.
2. Compliance with the Tabaksblat code of corporate governance by senior executives will be closely monitored. Works councils of listed companies will be given the right to advise general shareholders' meetings on supervisory board proposals for executive remuneration.
3. Municipalities will have more scope to pursue a targeted poverty reduction policy and provide debt relief and income support, and to tie them to work participation wherever possible. Extra funding will be made available for providing targeted support to vulnerable groups.
4. Special attention will be given to sufferers from chronic diseases and disabled persons. The exceptional expenses allowance will be better adapted to their needs and transferred to the Social Support Act (WMO).
5. Parents will be permitted to cash in their child tax credit.
6. An income-related employed persons' tax credit will be introduced.
7. Incomes in the public and semi-public domain will be standardised or capped. The remuneration structure will be simplified, leading to cutbacks in a number of categories. The standard maximum for public and semi-public incomes is the Prime Minister's salary, as advocated in the government's position paper on the Dijkstal Committee recommendations. Remuneration of ministers and state secretaries will be adjusted to this standard in steps. Adjustments will not be proposed by members of the government, but by an expert committee.

8. Severance payments for top earners in the public and semi-public sectors will be capped at one year's salary.

## **Integration**

Peaceful coexistence, public spiritedness, shared mores and values and solidarity are characteristics that enable a national community to make the most of opportunities and maintain its resilience in an open, international society. Achieving social cohesion requires permanent commitment to fostering a climate of security, responsibility and participation, and social integration is a prerequisite for that. Integration is not merely a question of individuals finding their place in society. It is also about mutual dependence, respect for one another and tolerance among people and the communities they live in. Equal treatment is one of the fundamental rights in our society.

1. For integration to succeed we need to be able to comprehend, understand and live with each other. Knowledge of the Dutch language, society, common values and history is essential to social integration and participation. Anyone who wishes to live in the Netherlands needs to go through the civic integration process. Those who complete the process have earned the right to consider themselves accepted by society. The civic integration requirements under the new law must be bolstered by a substantial civic integration programme and a compulsory test. A comprehensive integration plan for both new and established migrants will be introduced in order to get through the waiting lists for civic integration and language courses within the next four years. Municipalities and civil society organisations will have an important role to play. The aim is to raise the level of the civic integration course to that of a basic qualification.

2. Municipalities will have more spending discretion to offer civic integration courses at a higher level, appropriate to the participants' capacity.

3. Newcomers are not the only ones expected to learn the language and customs of the Netherlands; it is essential to tackle weak language skills among the population as a whole. To that end a broad programme for remedying language deficiencies will be introduced. Three-year olds who, when tested by baby and toddler clinics or other bodies, are found to have language deficiencies will receive remedial training at childcare centres, playschools, schools providing early years education and separate bridging classes. Their parents will be directly involved and the extra training will be compulsory.

4. Participation in employment is another important condition for successful integration, so part of our effort should be devoted to guiding people competently towards the job market or self-employment. This will require public instruments and greater commitment from employers and the relevant agencies. The government will put this subject on the agenda of the participation summit with the social partners.

5. Participation in employment is not the only issue. Participation in society and social engagement among both individuals and the communities they live in are important too.

6. Everyone who is protected by our country's constitutional freedoms also - and perhaps most importantly - has an obligation to defend those basic rights, which include freedom of religion and freedom of expression, for others. This idea has inspired the development of a Responsible Citizenship Charter. The fundamental values of our society will remain vital only if they are truly experienced and defended by everyone in society. This requires public debate. And politicians have a duty to make their positions known in that debate.

7. A programme for training imams in the Netherlands is very important in the context of integration.

8. Discrimination is offensive, hurtful and against the law. It hinders the integration of newcomers in our society, prevents them from exercising their right to equal opportunities and injects tension into relations between population groups. Tackling discrimination will be a policy spearhead in the coming years.

9. The government will make combating exclusion from work placements and jobs on the labour market a priority and companies should be putting it at the top of their agendas. The aim is to set joint targets for which the parties involved can hold each other responsible. The public authorities will set an example by striving for a balanced human resources policy. Investigation and prosecution of discriminatory practices, on the labour market and at bars and clubs for example, will be publicised more. The police will be required to take statements every time an incident of discrimination is reported.

10. The greatest possible effort will be made to foster social engagement. More scope will be created for civil society partnerships, initiatives by private individuals and volunteer work. Sport for all is another binding factor in society, and combines health, safety, transfer of mores and values, integration and social cohesion. In view of its great value to society, sport should be actively supported by the public sector, so more financial resources will be made available.

