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Debating Dutch Civic Integration Policies, 2003-2011

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The Role of the State and the Image of Migrants Debating Dutch Civic Integration Policies, 2003-2011

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The mushrooming of civic integration policies is one of the most remarkable trends in migration and integration policies in Europe today. While language and integration requirements have long been part of many European naturalization procedures, formalised civic integration programs made their appearance in Europe in the 1990s. In recent years, a growing number of EU countries have made entry and residence rights conditional on participation in or successful completion of civic integration courses.

Civic integration policies are one of the ways in which contemporary European states strive to protect the cohesion and regulate the diversity of their societies. They reflect the assumption that a certain degree of homogeneity among the population is necessary for society to function, and that state intervention is necessary to safeguard this homogeneity. As Inez Michalowski (2009a: 23) rightly argues, these policies reveal “the competence that a state attributes itself in the management of cultural and religious diversity”. Studying debates and policies of civic integration allows us to identify different conceptions of the role of the state in ensuring order and cohesion in society.

There is a lively ongoing debate in the literature as to whether or not these new policies of integration and citizenship should be considered ‘liberal’ (Joppke 2007a, 2007b; Guild, Groenendijk & Carrera 2009; Michalowski 2009a; Joppke & Baubock 2010). This debate is primarily normative in nature. Emphasis has mostly been put on the *content* of civic integration policies and tests, investigating *what* migrants are supposed to learn and whether these requirements transgress the liberal dictum that the state respect citizens’ private lives, thoughts and opinions. This paper takes a different angle, inquiring *how* migrants are expected to learn, i.e. which roles and responsibilities are ascribed to the state, to migrants, and to other actors in the process

of acquiring the required knowledge and skills. This paper aims to show that if we wish to understand and assess the different conceptions of the role of the state inscribed in civic integration policies, the question of *how* is at least as important as the question of *what*. It also argues that the role ascribed to the state is intrinsically related to the way in which migrants as a policy target group are portrayed.

In order to do so, this paper investigates the role and responsibilities attributed to the state in political debates and policies of civic integration in the Netherlands between 2004 and 2011. In recent years, the Netherlands has embarked upon reforms which redistributed the responsibility for civic integration among individual, state, and social actors in more radical and innovative ways than any other European country. This paper analyses the political debates in which this reform was shaped, i.e. the parliamentary history of the Law on Civic Integration (*Wet Inburgering*), which Dutch parliamentarians have been debating from 2003 until the present day. The data consists of 345 documents from the parliamentary records, including government memoranda, legislative proposals, records of commission meetings and plenary debates, as well as parliamentary motions, questions and amendments¹.

1. A Short History of Dutch Civic Integration Policies

In the early 1990s, the Netherlands started to move away from the ‘ethnic minorities policies’ that had given rise to its reputation of a multicultural country. The government opted for an ‘integration policy’ that aimed primarily at individual socio-economic independence, rather than at emancipation of groups. Cultural matters were considered a private rather than a government concern. The neoliberal ideology of ‘individual responsibility’ that had started to shape the reforms of the Dutch welfare state since the mid-1980s was now also applied to the field of migrant incorporation, leading to a new emphasis on the duties that should accompany rights (Scholten 2007: 82-85; Bonjour 2009: 192-198).

As part of this shift, the first civic integration policies for newcomers were introduced in 1996 and laid down in the Law on Civic Integration of Newcomers (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*) of 1998. Foreigners – other than labour migrants – coming to the Netherlands for non-temporary purposes were obliged to participate in a Dutch language course as well as in societal and professional orientation programs. The municipalities contracted the semi-governmental Regional Education Centres (*ROCs*) to provide the courses, which were free of charge for the participants. Failure to participate was sanctioned with a fine. In parallel to this obligatory program for newcomers, a voluntary program was set up for so-called ‘oldcomers’ (*oudkomers*), i.e. people of migrant origin who had been living in the Netherlands for some time (Commissie Blok 2004: 118-124).

While it is important to note that the introduction of obligatory civic integration policies predates the turn of the century, current Dutch civic integration policies can only be understood as part of the political response to electoral successes of the anti-immigrant far-Right, i.e. of the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* which obtained 26 out of 150 Lower

¹ These documents were selected from the online archives of the Dutch Parliament under Kamerstuknummers 29543, 30308, and 31143, and through complementary keyword search.

House seats in 2002, and of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party which obtained 24 seats in 2010. Their success was interpreted as a vote of no-confidence against the entire political establishment. This is why all political parties have adopted a much more restrictive line on migration and integration, so as to let their electorate know that their discontent had been heard and understood (Bonjour 2009: 243-244).

