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Editorial: Towards a New Acta Politica

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339 Editorial: Towards a New *Acta Politica*

350 H. Daudt, G.J. van der Wal, A. Meesters & J. van der Wal
352 Ken R. Gledhill: Two Perspectives on the Netherlands
361 M. Kent Jennings: Political Culture in the Netherlands
416 Jacques Thomassen: Party Formation in a Core-Country
436 Percy B. Lehning: Foreign Policy and the Netherlands
437 Frank Rindler-Schjerve: The Role of the Netherlands in the
449 M.P.C.M. van Schendelen, Y. Fassin & J. van der Wal
454 J.E. Ellerman: Political Science in the Netherlands
459 Hansjoost Krieger: Federalism and Political Science in the Netherlands
477 Acknowledgements
478 Conclusion

Editorial: Towards a New *Acta Politica*

Kees Aarts, Jet Bussemaker, Wil Hout, Hans Oversloot & Holli A. Semetko

This issue of *Acta Politica*, the last one of Volume 31, is a special issue in more than one respect. Rather than contain 'new' articles, it brings together a number of seminal English-language articles published over the past three decades in this journal. The occasion for this special issue represents the major transition in the 31-year history of the journal. From this issue onwards, *Acta Politica* will be published entirely in English and, beginning with Volume 32, the name *Acta Politica* will be supplemented by a subtitle: *International Journal of Political Science*. The changes, however, will not be confined to the cover and the language. The re-launch of *Acta Politica* will also involve a renewal of the journal's editorial policy.

As editors of this journal we believe it is important to give readers the background of these decisions, which have been approved by the Dutch Political Science Association and by Boom Publishers, who are jointly responsible for the publishing of *Acta Politica*. We will first summarize Acta's history and development, in connection with the state of political science in the Netherlands. Next, we present our view on the future of this journal, and the measures we have deemed indispensable in order to realize our goals. Finally, we discuss the contents of the present issue.

Acta Politica and Political Science in the Netherlands

Thirty-one years is a considerable lifetime for a political science journal. In the days when *Acta Politica* was founded, there were few journals in the field of political science in Europe. Moreover, almost all of those journals could be characterized as general in scope, and often nationally-based. This was also true for the much larger number of American political science journals to an important extent.

Acta Politica was a joint initiative of Boom Publishers and the Dutch Political Science Association. L.G.A. Schlichting, then chairman of the Dutch Politi-



cal Science Association (which was founded in 1950) stated in his Preface to the first issue:

'The circumstance that only now the Dutch Political Science Association faces a larger public, should be attributed primarily to the fact that the academic study of political science started in the Netherlands only after the Second World War, that is, decades later than in countries such as Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and Belgium. When the Association was founded, not more than three, relatively new chairs existed in this discipline in the Netherlands, and there were no graduates. Since then this new social science specialization has exerted a growing attraction, and nowadays there are several hundreds of graduates who took political science as a major or minor. Thus, the Association recognizes the need for a scholarly periodical, as well as sufficient economic opportunities for the existence of a quarterly journal.' (Schlichting 1965, 1; translated by the editors)

A subscription to the journal was included in the membership fee of the Dutch Political Science Association. From 1965 onward, *Acta Politica* was in many university and public libraries, both in the Netherlands and abroad.

The first issue, extended to a complete volume of almost 300 pages, was meant to mirror the versatility of political science in general, and Dutch political science in particular. The articles covered topics such as the concept of political freedom, mass opinions on the Dutch Parliament, and Dutch housing policy since the Second World War. From the start, *Acta Politica* was meant to present a general overview of research in Dutch political science.

As a consequence of this national orientation, in those first years, authors were almost exclusively recruited from the small but rapidly growing community of Dutch political science. To be sure, some English-language contributions by foreign authors were published as well, but Dutch discussions dominated the journal.

In the early 1970s *Acta Politica* gradually published more English-language articles (although the vast majority of contributions remained in Dutch), by internationally-oriented Dutch political scientists and a number of visiting scholars, especially from the United States, who often dealt with the Netherlands in their research. At the time, there were full curricula in political science at three universities: University of Amsterdam, Catholic University of Nijmegen, and the Free University in Amsterdam; relevant research centres included Tilburg and Leiden as well. The 1970s also witnessed the birth of the European Consortium for Political Research, which has been of great significance for the internationalization of political science in many European countries, including the Netherlands.