## **Youth and families**

The family unit is very valuable. Families raise children, provide a secure environment and pass on essential values and standards to the next generation. The government will pursue family-friendly policies to help ensure that parents have the time, money and skills they need to perform these important tasks.

1. In 2008 the current childcare benefit will be replaced by an income-dependent child-related budget, which will be increased in phases.

2. A financial support arrangement will be set up for single-income households in which chronically ill, disabled or foster children are cared for.

3. Parents need to be able to combine work and care, employment and child-rearing in a satisfactory fashion. People in the prime of life should be able to take a time-out. The life-course savings scheme helps make that possible. The statutory right to parental leave will be lengthened from 13 to 26 weeks per employee and is non-transferable. The life-course savings scheme will be adapted accordingly.

4. Single parents entitled to social assistance benefit who have children under 5 will no longer be obliged to seek work. The maximum period of exemption from the obligation to seek work is six years. This group of single parents will be required instead to participate in training with a view to finding a job when the exemption period ends. A scheme will be introduced to make part-time jobs financially attractive to single parents who are required to seek work.

5. A pregnancy leave benefit scheme for self-employed persons and coworking partners will be considered.

6. Living together begins with playing together. The regulations governing childcare, playschools, pre-schools and early year's education, including the allowances for parents, will be harmonised. The main goals are to prevent segregation in daycare centres and playschools, to improve quality and to make the transition to the first year of primary school smoother. Schools will still be able to offer provision for 3-year-olds. This approach will generate an integrated system of facilities in which language deficiencies among children can be recognised and dealt with early on.
7. The government is committed to establishing Youth and Family Centres to provide as much medical, social and educational support for parents and their children as possible. A centre would offer services such as a baby and toddler clinic, parenting support and family coaching. The organisation of youth care will be simplified and 'decompartmentalised' at central government level. Waiting lists will be cleared and caseloads of family supervisors reduced.
8. It should be possible to place children from families with problems under supervision more quickly. The House of Representatives will be presented with legislation that would allow children's judges to impose milder measures, such as compulsory parenting support, before a situation gets to the point where the threat to the child's development is grave. Parents will be legally liable for damage caused by their minor children.
9. Attention will be devoted to the impact of divorce on children. The parliamentary debate on the bill promoting continued parenthood and careful divorce planning (30145) will continue.
10. While still in school, young people will do a three-month work placement in a non-profit or voluntary organisation to learn about society. The structure and implementation of the work placement programme will be discussed later with representatives from the education sector and other parties involved.
11. The electronic child file will be introduced as soon as possible but in 2009 at the latest.
12. Young people aged 26 and younger will be required to work or undergo training. This will be enforced through a training guidance programme. Those who do not cooperate will have their benefit cut.

## **Equal opportunities**

1. A new Policy Document on Equal Opportunities will be issued during the government's term in office.
2. The public authorities will call upon employers to account for their efforts to put more women in senior positions.
3. In education in particular there are very few women in senior positions while the sector is uniquely placed to set an example. Initiatives aimed at increasing the number of women in top jobs will be supported.
4. In close consultation with employers, measures will be taken to stem the outflow of women aged 35-40 from the workplace and increase opportunities for women returning to work and reintegrating.

5. Women still earn less than men. The government is committed to putting an end to this form of inequality.

6. As part of the policy on equal rights for homosexuals' special attention will be devoted to promoting 'respect for difference', especially among ethnic minorities. In consultation with the relevant organisations, targeted measures will be taken to combat discrimination and violence against homosexuals on the streets, in sport, education, care and companies. Adequate funding will be made available.

## **Housing and communities**

More quality construction is needed to promote movement in the housing market, to boost the restructuring of old urban neighbourhoods and ensure that starters on the housing market can acquire affordable, suitable homes. This applies to both the sales market and the rental market.

Beyond our homes and workplaces, the street, neighbourhood and district in which we live are our social community. The quality of that living environment and the way we interact with each other there often determines in part our position in society. Unfortunately, there are neighbourhoods in the Netherlands in which an accumulation of problems and failures have had a negative impact on the quality of the living environment. These are neighbourhoods where unemployment is high and jobs are scarce, more children leave school early, the population is homogeneous and homes are run down, public spaces are deteriorating and drugs nuisance, crime and antisocial behaviour are commonplace.

