

## **Executive summary of a letter to the House of Representatives entitled 'Modernising Dutch diplomacy – a timeless profession remodelled for today'**

### **The nub of the issue**

The world changes – that's nothing new. What is new is the speed and dynamics of that change and its impact on the existing world order. Fast-growing economies are seeking to position themselves. New players are introducing new rules and making their mark on the world. Established partnerships like the EU and NATO still give us something to hold on to, but it is now more common for countries to cooperate in shifting alliances. *If you want something, you have to join with others.*

As the world changes, so do our interests. The level playing field – the same rules for everyone – is still important for a trading country like the Netherlands, but it is becoming more difficult to achieve. As the world grows richer, competition is growing fiercer. Competition for markets and investment, but also for energy and raw materials, and for food and water. *If you want something, you have to succeed.* Be a bit better and smarter than the rest.

People are also interacting differently. The internet and social media are making it easier for people to share information and form opinions. Networks are widening. *If you want something, you have to look further, share, and connect.*

The government wants stability and economic growth, and actively engages in promoting human rights; the three pillars of Dutch foreign policy. But it cannot do so without acting internationally: this country is so hard-wired into the wider world that we cannot shrug our shoulders when we see what is happening in other parts of it. The line between the foreign and domestic blurs. Dutch diplomacy is a means of pursuing abroad the goals that we seek to achieve for this country. We do so by working for prosperity, security, and freedom in the world. And by ensuring that our consular operations have solid foundations. Obviously, we want our international commitment to be as effective as possible.

As a result, diplomacy is changing too. It is adapting to changes in international relations, Dutch interests, and modes of human interaction. The current spending cuts are triggering a process that is unavoidable if we are to perform as well as possible in the future.

The nub of the issue is not the lists of embassies that will open or close. Those lists make headlines, but the bigger picture is more important: our conception of how diplomacy should be organised and how we should operate in the world.

That conception rests on seven interrelated principles:

- Central to our operations are Dutch interests, including economic interests. That means making a big investment in economic diplomacy and cooperating more closely with the business sector.
- Structure follows function. We have to know exactly where to do business, what's in it for us, and how we can contribute. Only when we have a clear vision on the functionality, we can choose the matching structure. Our diplomatic presence does not always have to be an embassy (a building

with a flag, charged with every conceivable task, with support and maintenance personnel); it can also take very different forms. Roving ambassadors, for instance, or flexibly deployable policy teams, based at regional support offices. Or specific efforts on behalf of the business sector.

- Flexibility. We need to be able to respond quickly to changing circumstances.
- Focus. We cannot – nor should we want to – do everything. We need to look at where we can add value, and on that basis decide what we will do. The same approach has been applied to development cooperation, with the result that we will work with fewer partner countries in fewer sectors. We will focus on what we do and choose the most fertile setting in which to do it.
- Integrating tasks. We can do more to decompartmentalise our operations. At embassies, for instance, we don't need different sections for politics, economics, and development cooperation. We should address these domains in a common context.
- Operating more dynamically. We should use digital technology and new media to get a broad perspective on what is going on in society. That means expanding our range of partners and creating connections: daring to wander off the beaten track in order to put the Netherlands properly on the map.
- Our consular operations could be more modern and user-friendly, with more use of online services.

With these seven principles etched in our mind, we can review Dutch diplomacy and organise our missions accordingly. Making us leaner but stronger. Yielding not only a cheaper and more efficient mission network, but also a more flexible approach that is better equipped for today's requirements: precisely the goal specified by the government in the coalition agreement.

The work will be no less interesting for diplomats. On the contrary. Their duties will become broader, more complex, and more dynamic. We will therefore be investing in equipping diplomats for a new era.

Subject to the agreement of the Council of Ministers for the Kingdom, the following 10 missions are to be closed: the embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay; the embassy in Quito, Ecuador; the embassy in Guatemala City, Guatemala; the embassy in Managua, Nicaragua; the embassy in La Paz, Bolivia ; the embassy in Yaoundé, Cameroon; the embassy in Asmara, Eritrea; the embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; the embassy in Lusaka, Zambia; and the consulate-general in Barcelona, Spain.

The Ministry has proposed opening three missions: an embassy in Panama; a new diplomatic representation in Juba, South Sudan; and a consulate-general in western China.