

*Hereinafter you can read the imaginary English translation of an imaginary article in an imaginary Romanian newspaper. The title of the article is not imaginary chosen "Let's go Dutch!"*

## **Let's go Dutch!**

I am sure it occurred to most of you and surely more than once why isn't Romania in the European Union, why aren't we members of the OECD, why our GDP per capita is more than 10 times smaller compared to the average output per capita of the EU or why are there people in the Western World that do not know that Bucharest is the Romanian capital. Well, there is an answer to all these questions. A possible reason for Romania not being what it should be is because we are Romanians and not Dutch. Yes, Dutch, that means from inhabitants of this small country somewhere on the European map known both as Holland and as The Netherlands...

No sooner than I had first visited the Netherlands did I see and judge the Dutch as they actually were. Ideas, fantasies, stories about Holland and its inhabitants are probably very familiar among you and I admit I had plenty of those before getting in touch with the Dutch reality. Had we had at least the main Dutch characteristics we would have been where we all want to be, certainly out of the eternal and monotonous phase that we call transition, for a long time already. I did not choose the title of this article arbitrarily; "going Dutch" in my context reflects a wide Dutch reality and not only the proverbial feature that generated it. And because I came over this feature, I shall begin by talking about it. One of the main characteristics that one is emphasizing when describing the Dutch is the "zuinigheid", which in any language would be translated something between being economical and selfish. Nevertheless it is impossible to catch its exact meaning. The mistake that critiques make in talking about "zuinigheid" is that they are associating it with merely a negative connotation, most of the time in relation with selfishness. Why should one do such a thing when practically to be "zuinig" means to abstain from futile costs and to save for the most important, really necessary or unavoidable spending? Obviously the *zuinigheid* is active at all levels, including governmental, where instead of increasing the salaries of the ministers or members of the Parliament as our beloved leaders do, the Dutch reduce the government spending thus allowing the budget deficit to be almost non-existent, controlling inflation and enabling a high rate of output growth. Of course, you might argue, this cannot be due ultimately and solely to the *zuinigheid*. Indeed, that can be true. What the Dutch also promote, something that is totally lacking in Romania is cooperation, "samenwerking". What else would we need now in Romania except for cooperation of all structures, including political and economical ones? It is for sure that a Wassenaar agreement would not be at all inconvenient in Romania and instead of protesting at every new wave of measures of restructuring the old economical structures, reducing wages in some sectors or reducing the employment

rate in others, the social mass should realize that there is no other way if progress is expected. The Dutch have acknowledged that already in the 1970's.

Let us further consider another essential Dutch character that could be nothing but useful if implanted among the native Romanian features. The Dutch have inherited the Dutch businessman character, the so-called "handelaar" feature since the oldest times and they have been using it all the time. To see the opportunity and to take advantage of it, to know where to invest, whom to talk to and what to talk, to be as broadly oriented as possible, these are all sub-categories of this handelaar character that unfortunately we, the Romanians, have never possessed. We are too unidirectional; every individual here is going on his single, heavily bordered way and passes by his chance without noticing it at all. How can we have such a disastrous legislation pertaining in the economical sector that nobody considers investing in Romania? I can only explain it with the lack of business sense. If only all Romanian fellows would leave away the pleasure and commodity for the time they are in the exercise of their economical or political functions... The Dutch respect this is well, one of the most famous proverb in their language says: "Zaken gaan voor het meisje", which would translate in "business before pleasure".

Obviously I cannot discuss about the Dutch character by ignoring the proverbial Dutch tolerance. Everybody of you is most likely aware that the Dutch are the most or among the most tolerant nations regarding prostitution, homosexuality, drug use, euthanasia, minorities. Nevertheless most likely is not everybody of you aware that the proverbial Dutch "tolerantie" is translated better with ignorance and that most of the Dutch are not approving de facto all the extravagance. All of it is actually a latent attitude that promotes "voorkomen boven genezen", meaning that prevention is always better than complete and ultimate cure. Why not letting certain people or groups to choose freely what they want and thus also controlling them rather than showing a clear intolerance and opposing any minority rights or punishing any deviations from the standards set as normal 50 years ago with years of prison; the effect is seen in both cases. Neutral and peaceful multiculturalism in the Netherlands versus unstable and controversial uniformity in Romania. But we continue to fight within ourselves, to refuse any progressive measure that could sound contradictory to the tradition or in the better case to approve it only after decades of insistence.

No doubt, there are many more features in the Dutch character that we could greatly make use of, but for that novels rather than simple newspaper articles would have to be written. What is essential is that all Romanians, we need to wake up and to start doing something before it is too late. The Dutch would say it as "Word wakker en zit niet te tuten!"; it always sounds more plausible in Dutch for some sort of reason. I will end here my claim by suggesting all of you to forget for the moment what you have inherited or what you have been traditionally taught and instead let us all go Dutch!