In the realisation that a neighbourhood is the people who live there, it is our aim to work with residents and the civil society organisations and institutions that are active locally to create the conditions required to revitalise these neighbourhoods. A long-term, intensive, cohesive and broad approach is needed to tackle these problems.

1. Before this summer, an action plan will be drafted for a broad, cohesive 'strong neighbourhood' approach aimed at transforming problem neighbourhoods within 8 to 10 years into vital living and working environments where children stay in school and unemployment - also among young people - is reduced, where employment is available close by, where the population is varied and where people enjoy living.

2. Housing associations are social enterprises that have an important social task: investment in good, affordable housing and in the quality of the residential and living environment.

3. We are committed to making agreements with housing associations regarding a contribution to the affordability of rented housing. If they invest in improving the energy efficiency of existing homes they can make a positive contribution towards controlling the development of housing costs. Our aim is to make agreements with them in this respect too. We also want to make agreements about the new construction programme and joint investments to deal with the most vulnerable problem neighbourhoods. If, despite our efforts, it is not possible to reach agreement with the associations on their contribution to housing affordability and their investment efforts, their sizeable social capital will be used actively in other ways to achieve this goal.

4. The agreements with the corporations will not be without obligation. This applies to agreements between the government and the housing association sector as well as local-level agreements between municipalities and housing associations. At local level, municipalities can make concrete

performance agreements with associations concerning investments by the associations on the basis of municipal housing concepts.

5. Municipalities are responsible for coordinating housing, employment, education and facilities for young people and seniors. Central government support for this comprehensive, cohesive approach will likewise be integrated and interministerial in nature.

6. Municipalities will be encouraged to employ the 'one-stop shop' concept wherever possible in order to serve people in neighbourhoods, villages and cities as quickly and satisfactorily as possible.

7. Part of the increased budget for urban renewal will be apportioned to neighbourhood and district budgets from which resident initiatives are funded.

8. No changes will be made in the tax treatment of home ownership during this term of government. Nor will any changes be prepared or studied for the period following.

9. The Rent Deregulation Bill will be withdrawn. Rent increases will be linked to inflation.

10. Housing production will be increased to between 80,000 and 100,000 homes a year, with housing associations playing an important role.

11. It may be desirable for suburban municipalities to build more homes for lower and middle incomes to achieve balance in the development and demographics of a cohesive urban area. The power to issue designation orders will be developed in the event that municipalities which meet this description are unwilling.

12. Following an evaluation, the current urban policy will be continued after 2009. To that end preparations will begin in good time.

13. Many seniors prefer to live in their own neighbourhood as long as possible. Making urban districts generation-proof and endeavouring to offer social welfare and healthcare service points at district level would make a big difference. Expanding the variety of housing on the market (especially accommodation where progressive care is available) would help seniors stay in their neighbourhood longer. Cooperative building societies will be called upon to assume this task for society.

## **V. Safety, stability and respect**

Safety is a core government task and a precondition for a free society that creates a sense of belonging and togetherness. Crime has declined in recent years, and this trend must be continued. However, measures to reduce the number of violent crimes have not yet met with sufficient success and therefore merit substantial extra investment. The Netherlands must be made even safer. Our efforts to fight terrorism and radicalisation must not slacken. Measures to combat fraud, financial/economic and organised crime, and cybercrime will be intensified. Crime prevention must also receive plenty of attention. Probation and youth work services have a prominent role to play in this, and will therefore receive extra funding.

A safe society requires more than clear rules that are properly enforced. Mutual respect and common decency are also essential in creating a safe climate.