In the second Balkenende government – consisting of Christian Democrats, Conservative Liberals and Liberal Democrats – which entered office in 2003, the task of responding to what was interpreted as the electorate's call for radical change in the domain of migrant integration was entrusted to Rita Verdonk, Conservative Liberal minister of Foreign Affairs and Integration. She first presented her plans for a fundamental revision of civic integration policies to Parliament in April 2004². The legislative proposal for the Law on Civic Integration followed in September 2005³. It was adopted in November 2006 and entered into force on 1 January 2007.

The new Law brought about a number of fundamental changes. First, the obligation to participate in the course was replaced by an obligation to pass the exam. Failure to pass the exam within five years – three and a half years for newcomers who had passed the civic integration test abroad⁴ – was sanctioned with a fine. In addition, the granting of a permanent residence permit was conditional upon passing the exam. Second, the target group of obligatory civic integration was expanded from newcomers to 'oldcomers'. All foreigners were obliged to pass the exam, regardless of their length of residence in the Netherlands, except if they had followed at least eight years of primary or secondary education in the Netherlands or disposed of a diploma or certificate from a Dutch educational institute. An estimated number of 250,000 'oldcomers' would be subject to the obligation of civic integration⁵. Most importantly in the context of this paper, the Law on Civic Integration brought major changes to the role and responsibility attributed to the state in implementing civic integration policies.

The provision of courses was opened up to the 'free market': the monopoly of the semi-public Regional Education Centres was abolished, so that any organisation or company was allowed to provide civic integration courses. In addition, 'personal responsibility' was to be a leading principle. This implied that as a rule, individual participants were to decide for themselves how to prepare for the exam – e.g. in which institution to follow courses – and to pay for the courses themselves. Those who could not afford to do so could borrow money from the government. Part of the costs (70% with a maximum of €3,000) would be reimbursed if the exam was passed within three years. Thus, as a general rule, the role of the state would henceforth be limited to drafting and administering the exams, and providing certain financial facilities. Only

² Tweede Kamer (further: TK) 29543 (2), 23 April 2004.

³ TK 30308 (1-3), 21 September 2009.

⁴ The obligation to pass a civic integration test as a condition for family migrants and religious ministers to be admitted to the Netherlands was introduced by the Wet Inburgering in het Buitenland of 2005 (Bonjour 2010).

⁵ TK 30308 (3), 21 September 2009; EK 30308 (F): 7-8, 27 October 2006.

for specific groups – unemployed, housewives⁶, religious ministers and newcomers admitted on asylum grounds – were municipalities allowed to select and finance the course program. Even these groups were to pay a contribution of €270 to the costs of the course.

In the House of Representatives, there was broad and warm support for fundamental reform of civic integration policies, and no political party questioned the need of obligatory courses about Dutch language and society for both newcomers and ‘oldcomers’. However, the left-wing opposition was concerned about the financial burden imposed on participants, about the obligation to pass the test, and most of all about the limited involvement of the state in the preparation process leading up to the exam. The Social Democrats proposed that municipalities be allowed to offer a civic integration provision to everyone, instead of only to specific vulnerable groups⁷. Notwithstanding such differences of opinion, *all* the 150 members of the House of Representatives eventually voted in favour of the government proposal, except for one member of the Liberal Democrat party⁸.

It should therefore not come as a surprise that the change of government in 2007 did not lead to a radical reversal of the changes introduced by the Law on Civic Integration. The centre-Left cabinet Balkenende IV⁹, composed of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and the small reformed ChristenUnie, maintained the obligation for newcomers and oldcomers to pass the exam, even lowering the time allowed to pass the exam before a fine is imposed from five to three and a half years for all participants. It also kept the principle of a free market for civic integration course providers. However, the Social-Democrat minister Ella Vogelaar, who replaced Rita Verdonk, significantly softened the interpretation of ‘personal responsibility’. Thus, municipalities were given the possibility to offer the courses for free, i.e. not to oblige participants to pay the €270 contribution. Moreover, municipalities could offer a civic integration provision – implying the municipality would select the course program and pay for (most of) it – to all participants, instead of only to vulnerable groups¹⁰. Although in principle, municipalities still have the possibility to oblige migrants to prepare for the exam through their own means, in practice municipalities provide and finance the civic integration program for almost everyone. Between 2007 and 2009,

⁶ The official definition of this category was persons “not entitled to unemployed benefits and without paid labour”, i.e. according to the government “mostly women in a disadvantaged position”. TK 29543 (4): 11, 7 December 2004.

⁷ TK 27083/29543 (53), 6 June 2004; TK 30308 (37), 9 June 2006.

