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## **Between the League of Nations and Europe: multiple internationalisms and interwar Dutch civil society**

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## 5 Between the League of Nations and Europe

### Multiple internationalisms and interwar Dutch civil society

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#### Introduction

The Dutch have long projected an internationalist image. At least since the nineteenth century, the Dutch foreign policy elite propagated international law and free trade as the preferred means of serving the interests of the Netherlands and its empire.<sup>1</sup> These days, The Hague promotes itself as ‘international city of peace and justice’, the Netherlands is an active member of numerous international organizations, including the United Nations, and was one of the founding members of what has become the European Union (EU). These internationalisms are often portrayed as both complementary and flowing from older forms of internationalism. However, when we look more closely we see that not all internationalisms are alike, and that there is no straight line between the internationalisms of the nineteenth century and the current membership of the EU, which some scholarship suggests.<sup>2</sup>

The interwar period is the period when the tension between different types of internationalisms was most clearly articulated.<sup>3</sup> However, most EU scholarship starts after World War II (WWII), which in the Dutch case allows for a complementary story of European, transatlantic and global cooperation in the EU, NATO and the United Nations (UN). Nonetheless, European cooperation was on the agenda well before 1945: from the early 1920s important Europeanist initiatives were being taken.<sup>4</sup> Most Dutch scholars of the interwar period solidly focus on the internationalism of the League of Nations and argue that European cooperation only came onto the Dutch scene during or after WWII.<sup>5</sup> This ignores the European movement that existed in the Netherlands in the interwar period and the heated debates about whether and how European and League cooperation could coexist. Forms of internationalism could be strongly opposed to each other in the interwar period. This chapter will examine the tensions between these internationalisms and show how concomitant debates made European, transatlantic and global internationalism complementary after 1945.

As the various contributions to this volume show, international relations are not just the purview of the Foreign Ministry and its diplomats. A much broader foreign policy elite of business people, intellectuals and journalists

and the like, as well as more grass-roots activists, are involved in influencing foreign policy. This was also the case in the interwar period when ties between state and non-state actors were less institutionalized than they are today in our NGO-ized world. Despite, or because of, the lack of 'official' channels for civil society contact, informal contacts abounded and were highly influential in shaping foreign policy.

The chapter adopts a transnational approach and will focus on a civil society organization, the *Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede* (VeV), the Dutch League of Nations Union. This approach makes it possible firstly to bring the European question into focus and secondly to analyse the tension between League and European internationalism, which came to the fore in the VeV. The question of European cooperation in the Netherlands was strongly influenced by developments across Europe, including developments in the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS) of which the VeV was a member. This chapter will therefore analyse Dutch discussions within a Europe-wide framework.

The VeV was a non-state actor, a representative of civil society, with members not just among an educated elite but also among the general population. However, the VeV is also an example of the overlap between the civil society actors mentioned above and public officials, which was quite common in the interwar period, both in the Netherlands and in other European countries. Organizations such as the VeV counted among its members a significant number of Foreign Ministry officials. This interaction between types of actors makes debates within the VeV typical of how internationalist opinion was developing in the Netherlands and which types of actors were active in developing and sustaining which internationalist narrative. Focusing on non-state actors, with strong connections to the state, allows for a broadening of the official, governmental, internationalism. Thus, the question of European cooperation can come to light and the interaction between internationalisms can be studied.

While the role of certain non-state actors in Dutch foreign policy has been studied, this literature has followed the topics of more traditional diplomatic history, such as relations with Germany or the League of Nations, and not addressed the question of European cooperation.<sup>6</sup> The traditional view in the literature on Dutch foreign policy followed the opinion of the Dutch Foreign Ministry regarding European cooperation: it was exclusivist, as it pitted one continent or empire against others, and would hamper free trade by leading to a customs union. Given the importance of international law, free trade, the Gold Standard and empire to Dutch national interests, the League of Nations was seen as the only proper platform for international consultation. This viewpoint has prevented scholars from delving more deeply and examining the attitudes of non-state actors regarding European cooperation. When these under-used sources are analysed it becomes clear that European movements did exist in the Netherlands, although they were not as strong as, for example, in France.<sup>7</sup> By examining the question of European

cooperation in the VeV, the largest internationalist organization in the Netherlands, we see that this question was also hotly debated in what seemed a bulwark of League internationalism. The overlap in membership between Europeanist and League organizations immediately makes clear that the viewpoint of the Foreign Ministry does not give the whole story and that the VeV is an excellent case to examine the tension between European and global internationalism.