1. A new public safety programme will be launched, with the aim of reducing crime in 2008-2010 by 25% compared with 2003. The functioning of the police and Public Prosecution Service will be strengthened, and optimum use will be made of new technology to improve the crime clear-up rate. Problems will be ironed out and no new obstacles, procedures or restrictions will be imposed. Prison system reforms will be continued, to create scope for greater differentiation. Extra attention will be given to the level of support for work for prisoners, including those serving short sentences, and for treatment and aftercare. Reoffending will be further reduced by reintroducing release on parole and tailored guidance and aftercare.
2. Safety must be ensured nationally, and embedded locally; it must exist in neighbourhoods, districts, villages and rural centres. Joint action by police forces and cooperation between them must be improved. The bill to strengthen state powers will be introduced as soon as possible. There is a need for an integrated police information system and ICT network, specialisation between forces and a common policy on human and material resources and management. Integrated and joint tasks can be funded centrally. The power of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and the Minister of Justice to issue designation orders will be simplified. Consideration of the bill introducing a national police organisation will be suspended. If cooperation does not produce adequate results, the process will be resumed, but in the light of the prevailing situation. The government will take a decision before the end of 2008.
3. Safety begins with prevention. The government should encourage the public, young people, schools, businesses, public services and institutions to play their part. Neighbourhood initiatives to improve safety and curb antisocial behaviour will be supported. We will work with schools to create a climate of safety. Crime Prevention and tackling the laundering of the proceeds of crime (as laid down in the Public Administration (Probity in Decision-making) Act are part of an integrated municipal policy on safety. Reoffending will be reduced by introducing release on parole, and strengthening supervision by the probation service and aftercare by municipalities and civil society organisations. A project plan will be drawn up setting out policy, initiatives and measures in the field of prevention.
4. The creation of 'safety regions' will be continued, and care will be taken to ensure that they have adequate democratic legitimacy locally. No statutory measures will be taken to force local fire services to regionalise. Providing an alarm centre is a public responsibility.
5. Municipalities' integrated safety policy will be further developed. As part of the strong local approach mentioned above, efforts will continue to ensure that every neighbourhood has its own police officer. We will seek ways of increasing public involvement in improving safety at neighbourhood level, e.g. by means of 'safe neighbourhood' budgets or by ensuring greater participation in setting priorities. To promote safety, municipal wardens will be given the authority to hand out fines for antisocial behaviour in public. Police numbers in rural areas will be increased where necessary. Greater emphasis will be placed on prevention and on quality rather than quantity when agreeing performance targets with police forces.
6. To protect public order and safety, clothing that covers the face may be banned.
7. Fighting terrorism and preventing radicalisation are an ongoing concern. The Minister of Justice is responsible for combating terrorism and has the authority to take measures in other ministers' areas of competence in emergencies. The necessary legislation will be submitted and introduced as quickly as possible.

8. To stop the dissemination of radicalising messages and information on terrorist weapons, it will be made possible to prohibit internet providers from transmitting certain information.
9. Maintaining law and order and enforcing legislation are preconditions for social integration and development. Toleration of non-compliance with the law is not enforcement, and existing practices in this regard will be minimised or abolished. Measures will be taken to prevent further fragmentation of enforcement; an integrated municipal safety policy and systematic enforcement by the authorities will be promoted. The government will explain the need for any measures taken and their impact on peoples' privacy.
10. Combating drug production and trafficking will continue unabated, as will the fight against nuisance caused by drugs. The bill to shut down homes involved in the illicit sale of drugs will be ushered through parliament as quickly as possible. A vigorous prevention policy will be pursued with respect to young people. 'Coffee shops' (which sell soft drugs) near schools will be closed and their presence in border regions will be curtailed. Efforts to tackle large-scale weed cultivation will be intensified; there will be no experimentation and we will work closely with neighbouring countries in border regions. 'Coffee shops' must meet strict criteria: no advertising, no hard drugs, no nuisance, no sales to under-18s, no more than five grams per transaction. Any that fail to meet these criteria will be closed, without exception.
11. Special measures are needed to tackle growing crime among youth: on-the-spot penalties, greater sanctions, targeting risk groups, prevention through parenting support, coaching, tackling early school leaving, and dealing firmly with truancy.
12. Priority will be given to tackling crime and antisocial behaviour. Streamlining criminal-law and other measures will contribute to a clear and effective policy capable of influencing behaviour (e.g. suspended sentences, conditional decisions not to prosecute, mayoral orders).
13. The 'citizens network' (a telephone network enabling the police to enlist the assistance of the public in search actions) will be rolled out nationally.
14. Legislation designed to deprive people of the proceeds of crime will be amended to make it easier to seize profits resulting from criminal activities and to broaden its applicability to include minor offences.
15. Measures to tackle domestic violence and 'honour crimes' will be pursued vigorously and help for victims and their children will be improved.
16. Prostitution - despite being legalised - is still very much synonymous with black economy work, traffic in women, money laundering and other forms of illegality and criminal activity. Vigorous measures are required, but current instruments are inadequate. There is therefore a need for more robust inspection and enforcement, transparency and the creation of more individual liability (including prosecuting clients of under-age and illegal prostitutes), using new instruments and amending legislation where necessary. Victims and women who want to leave the prostitution sector should receive extra attention, protection and aftercare. Municipalities will be given greater freedom to take account of existing brothels in their spatial planning policy; this also applies in the region where the municipality concerned is situated and includes the 'zero option'.
17. The position of victims in criminal proceedings will be strengthened. Help for victims of serious violent crimes will be intensified, and extra attention will be given to victims of domestic and

honour-related violence. Assistance in collecting compensation for victims from offenders convicted by the courts will be improved.