⁸ The sole dissenting member was the Liberal Democrat Koser Kaya. TK 30308 plenary debate: 6084, 7 July 2006. In the indirectly elected Senate, the Liberal Democrats, Greens and Socialist Party voted against the legislative proposal. Eerste Kamer (further: EK) 30308 plenary debate: 407, 28 November 2006.

⁹ The cabinet Balkenende III was a transition cabinet, in office from June 2006 until February 2007, composed of Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals and mainly responsible for organising elections.

¹⁰ TK 31143 (1) appendix: 15-16, 7 September 2007; VROM ‘Nieuwsbrief Deltaplan Inburgering, No. 17, december 2009’, <http://www.vrom.nl/pagina.html?id=4590>, consulted on 1 June 2010.

more than 100,000 newcomers and oldcomers embarked upon a civic integration program offered by their municipality, while less than 8,000 persons prepared for the exam on their own, making use of the loan and reimbursement facilities available to this effect¹¹. Thus, the role of the municipality in implementing civic integration policies has been restored to its old state. This might have been temporary however, since the current Conservative Rutte government, which entered office in 2010, has announced its intention to restore migrants' responsibility for "reaching the required level of knowledge of Dutch language and society. Migrants who need a course will have to pay for it themselves"¹².

2. Theoretical Analyses of Conceptions of the Role of the State in Dutch Civic Integration Policies

Because of the emphasis put on 'individual responsibility', Dutch civic integration policies have been interpreted as 'neo-liberal' policies (Joppke 2007b: 248; Schinkel & Van Houdt 2010: 700). Neoliberalism is generally associated with a withdrawal of the state. Thus Michalowski (2009b), who investigated the Dutch privatization of civic integration courses from a historical perspective, argues that the Law on Civic Integration was no less than an attempt by the second Balkenende government at fundamental change in policy paradigm, as it "questioned the previously valid paradigm that integration was a task of the state" (2009b: 273). The image here is one of the state disengaging from civic integration.

This same image is presented and complicated by Joppke (2007a: 7-8) who states that "the Dutch state has engaged in a paradoxical double move of withdrawal from and increased presence in the integration process". The "withdrawal", according to Joppke, is visible in the "farming out" of course provision to private actors and in pushing the financial burden towards the individual migrant. The "increased presence" on the other hand pertains to Joppke's observation that "coercive state involvement has massively increased", most notably through making entry and residence rights dependent on meeting civic integration requirements.

In my view, the image of "withdrawal" of the state, so common in political and analytical discussions of neo-liberalism, is not the most insightful metaphor to understand the change in the conception of the role of the state underlying recent Dutch reforms of civic integration policy. Michalowski is entirely justified in labelling this a paradigmatic change: however, what the second Balkenende government proposed is not *less* state involvement, but a *different* state involvement.

This resonates with the arguments of scholars inspired by the writings of Michel Foucault who investigate the workings of 'neo-liberal' forms of government. Analysing 'neo-liberalism' not as an ideology but as a technique of government, they show that neo-liberal governing – even if it is ideologically geared towards limiting the state and maximizing individual autonomy – is still governing. Thus Burchell (1993: 271) explains that the liberal "principle of government requires of the governed that they freely conduct themselves in a certain way". In neo-liberalism, this "rational self-

¹¹ TK 31143 (84) appendix: 24, 12 August 2010.

¹² TK 32824 (1): 11, 16 June 2011.

conduct of the governed” is conceived “not so much a given of human nature as a consciously contrived form of conduct”. There is a task here for the government, to ensure that the optimal conditions for liberal rule to function are present in society, in the market, and in the individual citizen. Thus, governments which have been “presented as being engaged in a project of ‘rolling back the state’” have “nonetheless been very inventive in the models of action constructed for different areas of social life” (Burchell 1993: 274). The forms of government which Burchell (1993: 275-276) calls “responsibilisation” or “autonomization” may be new and different, but they are “still a technology of government” (cf. Dean 2002: 42-43, Rose 2007: 144).

Joppke (2007a, 2007b) and Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010) have drawn inspiration from this literature, sometimes subsumed under the heading of ‘governmentality’, in analyzing Dutch civic integration policies. Thus Joppke (2007a: 16) refers to this literature to explain that “the repressive impulse” in civic integration policies “stems from liberalism itself”. Joppke seeks an explanation for the paradox that liberal policies may strive to coerce individuals into being autonomous, a paradox that has been addressed in the governmentality literature. Dean (2002: 38, 40) for instance argues that liberalism is not incompatible with authoritarian mentalities or practices, indeed that liberal government necessarily has an “authoritarian dimension”. Dean (2002: 46-49) states that – as post-colonial and feminist scholars have shown – liberal government necessarily identifies different categories of people “according to their capacities for autonomy”, amongst whom “subject or dependent populations who cannot, or cannot yet, be governed through freedom”. For the latter category – which may range from chronic welfare dependents to drug addicts, elderly, people in developing countries or teenage mothers – “coercion might be a condition of acting in their best interest”. Likewise, Joppke (2007b: 268) quotes John Stuart Mill stating that “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end”. Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010) describe Dutch citizenship policies since 2000 as an example of “repressive responsibilization” which “involves the moral education of citizens deemed unable to assume responsibility”.

