

Briefing about the Netherlands Institute in Turkey

On the occasion of the visit of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands to the
Institute

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Your Majesty, Excellencies, esteemed guests, colleagues and friends,

It is a great honour for us to welcome you to the Netherlands Institute in Turkey, located in the premises of Koç University's Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations.

Even though we moved to this location only in the previous year, the institute has been established in Istanbul already for 49 years, as a subsidiary institute to the Netherlands Institute for the Near East in Leiden. Generally, institutions wait until their fiftieth anniversary to celebrate and take stock of past achievements and future prospects. We feel, however, that an eminently suitable moment to do so has come today. Because, Your Majesty, in 1958 it was your father, His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard, who opened the Netherlands Historical-Archaeological Institute, as we were then called. Welcoming you here today gives the same feeling as an anniversary, that double sense of completion and of new beginning.

When the institute opened its doors, it was an event that did not go unnoticed here in Turkey. Most newspapers brought the news on their front page, many even beginning the coverage the day before when Prince Bernhard arrived, he himself at the controls of the airplane. From the reports by these newspapers, we also know that the Prince in his opening speech spoke about the long history of Dutch-Turkish relations and he observed that the relationships between Turkey and the Netherlands had never known bad times.

What he said then can still be said today. The relations between the Netherlands and Turkey have certainly changed over the last half century, but they can only be characterized as good. Relations have become much more intensive and they have taken on a dimension that was completely absent in 1958, that of the large community of people of Turkish descent living in the Netherlands.

It would be preposterous for the Netherlands Institute in Turkey to claim any credit for these good relations. But in a very modest way, it can be said that throughout its existence, one of the goals of the institute has been to work at good relations, especially between Turkish and Dutch people from the scholarly and cultural communities. More mundane as this effort may be than maintaining the relationships

between the two countries at a diplomatic level, it is working at relations in actual practice, as part of our day-to-day affairs and interactions.

So what are some of the things that the Netherlands Institute in Turkey does to achieve this? Long before the catchword internationalisation became in vogue in the vocabulary of Higher Education Institutions, the Institute already facilitated the contact between researchers from many different countries in the fields of archaeology, history, philology, and art history. The rich and important cultural heritage of Turkey has always attracted scholars. They came to stay in the institute's guest rooms, and used it as a base in Turkey from which not only to conduct their research, be it in the great archives, museums, and libraries of Istanbul, or at the archaeological sites further afield, but also to engage with Turkish colleagues at universities and museums.

Much more than offering a 'home away from home' for Dutch researchers, the institute thus provided and still provides the fertile ground from which the exchange of ideas and international cooperation can flourish. In my own field of archaeology, for example, Dutch research projects in Turkey have always involved the cooperation of scientists from the Netherlands as well as Turkey, and on occasion the institute has acted as a catalyst in the introduction of new research methods and perspectives.

Both sides of such international cooperation learn and profit from each other. Perhaps more so now than in the early years, the institute offers students and researchers from the Netherlands a first-hand experience of the inspiring and fast-developing character of modern-day science and academia in Turkey. Most go home with a feeling of excitement at having discovered something that we are not always sufficiently aware of in the Netherlands. This is the existence here of a thriving and inspiring climate for research.

This building, and the Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations that it houses, is a very good example of these current developments. It is part of the young and ambitious Koç University, and has a programme of annual fellowships that allows PhD students and senior researchers from all over the world to be in residence here for a year while completely focusing on their research. All the facilities needed for a centre of academic excellence have been established here in this building. As the Netherlands Institute we may have been in Turkey for almost 50 years, but it is fair to say that without the hospitality of Koç University, our prospects for the future would be far less bright than they are today.

Coming back to the ways in which the institute contributes to international exchange and cooperation, the library should certainly be mentioned. It was established from the first beginning, and over the years, even when the financial means of the institute were lean, serious investment was always made into the expansion of the collections. It is a collection to be proud of, with subject areas such as Anatolian and Near Eastern archaeology and history, but also the Art History of the Netherlands, which is probably nowhere else in Turkey better represented than in our library.

The importance of the library lies of course not in the number of books, but in the scholars and students that use them for their research. I think that it is fair to say that it is through our library that the institute has been most directly successful in providing services to the Turkish academic community. Scores of students in archaeology and art history from the universities in Istanbul have written their theses and dissertations in our library.

A more indirect but probably also the most fundamental manner in which the institute stimulates the exchange of people and ideas is through our research projects. The main fields of research with which the institute is concerned are those fields that have a bearing on the historical cultures and societies of Anatolia and the Near East. Currently, the institute's own projects focus on archaeology and architectural history, but as an institute with a small staff, we try to stretch our field of activity further by offering support for Dutch or Turkish projects in related fields.

As our excavations take place in the field, this research is a dimension of the institute that is not always directly evident here in the building. But for this occasion we have tried to bring some of the archaeology indoors, with a small exhibition upstairs. It shows some of research projects that the Institute and its staff have carried out over the last twenty years. As the centre of the exhibition, we have chosen to present a project, however, to which the institute has contributed with its archaeological expertise, but which really is a Turkish project. It investigates Ottoman Period Iron Production at a site called Demirköy to the northwest of Istanbul. In many ways it is an innovative project. It represents a new field of research for archaeologists, that of the history of industrialization. Moreover, by drawing in historians, metallurgists, restoration architects and historians of technology, it approaches the issue from many angles.

As such, the project shows the same characteristics that we like to think also belong to the institute, at an international level: dedication to scholarship regarding societies in the past, through the cooperation and exchange of ideas that will sustain and extend those good relations that I began with in the future.

Your Majesty, we are delighted to be able to show you what we do at the Netherlands Institute in Turkey. May I now invite you to visit our exhibition?