18. The Netherlands is involved in efforts to strengthen executive cooperation between the police and criminal justice system, and in the field of migration in Europe.

## **VI. Government and public services**

A fully fledged democracy, a unifying public administration and authorities that serve the people are preconditions for the sustainable development of our society. A fully fledged democracy means that the representative democracy that is part of the Dutch tradition must retain its central importance. A unifying public administration enters into dialogue with the public, organisations, public authorities and the different tiers of government, including at Kingdom level. Authorities that serve the people put the public first. This means cutting rules and bureaucracy, consistent enforcement and ensuring a high standard of public services.

The government gives the public the freedom to take initiatives and equips them to participate to the full. Trust is the foundation of a well-functioning government. The government puts its trust in the public and in public-sector professionals and implementing bodies, whose specialist knowledge is vital. The government earns trust by providing good services, entering into dialogue with the public and striking the right balance between careful deliberation and swift action. Introducing the social enterprise model will help to renew public tasks and services.

### **Administrative structure and legislation**

1. The problem of excessive layers of government will be tackled; measures taken by government as a whole will be made more effective by systematically reducing the layers of government involved in a particular issue, without altering the administrative structure laid down in the Constitution. The watchwords are differentiation and tailoring.

a. Differentiation in the tasks, powers and administrative structure of municipalities and provinces will be made possible in the Municipalities Act and Provinces Act.

b. Some policy areas will be organised in such a way that no more than two tiers of government are involved: the level that formulates policy and implements the task, and no more than one level that provides coordination or oversight. The possibility of extending this approach to other areas will then be examined.

2. Municipal boundaries will be redrawn where there is sufficient local support. Provincial councils will be responsible for assessing this; as a rule, the legislature will only check the procedure followed.

3. Vigorous efforts will be made to decentralise tasks and powers to provinces and municipalities and give them greater autonomy; the details will be laid down in two administrative agreements covering the contributions of provinces or municipalities to solving social problems. In this regard, half the specific-purpose grants will be turned into generic grants for the municipalities, and decentralisation will be given a further boost by introducing budget transfers and/or expanding local taxation while limiting state taxes. These administrative agreements will also include a reduction of

at least 25% in the administrative burden on citizens and businesses at provincial and municipal level.

4. In consultation with the provinces and municipalities concerned, the government will draw up a high-priority programme for the western conurbation (the Randstad), aimed at reducing the administrative burden, improving accessibility, creating a better living and working environment, and strengthening know-how and innovation. This project will be coordinated by a single minister.

5. Maximum scope will be allowed for public involvement and individual initiatives in the implementation of government tasks and public services. In this context, a new legal form - the social enterprise - will be introduced.

6. In the legislative sphere, more trust will be placed in the public and more emphasis will be placed on public services to allow greater scope for innovation and better quality.

7. We will adopt a new approach to regulation, supervision and monitoring, and a more integrated and project-based approach to policymaking. This is essential to reduce central government bureaucracy. This will allow the number of ministerial policy staff in particular, and the number of hierarchical layers, to be reduced through 'standardisation', targeted slim-downs and flexibilisation (by appointing all public servants as employees of central government instead of individual ministries).

8. The last comprehensive revision of the Constitution took place 25 years ago. A national commission will issue an advisory report on, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of a preamble, the Constitution's accessibility to the public, and the relationship between the fundamental rights enshrined in it and the rights arising from international treaties, such as the right to a fair trial and the right to life.

9. Mayors and Queen's Commissioners will be appointed on the binding recommendation of the municipal or provincial councils, based on a statutory job description and official government instructions. The Crown reserves the right to reject a recommendation for compelling reasons.

10. The government will withdraw the part of bill 30902 relating to the number of members a municipal council has.

11. In accordance with the policy laid down at the time, fair treatment of registrars of births, deaths and marriages who object to performing same-sex marriages means that, following consultation, another registrar will take their place in conducting same-sex marriage ceremonies, provided such marriages remain possible in every municipality. If problems arise in practice, measures will be taken to safeguard the legal certainty of registrars who object on grounds of conscience.