At the same time, however, Dutch political science remained underdeveloped, partly as a result of incisive conflicts at the universities of Nijmegen and Amsterdam. Students and staff struggled over issues about democracy in the universities and the content of the curriculum, about 'traditional' politics

and marxism and about new topics like feminist politics. In short, they took issue with the question: 'What is politics?'

While the number of students taking political science as a major grew rapidly, with the number of (young) staff following at a distance, there was not yet a critical mass of political science PhDs working in political science departments. As late as 1972, Hans Daudt put it rather bluntly: 'Political science does not (yet) exist in the Netherlands' (1972, 269). He stated this 25 years after the first full curriculum had been introduced.

The 1970s thus showed a beginning divergence of, on the one hand, the demands which the internationalization of (European) political science put on its practitioners, and on the other hand the widely felt need that Dutch political science should develop an identity of its own. The latter wish found an expression in, for example, the annual meetings of the Dutch Political Science Association. *Acta Politica*, being the Association's official periodical, tried to butter its bread on both sides. The journal published articles that aimed at joining the debate in international political science irrespective of the field (often these articles were written in English), as well as articles with a more parochial outlook on political science and Dutch politics.

The identity of Dutch political science was found primarily in some fruitful themes for research (Daalder 1984). The Netherlands were the prime example of the consociational model of democracy, developed by Lijphart, Daalder, and others. Partly connected with its particular theoretical status in comparative politics, the Netherlands was a recurring case in international comparative research projects, both at the mass and the elite level. Political science was also strong in its methodological aspects (exemplified, e.g., by studies on political behaviour). Comparatively speaking, political theory and international relations were less developed, although they were certainly there.

In the 1970s and 1980s, three other developments influenced the position of the journal. First, whereas in the early 1970s public administration was a specialization in political science curricula, in 1976 a full curriculum in public administration and public policy was started at the University of Twente, followed by similar initiatives in Leiden and Rotterdam in 1984. Political science is a strong part of the curricula of public administration and vice versa. Second, in a development not unlike the emergence of public administration, curricula in communication science were established at the University of Amsterdam and the Catholic University of Nijmegen. Third, both in the Netherlands and abroad, several new political science journals were launched.

The start of public administration as a separate academic discipline with a major component of political science led to a peculiar competition for scarce academic resources. Public administration began to bloom at least partly at

the expense of political science. To be sure, there are differences between the two kinds of curricula but these should not be exaggerated. Typically, the study of public administration has a stronger multidisciplinary character than political science. Political scientists working in public administration departments, however, can hardly be distinguished from their colleagues working in political science departments proper purely on the basis of their research. The result of the schism was that public administration started its own professional organization as well as several (Dutch-language) journals.

The development of communication science in the Netherlands in the late 1970s and 1980s, and particularly its growth in terms of student numbers over the past decade often at the expense of other relevant social science disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and political science, is also an important consideration for the future. In terms of student and staff numbers, for example, communication science at the University of Amsterdam and the Catholic University of Nijmegen have expanded rapidly. The Dutch university curriculum in communication science contains a number of required methodology, theory, and philosophy of science courses that are comparable with what is taught at the post-graduate level in US and UK programs in communication and political science, as well as a number of substantive seminars in which issues of concern to political scientists are a focus. Political communication – the media's role and effects on public opinion formation and vote choice, its potential effects on elites in the policy-making process, and in local, national and international contexts – has become an important subfield in political science. Needless to say, the subfield generated its own national and international journals.

The founding of new journals in public administration and in communication science, both in the Netherlands and abroad, was part of a larger phenomenon. From the 1970s onwards, the number of specialized and non-specialized political science journals has proliferated. From the outset, many of the new journals were internationally oriented. All in all, the number of possible outlets for political science research in the Netherlands and Europe has increased enormously.

The latter three developments, combined with the divergence of the demands imposed upon Dutch political scientists (internationalization versus a strong home base) tended to weaken the position of *Acta Politica* in the Dutch, as well as the international, world of political science. This was not apparent in the number of manuscripts submitted, however. *Acta Politica* has always had, and still has, a relatively low acceptance rate, not exceeding approximately 25%. But a certain lack of focus, plus the combination of global and parochial outlooks already mentioned, did not favour the position of the journal in a world with growing competition for quality.

The New *Acta Politica*

1997 not only marks the re-launch of *Acta Politica*. It also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the start of political science as an academic curriculum in the Netherlands. Today, although the number of chairs and curricula in political science proper hardly exceeds the number existing in 1972, there certainly is a critical mass of political science PhDs. The interaction with other academic disciplines has also broadened the field of scholars dealing with problems central to political science. The Netherlands continues to be a much preferred sabbatical home for a number of prominent political scientists from abroad, not least because of the international orientation of many of their Dutch colleagues and the multi-lingual environment in which visitors live and work.