In examining this tension, this chapter will also connect with recent historiographical developments which emphasize the importance of the world outside Europe, and particularly the colonial world, for European cooperation.<sup>8</sup> This then also links to European cooperation initiatives during the decolonization period after World War II.

This chapter will first sketch the types of internationalism that were being discussed in the Netherlands in the interwar period, briefly describe the organizational set up of the VeV and then analyse the debates in the VeV on the interaction between internationalisms. In connecting these interwar debates to developments after 1945, this chapter argues that a transnational civil society approach to interwar Dutch foreign policy is necessary to understand the origins of the Dutch role in the European integration project.

### **Dutch League internationalism**

In the early twentieth century the Netherlands boasted a significant peace movement. Neutrality during the First World War strengthened internationalist pacifist tendencies, but this did not immediately lead to widespread enthusiasm for the League of Nations. The Treaty of Versailles was regarded sceptically because of the way Germany was treated. Since the League was established by the Treaty, the scepticism also concerned the League. Another reason for initial hesitations was the question of how Dutch neutrality could be reconciled with obligations of collective security under the League.<sup>9</sup> In the end, staying out was simply not an option, and the Netherlands joined the League, despite continuing misgivings, in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

The position of the Netherlands as a small state on the edge of the European continent with a large colonial empire overseas and large trade interests has led the literature on Dutch foreign policy to refer to certain recurring trends.<sup>11</sup> These play an important role in what can be described as Dutch League internationalism and they also strongly influenced the development of Dutch Europeanism. This includes firstly a preference for neutrality or abstentionism and international law. For some, this was a moral duty; for others, this was the result of a realistic assessment of Dutch power in the world. In the last resort, however, the Dutch relied on the British to protect them in case of an emergency, especially in Asia. While neutrality was initially a stumbling block to joining the League, the rhetoric associated with it and particularly with international law, which rejected great power politics, matched the rhetoric of the League.<sup>12</sup>

The second trend is a for preference, or even a belief in, free trade and the Gold Standard.<sup>13</sup> As with neutrality these preferences were a combination of realist interests and moral duty. From 1862 onwards the Netherlands had been a free trade nation with an open-door policy in the Dutch East Indies. Where the historian of the British Free Trade Nation, Frank Trentmann, sees Britain, the archetypical free trade nation, 'unravelling' from the end of World War I,<sup>14</sup> the Dutch Free Trade Nation was still very much alive at that time.<sup>15</sup> Despite the rise in tariffs across Europe after World War I, the belief in the salutary effects of free trade remained unshaken for some time. While leading by example was hoped to have an effect, a potentially more effective route used was the League of Nations, where former and future prime minister Hendrik Colijn presided over several committees of the World Economic Conferences in Geneva (1927) and London (1933). Free trade and attempts to save it were therefore closely associated with League internationalism.

The unravelling of the Dutch Free Trade Nation began only when the Depression hit Dutch agriculture to the extent that what World War I had shown to be a vital sector of the economy was threatened in its existence.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, international economic cooperation remained an important item on the Dutch foreign policy agenda and of Dutch League internationalism. The focus was still on cooperation in the context of the League. The preferred method was still reducing tariff levels, following for example the ideas of the Tariff Truce Conference (1930), which aimed to prevent a further rise in tariffs. Initiatives that might lead to cartelization and tariff walls around Europe, aimed against the United States, were in principle not compatible with League internationalism. This is a key reason why the Dutch reaction to French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand's proposal for a European union in 1929 had been less than enthusiastic.<sup>17</sup>

However, with the difficulty in stimulating trade liberalization globally, mainstream Dutch economic opinion began exploring not just universal but also regional arrangements. This, however, raised the question of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN)-clause, which was enshrined in the international economic system and which allowed all states with MFN-status to trade on the same terms as the country with the most favourable trading position. This system made the setting up of special (regional) trading arrangements not very attractive, since all MFN countries could claim the same treatment. While the British kept arguing that no exceptions were possible, in the Netherlands an exception became accepted in the case of open plurilateral conventions which the League had agreed to.<sup>18</sup> The Economic Committee of the League deemed multilateral conventions a justified exception to MFN-treatment, since countries were free to join the convention if they wished to benefit. If third countries could also benefit without joining, there would be little incentive to engage in the exercise. Since other attempts to lower trade barriers had had little effect, it was hoped that the exception to the MFN-clause could stimulate trade liberalization. By this reasoning the Dutch economic foreign policy elite came to accept regional approaches, explored

among the states that in 1930 concluded the Oslo Agreements or Convention on Economic Rapprochement, and culminating in the Convention of Ouchy with Belgium of 1932.