## **Kingdom relations**

12. The administrative reorganisation of the Netherlands Antilles (and the associated oversight) and the ensuing deepening of cooperation (law enforcement, good governance, social services, education and Dutch language, government finances) will be based on the agreements made at the Start Round Table Conference in November 2005 and the administrative agreements made in the autumn of 2006. Similar agreements will be concluded with Aruba.

13. The movement of persons within the Kingdom will reflect the new administrative structures of the Netherlands Antilles. The civic integration of Dutch citizens from the Antilles and Aruba will be laid down by law. In this regard, further agreements will be made with the Netherlands Antilles, e.g. regarding the implementation of the youth education programme in the Netherlands Antilles in order to tackle the problems experienced or caused by Antillean youth.

14. The Kingdom's territorial integrity will be fully preserved.

## **Arts and culture**

1. The arts and culture bring people together, provide new, inspiring perspectives, can move and fascinate us and hold up a mirror to us. Cultural policy contributes to social cohesion and a healthy economy. A rich cultural life is a source of creative inspiration and helps to attract international businesses. It is essential if people are to feel proud of our society and identify with it. It is therefore important to offer a wide range of artistic expression in our Kingdom and to reach a wide variety of people.

2. Cultural participation will be actively encouraged. Special attention will be given to ways of introducing a broader and more diverse range of people, including young people and ethnic minorities, to the culture on offer, especially museums.

3. Cultural education will continue to enjoy a prominent place in policy on education and the arts in the years ahead. It brings people into contact with the values underlying our society and with its history, and teaches them to appreciate and judge art.

4. Amateur arts and popular culture will be encouraged. The government is responsible for preserving our cultural and religious heritage. The implementation of the Conservation of Historic Buildings and Monuments (Government Grants) Decree will be evaluated in this light.

5. The government will promote the simple and careful use of Dutch as an administrative, cultural and everyday language; its use will also be enshrined in the Constitution, without prejudice to the statutory recognition of the Frisian language.

## **Public broadcasting**

1. The importance of a free, pluralistic, accessible and high-quality public broadcasting service cannot be overstated. A bill will be presented to parliament in the near future reviewing its principal and secondary tasks based on the principles set out below.

2. The board of directors is responsible for policy, balanced programming and coordinating the required cooperation between and with the independent broadcasting networks and the various broadcasting transmitters. Listener and viewer behaviour and the network profiling based on it, and an even distribution of broadcasting time are the keys to coherent programming by the various networks. Broadcasting associations will retain their autonomy and responsibility for their own programmes along with the associated budgets.

3. New networks will be accredited and assessed on the basis of criteria such as public support (expressed for example in membership), their contribution to the quality and long-term external pluralism of the public broadcasting service as a whole, and their reach among relevant target groups.

4. The recently renewed accreditation of the existing broadcasting associations and the concession for the public broadcasting service (with three TV transmitters, five radio transmitters and the accompanying new media activities) will remain intact. In 2010 the concession will be extended for five years.

5. A financial buffer will be created to make the public broadcasting service less dependent on fluctuations in advertising income.

6. Media providers and other stakeholders will be encouraged to adopt a code of conduct to ensure a safe supply of programmes. A media education and expertise centre will be established to help children, young people, parents and schools handle the wide range of media expressions.

7. The Public Broadcasting (Organisation and Implementation) Bill (Media Act, 30571) will be withdrawn.

## **Health and care**

Surveys have repeatedly shown that people regard their health as all-important. Nobody wants to be sick or infirm. Everyone wants the assurance that when they are sick or old they will be able to obtain affordable, high-quality care.

The healthcare sector has undergone major changes in recent years, mainly due to the introduction of the new basic insurance and the Social Support Act. This has placed many demands on the adaptability of patients, the public, health workers and professionals. That is why in the years ahead we want to focus on expanding support among patients and professionals so that together we can tackle unnecessary bureaucracy, improve job satisfaction and implement best practices.

## **Focus on prevention**

1. Prevention is better than cure. Effective prevention policy is the best way to control costs. In particular, this will lead to lower healthcare costs and smaller differences in life expectancy in relation to socioeconomic background.