The new *Acta Politica* will be published in March, June, September, and December. We now turn to some of the major changes in the journal.

English Language – Instead of continuing as a multilingual journal (with articles published in Dutch, English, and occasionally German), *Acta Politica* will now be published entirely in English. We consider the use of one language as essential for the journal's profile. English and Dutch being the options, the choice for English is a natural one, considering the academic character of the journal and the present state of internationalization of Dutch political science. The Board of Editors will receive copy-editing assistance in order to assure that contributions satisfy common standards of correct English. All manuscripts should be submitted in English.

Editorial Policy – *Acta Politica* will continue to be a general, non-specialized, journal of political science. The main objective of the journal is to publish outstanding work reflecting research and developments of both a theoretical and empirical nature in all sub-areas of the discipline, including Dutch and comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public administration, and political communication. At the same time, the journal aims at maintaining its position as the most prominent forum for publications pertaining to politics in the Netherlands, broadly defined. Dutch politics, either in itself or in a comparative setting, remains an extremely interesting topic for study, in all its aspects. The Netherlands, the largest of the smaller European democracies, is presently undergoing the impact of rapid European unification. Moreover, historically speaking, Dutch society has adapted to many developments in other countries.

Board of Editors – Over the past 31 years, the Board of Editors has been the major body of decision-making concerning the journal's editorial policy. It

was appointed by the Dutch Political Science Association on the basis of a recommendation by the Advisory Board ('Redactieraad'). Members of the Board of Editors were appointed for a maximum of ten years.

With the re-launch of *Acta Politica* the position of the Board of Editors is changed in some important respects. Its position as the journal's central body will be enhanced by an Editorial Statute. The six members of the Board will remain in office for five years, and will have the possibility to serve a second term of five years. Members of the Board of Editors are formally appointed by the Dutch Political Science Association upon a proposal of the Board of Editors itself. The same recruitment procedure applies for the International Advisory Board.

Two of the six members of the Board of Editors are appointed, respectively, as Managing Editor (the former 'Redactiesecretaris') and Book Review Editor. In principle, these two positions will continue to be filled from the ranks of the Board of Editors in the future. Members of the Board of Editors as of 1 January 1997 are:

- * Kees Aarts, Book Review Editor, University of Twente
- * Jet Bussemaker, Free University, Amsterdam
- * Wil Hout, Managing Editor, University of Nijmegen
- * Kees van Kersbergen, Free University, Amsterdam
- * Hans Oversloot, University of Leiden
- * Holli A. Semetko, University of Amsterdam and Syracuse University.

Manuscript Review Process – Manuscripts submitted to the journal (see the Instructions for Contributors for details) will be reviewed in a double blind review process by at least two external referees (i.e., scholars who are not members of the Board of Editors). Publication is dependent on a final decision by the Board of Editors. A decision is expected within eight to ten weeks of submission of a manuscript.

International Advisory Board – The Board of Editors will be assisted by an International Advisory Board, including a number of renowned specialists from all major areas of political science, including Dutch and comparative politics. The International Advisory Board replaces the Advisory Board which has fulfilled this task in the past 31 years. The International Advisory Board will be appointed by the Dutch Political Science Association upon a proposal of the Board of Editors. The new International Advisory Board will be presented in the first issue of Volume 32 (March 1997).

Debates and Developments – In the new section *Debates and Developments*, medium- and long-term processes in and around the Dutch political system will

be analysed by a leading scholar. This section will be published each year in the June issue of *Acta Politica. Debates and Developments* ensures that *Acta Politica* will be in close touch with not just the theory, but also the practice of Dutch politics.

Book Review Section – In each issue, the Book Review Section offers a comprehensive and briefly annotated overview of significant recent publications (in Dutch, English, German or French) on the Dutch political system, either as a case or in a comparative setting, as well as substantial reviews of selected works that are of importance to the development of the discipline as a whole. Such books should be of methodological and/or theoretical significance to the discipline, but they need not be concerned with the Netherlands or even comparative politics.

An International Audience – In the past, *Acta Politica* has always had a relatively strong international circulation. More than 10% of its subscribers are libraries abroad (just over half of the subscribers are members of the Dutch Political Science Association). Further internationalization of the circulation of the journal is one of the main targets of the publisher and the editors.