Clearly, the civic integration policies designed by the second Balkenende government were coercive in nature, since migrants were obliged not only to make the effort of learning about Dutch language and society, but actually to pass the exam. Clearly also, these policies were aimed at turning migrants into autonomous citizens. The paradox explored by the scholars quoted above then, was certainly present in these reforms. However, as I shall argue below, the solution they propose only fits half of the Dutch political spectrum. State coercion is entwined with representation of migrants as a weak group, inapt to shoulder responsibilities, in the discourse of the political Left, but *not* in the discourse of the political Right. The analyses of Joppke as well as Schinkel and Van Houdt suffer from a weakness that is not uncommon in the ‘governmentality’ literature: a neglect of the party politics through which policies are shaped. A closer look at Dutch political debates about civic integration abroad shows that conceptions of the state and portrayals of migrants relate to each other in very different ways in the discourses of different political parties.

3. The Role of the State and the Image of Migrants: Views from the Right

In the view of the second Balkenende government, as expressed by Conservative Liberal minister Rita Verdonk, the migrant integration policies conducted in the past had failed, mostly due to the perverse effects of the role which the state had adopted in past decades. On the one hand, the government had done too little: past policies had been too “non-committal”, instead of imposing unambiguous obligations. On the other hand, the government had done too much, treating migrants as “care categories that need to be taken by the hand by the government”¹³.

First, the government decided to entrust the responsibility for providing civic integration courses to the free market, rather than to the semi-public Regional Education Centres. Doing away with this monopoly and opening the market was expected to enhance the diversity and the quality of the courses and to lower the prices. As a Conservative Liberal MP argued: “People are different and may have different demands. (...) If the market is good at anything, it is at making supply meet demand. (...) This will probably lower the costs too”¹⁴. Upon insistence from Parliament, including the Christian Democratic coalition party, the government eventually agreed that “some form of consumer protection” was necessary. It opted for a non-compulsory quality mark developed by business itself, since this offered the best “balance between consumer protection and free access to the market”¹⁵.

‘Individual responsibility’ had been a mantra in Dutch migrant incorporation policies since the early 1990s. However, the second Balkenende government pushed for a more radical interpretation of this ‘individual responsibility’, in which migrants would be expected to prepare for the civic integration exam on their own, with only limited financial state assistance. Asking migrants to make this effort was thought legitimate because it was the consequence of their own choice to move to the Netherlands and because it was primarily in their own interest to “invest in their future in the Netherlands”¹⁶. Moreover, as Minister Verdonk argued, “personal responsibility yields the best results. It stimulates people to get busy themselves and to find the best way to prepare for the civic integration exam”¹⁷.

Importantly, this argumentation is based on a representation of the target group as strong and able persons, in contrast to past policies and present opponents who are said to reduce migrants to “care categories”, whereas minister Verdonk objected that “coming to the Netherlands from another country does not all of a sudden turn people into poor wretches”¹⁸. She argued:

We let people take responsibility for obtaining a drivers licence, getting married, having children, why should we take charge of civic integration? (...) Why not put our faith in people’s strength? They are perfectly able of taking their own responsibility¹⁹.

¹³ EK 30308 Plenary: 353; 21 November 2006.

¹⁴ TK 27083 (44): 22; 21 June 2004.

¹⁵ TK 27083 (47), 30 June 2004; TK 30308 (3): 9, 21 September 2005.

¹⁶ TK 29200 VI (21): 24, 12 October 2003; TK 29543 (4): 4, 7 December 2004; TK 30308 (7): 56, 23 December 2005.

¹⁷ TK 27083 (44): 24, 21 June 2004.

¹⁸ EK 30308 Plenary: 353, 21 November 2006.

¹⁹ TK 30308 (63): 40, 12 June 2006.

Likewise, Conservative Liberal parliamentarians pleaded for breaking with the policies of the past, when “civic integration was in the hands of social workers and as long as civic integration remains a matter of social assistance, continuous failure (...) is rewarded with extra attention”²⁰. No longer should migrants be treated as weaklings: “Newcomers have chosen the Netherlands. In the jungle that this world is, they found their way to the Netherlands. It would be condescending to assume that they need the government to take them by the hand”²¹. In a discussion with a Socialist parliamentarian, a Conservative Liberal MP emphatically professed his creed: “I do not see people as patients. On the contrary, I see people as adults and independent and that is how the government should treat people”²².