The trends the historiography on Dutch foreign policy discerns closely match what can be described as League internationalism. While particularly in the economic sphere open multilateral conventions suggest that alternatives to global internationalism were being discussed, the historiography has not picked up on this. This became nonetheless the route through which the Dutch became convinced of the possibilities for (certain kinds of) European cooperation.

### **Dutch Europeanism**

The traditional view in the historiography has been that unlike in the post-1945 period, in the interwar period the enthusiasm for European cooperation in the Netherlands was non-existent.<sup>19</sup> As a result, until recently, there were no studies which went beyond Hein Klemann's (cursory) description of sceptical government opinion with regard to European cooperation.<sup>20</sup> This is too simplistic. After all, even national icon Colijn was involved in two European organizations, *PanEuropa Nederland* and the *Entente Douanière Européenne*.<sup>21</sup> Instead, a much broader understanding of this activity is necessary, beyond the Foreign Ministry, one that examines how Europeanism related to other forms of internationalism and fit in with foreign policy debates.

While enthusiasm never reached levels as high as in France, Germany or Czechoslovakia,<sup>22</sup> ideas for European cooperation did acquire a following in the Netherlands, especially in the years 1929–1933. Individual activists, often inspired by foreign examples, became interested in ideas of European cooperation, networks of correspondents emerged and numerous societies were set up. One of the activists claimed that there were thirty-one organizations working for various forms of European cooperation, a number which is not at all inconceivable.<sup>23</sup> Some industrialists, familiar with international cooperation and participating in international cartels, supported the idea. The traditional foreign policy elite of state officials, international merchants and financiers tended to be sceptical about European cooperation. Yet even representatives of this elite can be found among those who supported some form of European cooperation in the Netherlands in the interwar period.

This chapter mainly focuses on elite actors who supported the Dutch European movement. However, the Dutch European movement, and the VeV, also enjoyed significant grass-roots support. These two groups supported different types of European cooperation. Grass-roots activists often came to Europeanism from the more radical flanks of the peace movement and supported further reaching projects than the more elite members. Higher profile supporters, who participated in public life and had a reputation to lose, were often inspired by pragmatic (economic) concerns which necessitated concerted action by governments. If (political) cooperation among

European governments could contribute to this goal, either specifically or by creating a more conducive climate, they would support it.<sup>24</sup>

Although this was mentioned by both types of activists, the awareness and the concern that European cooperation would affect the relationship of the Netherlands with its colonial possessions was particularly strong among more the VeV's more high-profile advocates. Their personal experience with the Indies meant that in their assessment of internationalization below the global League level, these public figures always considered the consequences for the Indies, and thus by consequence for the Netherlands. Rather than focusing on the troubles that Europe faced after the war, they adopted a global perspective in which the position of the Netherlands had to be determined. The debates in the VeV show the tension, but also the overlap, between these two types of internationalism: European and global/League internationalism.

### **The Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede**

The Dutch League of Nations Union, the Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede (VeV) was a focal point for interwar internationalism. It had both close contacts in government, economic and academic circles, as well as branches across the country. It was the most influential organization involved in foreign affairs in the Netherlands during the interwar period. The aims of the VeV included combatting war and furthering arbitration, disarmament, Wilson's 14 Points and 'representation of the Peoples'.<sup>25</sup> They emphasized the universal aspects of the League, which they conceived of as 'a legally constituted community of peoples'.<sup>26</sup> Founded in 1919 out of two older pacifist organizations,<sup>27</sup> the VeV's heyday was the years 1929–32 when it had around 10,000 members and more than 100 sections all over the country.<sup>28</sup> Compared to other European League of Nations Unions this was average: the British League of Nations Union, the biggest of the League Unions, was eight times bigger (relative to population size), whereas the Belgian League of Nations Union was five times smaller.<sup>29</sup> The VeV published two periodicals, from 1926 the monthly *De Volkenbond* (*The League of Nations*) and from 1928 also the quarterly news bulletin *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede* (*For League and Peace*). It was a member of the International Federation of League of Nations Societies (IFLNS), in which it actively participated with the Dutchman Joseph Limburg presiding over the IFLNS for several years.<sup>30</sup> Over the course of the 1930s the activities of the VeV tapered off somewhat. As the president of the Dutch National Bank and the section Amsterdam of the VeV, L.J.A. Trip, pointed out in 1933, 'like everything connected to the League and international cooperation, this section has also somewhat declined.'<sup>31</sup> Overall membership of the VeV, however, declined only slowly, with the real downturn taking place after the Munich accords in 1938.<sup>32</sup>