2. Prevention measures will be agreed and targets set, in consultation with all parties concerned. This could include developing new forms of insurance which encourage a healthy lifestyle and highlight precaution and prevention. The merits of allowing insurers to offer long-term contracts will be examined.

3. Schools and the Youth and Family Centres can play a prominent role in prevention policy. To that end, further agreements will be made on parenting support, nutritional information, the sale of snacks and sweets in schools, gymnastics and swimming lessons and encouraging the practice of sports.

4. We will work with the sector concerned to make all hotels and catering establishments smoke-free during this government's term of office.

5. Existing policy discouraging the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco will be continued. Radio and television advertisements for alcohol will be banned before 9 pm. Enforcement of the age limit for the sale of alcohol will be monitored more closely.

6. High-quality care for addicts will include work rehabilitation and reintegration, along with experiments with more compulsory forms of treatment.

7. Funding for the provision of heroin for medicinal purposes will be continued after 2007 for the cities currently participating in the project.

Premiums, healthcare benefit, basic package and payments by insurees

8. The no-claims bonus will be abolished as of 1 January 2008.

9. The birth-control pill and annual dental check-ups for adults will be included in the basic insurance package, and the number of maternity care hours will be increased.

10. A new insuree payment system will be introduced to replace the no-claims bonus. The chronically ill and the disabled will be exempted since they have no choice in the matter.

11. The allowance under the Exceptional Expenses Allowance (Temporary Provisions) Decree will be transferred to the Social Support Act (WMO). The WMO will be geared more to the chronically ill and disabled.

12. Extra funds will be earmarked to increase the healthcare benefit.

13. The system of a nominal health insurance premium and income-related healthcare benefit will be maintained.

14. The balance of the nominal premium and income-related healthcare benefit depends on income. The scope for paying the balance straightaway (instead of paying the full premium and receiving the healthcare benefit separately) will be increased. Insurees will be free to ask their health insurer to deduct the healthcare benefit from the nominal premium. Agreements will be made with insurers on this matter.

15. The above measures are partly aimed at reducing the number of non-insured people and non-payers.

## **Cure**

16. The scope for free pricing in hospitals (cure) is currently 10% for plannable care. In 2007 a decision will be made to raise the figure to 20% in 2008, again for plannable care. Further steps will only be possible after careful evaluation of the measures already taken, on the basis of quality and accessibility. The independent Healthcare Authority can play an important role in this assessment.

17. The parties concerned will implement a joint plan to simplify the Diagnosis Treatment Combination (DBC) system in the near future.

18. For the non-liberalised part of hospital care which is suitable for negotiations on DBC prices, yardstick competition will be used for the time being to promote a better price-quality ratio and more efficient working methods.

19. Several other measures will be taken to contain costs in the cure sector and to encourage the adoption of best practices. DBC prices in the plannable part of hospital care will relate to all costs incurred in hospitals, including capital costs. Hospitals can therefore decide on their own

investments and will run a financial risk with regard to capital costs. The pace at which hospitals actually incur increasing financial risks will be aligned with the initial redistribution effects of switching to a different funding system.

20. Insurers' capacity to bear risks for expenditure on hospital care will be increased. The cost accounting system will be adapted to this end.

21. The resulting cost savings will be passed on to the public in the form of lower premiums.

22. Use of ICT will be urgently promoted. The emphasis will be on the speedy introduction of the electronic patient file, by 2009 at the latest, and the electronic medication file.

### **Care**

23. Extra funds will be earmarked for nursing home care.

24. Care under the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ) (especially nursing homes and care for the elderly and disabled) is not suitable for free pricing and commercial competition.

25. There is, however, an urgent need for ongoing, wide-ranging efforts to reduce workload and bureaucracy, improve efficiency and strengthen the position of care consumers. To that end, the following developments will be promoted.

26. In dialogue with the sector concerned, the government will investigate, encourage and reward the development of new care concepts. The watchwords are small-scale, integration in neighbourhoods and districts, less red tape, and professionalisation.

27. In view of the necessity and merits of doing more to meet the growing diversity of residential and healthcare needs, especially among the elderly, the financial separation of residence and care will be further promoted.

28. Half of any ensuing cost savings will be passed on in the form of lower premiums and the other half will be reinvested in care.

29. Scope will be created for entrepreneurship and private capital, preferably through the social enterprise model. New enterprises must not be confronted with unnecessary obstacles. Assessment will focus on quality and accessibility.