In the election program which won them the elections of June 2009, the Conservative Liberals wrote:

Allochthons are not pitiful. They can be called upon to take their responsibility, just like any other Dutch person. That does not fit with a government (...) which takes the responsibility from their shoulders. It seems sympathetic to do so. But underneath lies a deeply condescending, stigmatizing attitude of pity²³.

The Christian Democrats agreed wholeheartedly, stating that “our party considers newcomers as adults who make conscious choices and are aware of the consequences of their choices for themselves and for Dutch society”²⁴.

The second Balkenende government initially proposed three exceptions to the rule that migrants should be expected to be able to prepare for the civic integration exam by themselves: unemployed, housewives, and spiritual leaders. At the request of Christian Democrat MPs, refugees were added as a fourth category²⁵. Municipalities would offer people in these four categories the possibility to follow a civic integration program selected for them, in return for a relatively modest financial contribution of €275. With the exception of spiritual leaders who were offered a program because of “the major societal importance of their integration”²⁶, increased state involvement was deemed necessary for these ‘special groups’, because unlike the rest of the target group, they were not considered strong enough to carry ‘personal responsibility’ for their own integration. While these groups were consistently presented as ‘exceptions’ to the general rule of ‘individual responsibility’, the numbers revealed a different picture. Minister Verdonk aimed for 74,000 migrants per year doing their civic integration, out of which 47,000 – more than 60% – would be offered a course by their municipality²⁷.

Nevertheless, in the second Balkenende government’s rhetoric representation of civic integration policies, the state withdrew from the process of selecting and

²⁰ TK 27083 (44): 20, 21 June 2004.

²¹ TK 29200 VI (94): 36, 30 October 2003.

²² TK 27083 (44): 20, 21 June 2004.

²³ VVD Verkiezingsprogramma 2010-2014, ‘Orde op Zaken. Zeker Nu’: 34.

²⁴ TK 28198 (5): 6-7, 4 October 2002.

²⁵ TK 30308 (12): 11, 27 February 2006.

²⁶ TK 30308 (3): 24, 21 September 2005.

²⁷ EK 30307 Plenary: 359, 21 November 2006.

providing civic integration courses, entrusting these tasks to the market and to migrants. This did not mean however, that the state was to be an irrelevant actor in the policies introduced by the Law on Civic Integration. As minister Verdonk put it, “individual responsibility of the citizen for civic integration (...) does not mean just throwing everything on the citizen’s plate”²⁸. In fact, nothing could be further from the Dutch debates and policies of civic integration since the turn of the century than a *laissez-faire* approach to migrant incorporation. Government and parliamentary discourse is punctuated with references to the ‘ambition’ and ‘decisiveness’ that state policies should reflect. The political Right did not want *less* state involvement: it wanted a *different* state involvement.

What the Dutch right-wing politicians’ new conception of the role of the state in civic integration policies was, and how it related to their representation of migrants as a policy target group, was formulated most explicitly by the Christian Democrats:

Our party lives with the inspiration and the mission to give room to people’s talents. Our goal with this Law [on Civic Integration] is to place people in their strength by teaching them to find their own way and place in society and thus to become its citizen²⁹.

The Christian Democrats want a policy that challenges people and poses demands. In English we would talk of a ‘*demanding*’³⁰ policy, a policy that equips people for carrying responsibility. That is where integration policies have fallen short these last years³¹.

This relation between starting from people’s strength and formulating demands runs as a red thread through the discourse of the Christian Democrats, who argued that “we do not take people seriously if we do not couple [civic integration courses] to a proper exam”³² and who summarized their views on the Law on Civic Integration thus: “This cabinet has opted for a demanding integration policy, where people are not seen as victims but as responsible individuals who are capable of shaping their existence and are not victims of circumstances”³³. In the words of Minister Verdonk, the role of the government would be “to formulate the standards that the migrant must meet to be able to function in Dutch society” and to “enable people to realize their own responsibility” through “positive and negative stimuli”³⁴.

The minimum standards of skills and knowledge that migrants need to be able to “function in Dutch society”, as formulated by the second Balkenende, are not insignificant. They include speaking and writing Dutch at level A2 ECFR, to be demonstrated not only in an exam, but also in practical situations. This “practical examination” involves either a series of four assessments, or assembling a portfolio

²⁸ TK 29200 VI (95): 14, 3 November 2003.