Despite a very thriving associational life in the Netherlands during the interwar period, the associational landscape was fractured as a result of



*Figure 5.1* IFLNS members, including several Dutch delegates, pose for a group shot in Geneva, 1930 (International Federation of League of Nations Societies, P95, Assembly Files, Geneva)

the pillarized nature of Dutch society.<sup>33</sup> Mass organizations drawing a membership from across the pillars were rare. The VeV, however, was a relatively large, moderately pacifist, non-partisan organization drawing members from across the political spectrum.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the British League of Nations Union it never became a mass organization. A considerable grass-roots base notwithstanding, membership of the VeV read as a *Who's Who* of the Dutch foreign policy establishment, including politicians, academics, bankers and publicists. Examples are the aforementioned Trip, the shipping magnate, banker and president of the Amsterdam Chamber of Commerce E. Heldring, liberal former Minister of Finance Professor A. van Gijn, journalist M. van Blankenstein, president of the Esperanto Society J.R.G. Isbrücker and Nobel Prize laureate and president of the League's International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation Professor H. Lorentz.<sup>35</sup> The close links of the VeV to the Foreign Ministry are a good example of the blurred lines between individuals acting as official state representatives and acting in a private capacity.<sup>36</sup> These blurred lines show the necessity of the inclusion of the civil society field when examining foreign policy, particularly when explaining the origins of longer-term developments. Two prominent examples of Foreign Ministry officials who were very much involved in the activities of the VeV



were Professor J.P.A. Francois, the director of the League of Nations section, and Ms C.A. Kluyver, who worked in the same section. Given the level of official involvement, it is not surprising that the VeV adopted positions that were very close to the positions of the Dutch government. Nonetheless, as the European question shows, debates in the VeV also show the variety in positions taken.

### The VeV and European cooperation

Given the VeV's prominence in the foreign policy field, the question of cooperation with other internationalist or pacifist organizations in the Netherlands was put to them regularly.<sup>37</sup> They generally adopted a cautious approach. In 1927–28 three Europeanist organizations, the Dutch *Vereeniging ter bevordering van de oprichting der Vereenigde Staten van Europa* (VSE, Society for the promotion of the establishment of the United States of Europe) and the Europe-wide organizations the Paneuropa Union and *Europäische Verständigung*, requested the VeV to cooperate. The VeV declined because of differences of opinion regarding the League, which the Paneuropa Union for example was very critical of, but also because both the Foreign Ministry and the IFLNS had ordered 'hands off' Paneuropa.<sup>38</sup> This 'order' shows the importance of the Europe-wide context for Dutch debates and in particular the influence that the Paneuropa Union had on European debates across the continent. The question of European cooperation was often described as the question of 'Paneuropa'.

In its policy toward the question of European cooperation the VeV then initially followed the reluctant line of the Dutch Foreign Ministry that has been sketched above. The aforementioned Director of the League of Nations Section, J.P.A. Francois, was an important link. The representative of Paneuropa in the Netherlands in the early years, Carolus Verhulst, complained to one of the prominent early Dutch members of the Paneuropa Union, Anton Philips, that 'in our work lately we have been greatly hindered by the VeV, where Francois has made a strong stand against Paneuropa.'<sup>39</sup> In adopting this reluctant line, the VeV also complied with the point of view of the IFLNS regarding 'Pan-European federation'.

In 1927 the IFLNS was of the opinion that in certain instances decentralization of the League and thus regional federations could be useful, but that in general a cautious attitude had to be adopted. These 'strict continental groupings did not correspond with reality, be it economic or political. Rather they could lead to competition that could easily lead to a new world war.'<sup>40</sup> The goal had to remain a 'united and universal League'. The question of decentralizing the League had been put to the IFLNS by the *Fédération française des Associations pour la Société des Nations*. In France European and League internationalism were generally seen as compatible, as long as European cooperation took place in the framework of the League.<sup>41</sup> In 1927 the IFLNS was not yet convinced that this would be beneficial.