The subscription rates (see the inside of the cover) make the journal within reach of international readers including graduate students. New subscribers receive the present special issue as a gift. Moreover, volume 32 (1997) is offered at a special introductory rate.

Finally, the international outlook of the journal will also be enhanced by the contributors. The editors encourage submissions from scholars in other countries.

We now turn to a discussion of the contents of this special issue.

About This Issue: Thirty Years of Change in Dutch and European Politics

Over the past decades, *Acta Politica* has published some of the finest articles on Dutch and comparative politics. Of course most of them were in Dutch, but many were published in English, at a time when the reasons to do so were considerably less compelling than they are now. This issue contains a selection of seminal English-language articles published in *Acta Politica* since 1965. We tried to find a balance between older and more recent articles, although we decided not to lean heavily on the more recent issues of the journal, in order to establish a certain distance between the present and the past. The selection was made by the Board of Editors. We did not strive to present in this special issue a coherent and integrated presentation of thirty

years of change in Dutch and European politics, for two reasons. First, the coherence and integration needed for that purpose simply cannot be found in a collection of separate journal articles. Second, and more importantly, we did not want to exclude any substantive topic of study or any methodological approach.

This special issue is an anthology of thirty years of change in Dutch and European politics, and in the study thereof, as recorded in *Acta Politica*. The articles necessarily reflect the state of the discipline at the moment of publication. Some of its practitioners maintain that political science is a discipline in which all relevant and interesting questions have already been posed long ago – the answers given to these questions nevertheless show a distinct course of development.

The first contribution, originally published in 1968, is 'Political Efficacy: A Further Exploration', by H. Daudt, C. van der Maesen and R. Mokken. The sense of political efficacy is traditionally considered to be one of the stable individual attitudes fundamental to one's political self. This sense of efficacy has been described as largely a product of adolescent socialization processes. In its particular survey operationalization, efficacy is both a norm for the political regime and an image of the ideal citizen in a democracy. On the basis of survey data gathered in Amsterdam in 1966, formal schooling appears to be closely related to this process of socialization. But the better educated respondents are also better aware of the failure of the political regime to conform to the norms imposed on it. The distinction between persons who voted for the same party in the municipal and in the provincial elections of 1966, and those who changed their party choice further specifies this relationship. Contrary to earlier American findings, the Amsterdam survey indicates that the 'changers' tend to be better informed and educated than the 'constants'. Moreover, among those with middle or high levels of schooling, the changers show a remarkably lower sense of efficacy than the constants. These results suggest an important modification of the supposedly circular relationship between political resources, political confidence, and political participation. Political participation might actually expose a gap between the norms for the regime and its reality, and thus lead to a lowering of the sense of efficacy.

The latter half of the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s are usually seen as a period of profound political change. The basically stable system of pillarization and politics of accommodation appeared to break down. The institutional characteristics of the Dutch electoral and party system were challenged by newcomers on the political scene (as the modern liberal party Democrats 66, or D66, as its commonly used acronym) as well as by an established party as the Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid or PvdA). One of the recurring themes in the debates on institutional reform was the desirability of a polar-

ized party system, according to Westminster standards, which would lead to a clear electoral choice between the incumbent government party and the challenging opposition party. Ken Gladdish, in 'Two-Party versus Multi-Party: The Netherlands and Britain' (1972) puts these ideas into perspective by, first, dissecting the Dutch reformist views on the party system and, second, comparing these views with British reality. He concludes with a warning addressed to the Dutch reformists. Whereas a transition from a multiparty to a two-party system is quite feasible through institutional reforms, it appears to be almost impossible to follow the way back, as the British experience shows.

In 'Partisan Commitments and Electoral Behaviour in the Netherlands' (1972), M. Kent Jennings presents the results of a first exploration into the meaning of partisan attachment in Dutch politics. The Dutch case is especially interesting as it is a multiparty system characterized by traditionally segmented subcultures, which landed on an inclined plane during the 1960s. Analysing one of the first full-blown Dutch election studies, Jennings shows that the intensity of partisan identification is closely related to voting turnout and political participation, as one might expect on the basis of American results. Although party identification appears to be less well developed than in the US, the relationship with political outlook and reported behaviour appears to be stronger in the Netherlands. This is surprising when it is realized that both the traditional segmentation and the turmoil in the party system that started in the 1960s would seem to impede intense partisan commitment.