²⁹ TK 30308 Plenary: 58427, 27 June 2006.

³⁰ In English in the original text.

³¹ TK 29200 VI (94): 14, 30 October 2003.

³² TK 27083 (44): 10, 21 June 2004.

³³ TK 30308 (63): 9, 21 June 2006.

³⁴ TK 30308 (16): 12, 27 April 2006; TK 27083 (44): 24, 6 June 2004; TK 30308 (7): 108, 23 December 2005.

of 20 “proofs” which establish that the applicant has in fact used Dutch to obtain a driver’s license, look for a job, or speak to his medical practitioner³⁵. In addition, the applicant has to demonstrate knowledge of Dutch society. The curriculum was significantly expanded in comparison to the civic integration program that had been in place since the 1990s, most notably with “knowledge about how people interact with each other in Dutch society”³⁶. The terms of the exam on Knowledge of Dutch Society included the requirement that the migrant be able to “understand and employ different Dutch manners, deal with unusual or conflicting habits, values and norms, participate in social networks, and engage in and maintain everyday social contacts”. This includes being able to cope with direct criticism, making appointments before visiting acquaintances, and knowing how to use a shopping trolley³⁷. Both Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals pleaded consistently for a high level of language requirements. The Conservative Liberals in particular also felt strongly that civic integration should cover not only legal prescriptions but also “other guidelines that citizens must keep to”: “civic integration is ensuring that newcomers know what the prevailing rules of the game, values, norms and social etiquette so that they can stand on their own feet as soon as possible”³⁸.

The role attributed to the state in civic integration policies by the Dutch political Right was far from a small or insignificant one. The state is no longer to care and to provide, as it previously did. Instead, the state is to define the minimum common standards required for the preservation of the cohesion of Dutch society, and to make sure that migrants meet these standards. The enforcement instruments put at the state’s disposal – positive and negative ‘stimuli’, i.e. financial loan and refund facilities, and sanctions in the shape of fines or limited entry and residence rights – are far from negligible. This confirms the argument of scholars of intergovernmentality, that to govern through ‘individual responsibility’ is not to govern less, but to govern differently.

However, the governmentalist solution for the paradoxical fact that liberal governments recurrently use illiberal policy instruments does not fit here. The Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals did not present the target group of civic integration as a ‘weak’ group, as ‘unable to assume responsibility’. To the contrary, a core element of their argument was the rejection of the ‘victimization’ of migrants by their political opponents. They emphatically refused to consider migrants as a ‘vulnerable’ group, unable to look out for their own interest. In the discourse of the Dutch political Right, migrants were construed as strong, able citizens, capable of taking care of themselves just like other Dutch citizens.

4. The Role of the State and the Image of Migrants: Views from the Left

From the first debates on the Law on Civic Integration, the Social Democrats had criticized Minister Verdonk’s plans for “marginalizing the responsibility of the

³⁵ DUO/IB-Groep, Inburgeringsexamen: Praktijkexamen, retrieved 7 April 2011 from www.inburgering.nl.

³⁶ TK 30308 (7): 65, 23 December 2005.

³⁷ TK 30308 (25) Appendix: 7, 11, 14-15, 2 June 2006.

³⁸ TK 29800 VI (101): 13, 13 December 2004.

government. The newcomer is left to find his way between legal obligation and market mechanisms. Individual responsibility is primary in our vision too, but as new citizens of our country they must also be enabled to participate”³⁹. In a similar vein, the Greens argued that “the obligation to learn must be met by the right to education”⁴⁰. The Liberal Democrats stated that “considering the efforts that people make, [the state] has a duty to provide”⁴¹. Likewise, the Socialist Party argued that “if you introduce an obligation, the migrant (...) at least has a right to a good and fitting [civic integration] provision”⁴². This criticism increased as the first results of the Law on Civic Integration proved severely disappointing. Before the Law entered into force, some 30,000 persons per year started a civic integration course. While the aim of the Law was to double this number, it actually dropped below 10,000 in 2007⁴³. This drop was partly attributed to severe start-up problems in the municipalities, but it was also interpreted as a result of flaws in the original design of the Law on Civic Integration.

