

Remarks by Former minister of Defence, Mr. Wim van Eekelen

Wassenaar 75 years Freedom

75 years ago I was 14 and just had managed to live safely through 5 years of German occupation. I vividly remember mounting a Canadian tank and driving into the city of Utrecht. Only a few months later Japan surrendered, which raised the issue of our colonial heritage. Sukarno and Hatta declared independence only two days later. The Netherlands were prepared to grant Indonesia a considerable degree of self-government provided Dutch interest would be safeguarded. They hastily sent back officials and military. Within a year, In May 1946, our constitution was adapted to make military service in Indonesia possible. As a result more than 100.000 Dutch soldiers were sent to the archipelago, young guys who just had lived under German occupation now became occupiers themselves. If I had been a few years older I would have been one of them. That is why I closely followed their struggle in a guerrilla – type war and had some sympathy for the lack of recognition for all those who had done their duty. Next year we'll finally get the reports on excesses of violence. Rather late and difficult to judge in a setting of a guerrilla war in the jungle. But apparently we Dutch need it for any bad conscience it might reveal.

The government of Soetan Shahrir was moderate and agreed to negotiations which produced the Agreement of Linggarjati, opening the door for a federal Indonesia. Then things went wrong as the Dutch parliament introduced amendments, two so-called police actions were held, the second one arrested Sukarno and Hatta and in the end, in 1949, the entire government was handed over to an entirely free Republic – with the exception of Netherlands New Guinea which followed in 1962.

How did we score in managing decolonisation? Not very well, and the New Guinea issue did not make it any easier. We did better than France in Indo-China and Portugal in Angola and Mozambique. Britain did better in India, but could not stop partition with Pakistan, and fought in Malacca till 1957. International mediation and pressure, strengthened by American concern about Indonesia going communist, made us give in without achieving the economic deals we earlier regarded as our main goal.

The Indonesia Nederland Society (three languages in one title!) stresses the example of Linggarjati as the first meeting between equals (in the house of Joty ter Kulve's parents) and an example of successful negotiations. Equality and respect remain our basic norms. We do not shirk difficult issues. like the palm-oil session we held in The Hague. And now we are planting trees together. We want dialogue about our common past but also about cooperation among younger generations. INS has a section for young members and we hope to assist the 1500 Indonesian students in feeling at home in the Netherlands.

Full marks for Wassenaar for responding in such a fantastic way to the initiative of Joty ter Kulve for doing things together.

Thank you

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