30. No further measures will be taken as yet in connection with the WMO and AWBZ. The WMO must allow municipalities, through a tailored approach, to encourage the public to participate in society, while offering specific help.

31. From 2008 to 2011 several measures will be taken that will ultimately yield further cost savings in cure and care. These will partly be used to improve the quality of care, and partly passed on to the public in lower premiums.

### **Medical ethics**

32. In the light of the evaluation of the Termination of Pregnancy Act, enforcement of the statutory standards regarding due care will be continued, striking a balance between the legal protection to

which an unborn human life is entitled and women's right to appropriate, individualised assistance with an unwanted pregnancy (as stated in the exploratory memorandum). Suction curettage abortions will be included in the Act. The fixed, five-day deliberation period will be maintained, but will be made variable for suction curettage abortions (until the 16th day). In accordance with the evaluation committee's recommendation, and in cooperation with the professional groups and organisations concerned, new guidelines will be drawn up for the decision-making process, follow-up research into the nature of emergencies will be carried out during the government's term of office, using an anonymous registration system, and research will begin into the psychosocial consequences of abortion.

33. The government will present a coherent package of positive measures, aimed at offering alternatives to termination; this may include increasing the scope for adoption, assistance and counselling, and support for initiatives aimed at helping teenagers with unwanted pregnancies.

34. Good sex education is important in preventing unwanted pregnancies. This is the responsibility of parents, but schools can also make a contribution. Special attention will be paid to information for ethnic minorities - men and boys as well as women and girls.

35. During the government's term of office, legislation on the termination of life on request will not be amended nor will experiments (e.g. with the Drion pill) be permitted. Money will be invested in improving palliative care, in terms of both training and the care provided in nursing homes, hospices and at home. Support for voluntary workers is important.

36. Research into potential treatments using adult stem cells will be vigorously promoted in view of the promising prospects. During the government's term of office the ban on specially producing and using embryos for scientific research or any other purposes apart from inducing pregnancy will be maintained.

## **Immigration policy**

1. The basic aim is a just and humanitarian asylum policy and effective implementation of the Aliens Act 2000, including the return policy.

2. The admissions procedure under the new Aliens Act will be improved (partly in the light of the Scheltema Committee's recommendations) and accelerated; in particular, the 48-hour procedure will be improved so that it can be extended where necessary to prevent delays.

3. A study will shortly be conducted on how to minimise repeat asylum applications. It will explore the possibility that matters relating to article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights that applicants bring up at a later stage and other circumstances for which they are not responsible may be assessed as part of a current procedure without them having to submit a repeat application.

4. Knowledge of the Dutch language will be made a requirement for obtaining Dutch nationality in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba.

5. The refugee quota will continue to be an average of 500 people per year after 2007. The government will ensure that the quota is fully used.

6. To settle cases relating to the old Aliens Act as soon as possible, a regulation will be introduced allowing a residence permit to be granted automatically to people who satisfy the following objective criteria:

- a. they submitted their first asylum application before 1 April 2001;
- b. there are no contraindications related to criminal behaviour, as specified by the criteria for declaring a person an undesirable alien, and they have not been involved in war crimes;
- c. they fell under the return programme prior to 13 December 2006 (either being part of the original programme or having joined it later) and were still involved in legal proceedings or had not yet left the programme; or
- d. they did not leave the Netherlands of their own accord and were not deported at that time and can provide an explicit declaration from the mayor of a municipality showing that they were known there and had lived there since early 2006 in emergency accommodation (as defined by the return programme) or ended up there in the course of 2006 immediately after leaving the return programme referred to in point c; or
- e. they were granted a temporary residence permit on the basis of the old Aliens Act in the context of categorical protection policy or on medical grounds, and it had not been withdrawn by 13 December 2006.

This regulation is coupled to the following:

- a. introducing statutory provisions that prevent applicants from invoking comparability with other cases and re-entering the programme after leaving reception facilities for an unknown destination;
- b. reaching agreement with the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) on providing accommodation for and ensuring the integration of admitted persons and on cooperating with the implementation of the Aliens Act 2000, including the return policy;
- c. reaching agreement with the VNG on not providing accommodation to failed asylum seekers under the Aliens Act regime and to people who do not fall under the above-mentioned regulation;
- d. improving the admissions procedure for asylum seekers based on the evaluation of the Aliens Act 2000;
- e. taking vigorous measures to prevent new backlogs.

9. The Removal and Return of Aliens Unit will begin operations in the first half of 2007, as planned.