Seven months after entering office, the Social Democrat minister Ella Vogelaar, responsible for civic integration policies in the fourth Balkenende government, announced that municipalities would henceforth be allowed to offer a course to any member of the target group, not just to the ‘special’ categories. In explaining why she chose to “shift the responsibility for providing a course to municipalities”, Minister Vogelaar wrote: “the personal responsibility of applicants remains fully valid on a number of points, but what is at stake is finding the proper balance between this personal responsibility and the societal interest of having as many people as possible doing civic integration. In the Law on Civic Integration, this balance was insufficiently found”⁴⁴. Although in principle, the possibility remained for individual migrants to select and finance their civic integration program themselves with the help of loan- and reimbursement facilities, in practice the focus both of local implementation and of political debate came to lie almost exclusively on courses selected and financed for migrants by the municipalities. While the original Law stipulated that with the exception of asylum seekers, migrants were free to reject the offer if they preferred to prepare for the civic integration program on their own, in May 2008 it was decided that all migrants could be obliged to participate in the civic integration program selected by the municipality⁴⁵. Thus, the role of the municipalities in the provision of civic integration courses was fully restored. No formal changes were made to the free market provision of courses, but in practice the municipalities became almost the only buyer on the market⁴⁶. The state may no longer have had a monopoly on the offer, but it had a virtual monopoly of the demand, thereby retrieving significant control over the market.

³⁹ TK 27083 (44): 6, 21 June 2004.

⁴⁰ EK 303087 Plenary: 349, 20 November 2006.

⁴¹ TK 30308 (63): 44, 12 June 2006.

⁴² TK 31318 Plenary: 6098, 21 May 2008.

⁴³ EK 30307 Plenary: 359, 21 November 2006; TK 31143 (25): 3, 3 October 2008.

⁴⁴ TK 31143 (9): 6, 18 October 2007.

⁴⁵ TK 31318 (7): 4, 21 May 2008.

⁴⁶ TK 31143 (84) appendix: 24, 12 August 2010.

The conviction of Minister Vogelaar and the left-wing parties that the state should play a more caring and providing role in civic integration policies was closely related to the way in which these politicians – especially the Social Democrats and Socialist Party – perceived the target group of civic integration. Minister Vogelaar wrote:

If the government gives the impression that it will take care of everything, citizens will not feel called upon to do much themselves. On the other hand, if the government leaves everything to citizens, it is likely that only those with the necessary competences will manage to get things well organized⁴⁷.

When asked about the possibilities for individual migrants to organize their own civic integration trajectory, Minister Vogelaar answered that “this is an entirely practicable road for certain applicants, especially for the well-educated”⁴⁸. In other words, this government thought only a very specific part of the target group fitted the profile of able and autonomous citizens that underlay the original Law on Civic Integration. For the rest of the target group, state provisions were deemed necessary. The fourth Balkenende government still sought to distance itself from a ‘victimisation’ approach: “People in a disadvantaged position easily tend to consider themselves victims of circumstances they cannot control. An activating government challenges citizens to give up their role of victim and take control”⁴⁹. Victims or not, migrants were once again described as ‘in a disadvantaged position’. The Social Democrats stated that “responsibility must be placed where it can factually be carried; this involves capacities and financial resources”, arguing that they knew “from experience that these target groups in particular need some guidance to be able to carry this responsibility”⁵⁰. Similarly, the Socialists claimed that “the target group of this law is one that needs good guidance to be able to carry personal responsibility”⁵¹. They wondered how “newcomers and oldcomers will be able to find and choose a civic integration course on their own”, since “the reason they are going to follow the course in the first place is that they cannot find their way around in the Netherlands on their own yet”⁵².

If these parties favoured a more important role for the municipalities in selecting and financing the civic integration programs, it is because they did not think migrants would or could prepare for the civic integration exams by themselves. The Social Democrats thought the system as it existed before Verdonk’s 2006 reform, where “municipalities take people by the hand from day one and send them on a course, remains attractive and simple”: “patronizing perhaps, but very practical for people who just arrived in the Netherlands”⁵³. The Socialist Party was equally in favour of the previous system, where “new citizens are collared and sent to a course right upon

⁴⁷ TK 31268 (2): 20-21, 13 November 2007.

⁴⁸ TK 31318 Plenary: 6108, 21 May 2008.

⁴⁹ TK 31268 (2): 21, 13 November 2007.

⁵⁰ TK 29200 VI (95): 4, 3 November 2003; TK 30308 Plenary: 5862, 27 June 2006.

⁵¹ TK 30308 (6): 23-24, 29 November 2005.

⁵² TK 30308 (63): 17, 12 June 2006.

⁵³ TK 29800 VI (101): 5, 13 December 2004; TK 27083 (44): 8, 21 June 2004.

arrival”⁵⁴. They argued that “we could tell people who come here: it is nice to have you, you can stay, there is the school and that is where you will get an education, because you need that to participate here”. To the Socialist Party, this was “paternalism in the positive sense of the term. This is how we position ourselves towards our own children too”⁵⁵. The metaphor of ‘children’ was commonly used in the 19th and early 20th century to explain why women and people of colour were granted limited civil and political rights. This then is exactly the liberal justification of illiberal measures identified in the literature: certain categories of people are thought unable to look out for their own best interest (Dean 2002: 46-49; Joppke 2007b: 268; Schinkel & Van Houdt 2010: 708-709).