The surprising results of Jennings look quite different, however, in the perspective offered by Jacques Thomassen, in his article 'Party Identification as a Cross-Cultural Concept: Its Meaning in the Netherlands' (1975). Using the same data as Jennings, Thomassen shows that in contrast with results in the US and other countries, party identification in the Netherlands appears to be merely a (weak) reflection of voting preferences instead of a lasting political attitude. Notably, party identification appears to be less stable than the vote preference, which for the Dutch case squarely contradicts the meaning originally attached to the concept. Thomassen suggests that the absence of an independent, lasting attachment to political parties in the Netherlands can be explained by the traditional prevalence of identification with the (subcultural) pillars of Dutch society. In this view, for most people party identification was not more than a derived, indirect attitude.

From the second half of the 1970s onwards, public debate in the Netherlands focused on the future of the welfare state. In political science, this debate revived interest in issues of social justice and democratic legitimacy, and was fuelled by the resurrection of normative political theory in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the present issue, the debate is represented by

contributions of Percy B. Lehning and Freek Bruinsma.

In 'Property Rights, Justice and the Welfare State' (1980), Lehning investigates the relationship between theories of property rights and conceptions of social justice by concentrating on five political theorists. He shows that these five theorists (Rothbard, Nozick, Buchanan, Rawls, and Macpherson) can be placed on a common right-left dimension with regard to their theory of property rights. The one extreme of this dimension implies that government intervention in property rights is never justifiable; the other extreme implies that government intervention is always necessary – from the particular viewpoint on social justice. Every theory of property rights presupposes a conception of social justice.

Starting from the point of view of the sociology of law, Bruinsma develops a 'consumer perspective' on the problem that welfare rights in the welfare state are often just not asserted ('The Non-Assertion of Welfare Rights: Hirschman's Theory Applied', 1980). Traditionally, the non-assertion of welfare rights was explained by a lack of legal competence of citizens. Bruinsma labels this view as a 'medical' approach to welfare rights, and introduces an alternative, 'legal' approach, for which the consumer's perspective on law matters. The legal approach is based on an adaptation of Hirschman's theory of exit and voice. Bruinsma argues that welfare rights usually assume citizens to 'fight' for their rights (voice), where 'flight' (exit) from welfare rights often seems to be a viable alternative.

The particular institutional characteristics of the Dutch political system again served as the stage for the comparative analysis of legislative activities in Britain and the Netherlands since the Second World War reported by M.P.C.M. van Schendelen and V. Herman ('On Legislatures and Social Change: The Netherlands and the United Kingdom', 1982). Van Schendelen and Herman observe that the two parliamentary systems have both been exposed to global social and economic influences, a growing public sector, and a tendency towards delegated and pseudo-legislation. But the two systems have responded quite differently. Whereas the Netherlands has constantly tried to adapt its procedures to changing circumstances, Britain adapted considerably less. The authors explain this difference in coping behaviour with the help of historical, cultural, structural and procedural factors. At the same time, the authors conclude, the systems seem to become more similar to each other in the period under observation.

In 1984 *Acta Politica* devoted a special issue to consociationalism, pillarization and conflict management in the Low Countries (edited by Van Schendelen). This issue brought together the views of some of the most prominent writers on the theme of consociational democracy, from both the Netherlands and Belgium. In the present issue, we reprint the contribution by the sociologist J. Ellemers, 'Pillarization as a Process of Modernization'. He ana-

lyzes Dutch pillarization as a systemic response to processes of modernization when society is characterized by segmented pluralism and a high degree of particularism. In his view, pillarization is not merely a way of regulating latent social conflicts, as a one-dimensional political science view would have it. Pillarization is also a phenomenon specific for a certain phase of societal modernization, when problems of size and scale become pressing. This view implies that pillarization is a temporary phenomenon, which wore down when it was no longer needed in more advanced stages of modernization.

The final article in this selection is taken from a special issue on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Acta Politica*. That issue presented four 'insights from the outside' on Dutch politics by foreign political scientists with expert knowledge about the Netherlands. The article we have selected for inclusion here is Hanspeter Kriesi's 'Federalism and Pillarization: the Netherlands and Switzerland Compared' (1990). Both the Netherlands and Switzerland serve as examples of consociational democracy and democratic corporatism. However, as Kriesi observes, the two countries also show important differences. Kriesi traces these differences back to the fundamental distinction between Swiss federalism and Dutch centralism. The Dutch centralism is accompanied by pillarization; both federalism and pillarization thus serve simultaneously to reinforce cultural segmentation and to provide mechanisms for integration. Kriesi stresses that federalism and pillarization were not 'solutions' for latent social conflicts, but rather consequences of existing practices of accommodating politics among elites.

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