The fourth Balkenende government never tired of repeating that “the personal responsibility (...) laid down in the Law on Civic Integration remains the starting point”⁵⁶. However, this ‘starting point’ was interpreted differently. To the previous government, ‘personal responsibility’ had meant that migrants were to get by without state help. In contrast, the new government wrote that the “the personal responsibility of the migrant for his or her civic integration in the Netherlands remains intact. Concretely, this implies the legal obligation to pass the civic integration exam on time”.⁵⁷ Thus, responsibility becomes an obligation, a requirement to make a certain effort:

We expect new Dutch to make an effort to participate in our society and to take the chance that we offer. That is important not only for themselves and for their surroundings, but most of all for the raising of their children. (...) Civic integration is nothing more or less than a moral responsibility⁵⁸.

Because “immigrants have chosen to build their lives in the Netherlands”, they have a “moral obligation to make an extra effort”⁵⁹. They “may be expected to accept the support offered [for their civic integration] as a welcome gift, and to seize it with both hands. After all, it is an investment in their own future”⁶⁰. In this left-wing discourse; ‘responsibility’ is disconnected from notions of autonomy or capability, to be reinterpreted as a (moral) obligation. This interpretation of ‘personal responsibility’ and representation of the target group is much closer to the “repressive responsabilization” defined by Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010: 708-709) as “the moral education of citizens deemed unable to assume responsibility”, than the discourse of the Dutch political Right.

5. Conclusion

Civic integration policies are based on the assumption that the diversity produced by past and present immigration puts a strain on social cohesion, to the extent that state

⁵⁴ TK 30308 (63): 14, 12 June 2006.

⁵⁵ EK 30308 Plenary: 386, 21 November 2006.

⁵⁶ TK 31143 (1) appendix: 6, 7 September 2007.

⁵⁷ TK 31318 (3): 2, 24 December 2007.

⁵⁸ TK 31143 (67): 4, 25 August 2009.

⁵⁹ TK 31268 (25): 4-5, 17 November 2007.

⁶⁰ TK 31268 (25): 6, 17 November 2007.

intervention is necessary. Policies and debates on civic integration reveal different conceptions of the role attributed to the state in managing diversity.

The civic integration policies conducted in the Netherlands since the turn of the century may be characterised as neoliberal, in that they start from the principle of individual responsibility of the migrant. Even though the role of the state in providing courses was drastically reduced, Dutch civic integration policies illustrate scholars of governmentality's arguments that governing neoliberally means governing *differently* rather than governing *less*, and that governing neoliberally does not exclude governing through coercion. However, because the governmentality literature tends to neglect party politics, it has overlooked the very significant differences between the positions adopted by political parties on the role of the state in civic integration policies.

Political parties on the Left of the political spectrum want the state to play both a coercive and a providing role. Civic integration courses should be obligatory and they should be organised and financed by the state, because migrants as a policy target group are perceived as vulnerable and weak, unable to acquire the required knowledge and skills through their own means. This combination of coercion and care fits well with the governmentalist explanation of the paradox of repression by liberal regimes: state coercion is deemed justified for groups deemed unable to look out for their own best interest.

This explanation does not fit the right-wing parties' conception of the role of the state in civic integration policies however. The Dutch political Right wants the state to play a demanding and facilitating role. Whereas the obligation favoured by the Left focuses on input, i.e. on making an effort and participating, the obligation favoured by the Right is about output, i.e. about standards to be met. The state should define high standards for migrants to meet, but intervene as little as possible in *how* migrants do so, because migrants are portrayed as autonomous persons who are able to take care of themselves. Coercion is deemed justified because the general interest is thought to require that all members of Dutch society share a basic set of values, knowledge and skills. In addition, coercion is framed as a way of 'placing people in their strength'. Migrants are assumed to have considerable resources and 'demanding' policies are considered a legitimate means to stimulate them to make full use of these resources, rather than smothering their initiative and resourcefulness by too much state care.

The way politicians speak about migrants has a direct impact on their public image and thereby on their life circumstances and opportunities. The migrant population in the Netherlands appears to be stuck between the political Left which represents them as weak and vulnerable, thus setting them apart from the rest of the population and contributing to their 'Othering', and the political Right which poses high demands and offers minimal provisions because it represents them as strong and able. While the literature on citizenship policies is currently dominated by the question of liberal limits to state intervention, the search for a third way out of this dilemma is a no less complex and pressing question.

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