As mentioned before, in the 1920s European cooperation was often associated with Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi and his Paneuropa Union. Since Coudenhove-Kalergi was openly critical of the League, Paneuropean projects were regarded sceptically by League supporters. However, when Aristide Briand, with his reputation for European reconciliation, proposed 'some sort of federal link' between the European nations in the context of the League, this was seen as quite a different project which led the IFLNS to modify its position. After Briand's speech to the General Assembly in September 1929 and the publication of the French memorandum on European Cooperation in May 1930, the subject of the 'United States of Europe' was discussed as a topic of 'urgent importance' in the IFLNS. Regional cooperation, if within the framework of the League, could 'eliminate many causes of international conflicts'.<sup>42</sup> In 1931, the IFLNS even asked the League to turn the Commission of Inquiry for European Union that had been created to study Briand's proposal into a permanent body.<sup>43</sup> The evolution of the IFLNS is shown by how in 1929 they referred to the *Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne* as a sister organization.<sup>44</sup> According to the IFLNS, the *Comité's* aims did not threaten the League – on the contrary, the aim was to 'develop the cooperation of the European peoples within the framework and in the spirit of the League of Nations.'<sup>45</sup>

After its initially hesitant approach to European cooperation in 1927, the VeV was torn between the still reluctant attitude of the Dutch Foreign Ministry and the development towards the more positive evaluation by the IFLNS. In 1927, when the Ministry and the IFLNS were still in agreement, the VeV had foregrounded the position of the League. As long as any European initiative strengthened the League, they would, of course, support it, but if – and this was just as likely – a European plan were to lead to a weakening of the League, they would not. With the question of European cooperation far from disappearing from the international agenda, the VeV set up a small '*Pan-Europa*' committee in early 1929. The committee was specifically focused on Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropa.<sup>46</sup> In October 1929 one of the local branches of the VeV reacted to Briand's proposal to the League Assembly by requesting that the VeV support Briand's plans.<sup>47</sup> The board referred the decision on the attitude to Briand's plans to the *Pan-Europa* committee. At the next annual meeting in 1930, the matter was discussed again. There, Joseph Limburg gave a talk about the developments surrounding Briand's plans, showing his sympathy for these plans. The influential and well-connected Limburg, who had chaired the VeV, the IFLNS and the *Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne*, was amongst the pro-Europeans in the VeV. Limburg then situated the discussion of these European questions within the international framework of the IFLNS, which had also set up a committee to study this matter.<sup>48</sup> These developments show that attitudes regarding Europe were shifting. As will be discussed below, this shift by the IFLNS and later also the VeV was informed by Briand's outspoken involvement in the question, the global economic situation and the

League's lack of success in addressing it and, for the VeV in particular, British economic policies.

While the question of European cooperation was discussed by the local sections, at annual meetings and in the VeV periodicals, the *Pan-Europa* committee of the VeV took a long time to produce a report.<sup>49</sup> After Briand had put forth his ideas, the committee argued that the Briand plan and the Commission of Inquiry for European Union of the League had made a study of Paneuropa obsolete and thus asked to be relieved of its task because it argued that that particular matter had 'receded into the background'.<sup>50</sup> The board saw the matter more broadly, treating Paneuropa and the Briand plan as expressions of a larger idea of European cooperation. They found it of great importance that the VeV determine its position regarding European cooperation. The solution was that this committee would be dissolved and a new, permanent, committee instated.<sup>51</sup> The original committee had consisted of four members, the Catholic senator W. van Lanschot, who was its president, the director of the *Scheepvaart Vereeniging Zuid* (Federation of Rotterdam shipping magnates) Auguste Plate, the economist and politician Elizabeth van Dorp and the international/constitutional lawyer and journalist Ernst van Raalte.<sup>52</sup> While the first two expressed interest and at times even enthusiasm for some form of European cooperation – they both were or became active in pro-European organizations<sup>53</sup> – Van Raalte was more sceptical.<sup>54</sup> This apprehension was due in no small part to his opinion of the *Paneuropa Union*, which he sarcastically complimented on their large 'theatrical experience'.<sup>55</sup> In his inaugural public lecture at the University of Amsterdam in 1931, Van Raalte accused Coudenhove-Kalergi of creating nothing but 'an exclusivist Europeanism'. Coudenhove-Kalergi's aims were 'unwelcome, unnatural and therefore impossible ... and unnecessary'.<sup>56</sup> Following the government's line on the Briand Pact, he argued that any European cooperation would only lead to competition between continents and did not take geopolitical reality into account. Extra-European, in particular colonial, questions should also be taken into consideration. Countries like Britain, France, and, indeed, the Netherlands had 'interests that were not exclusively European'.<sup>57</sup> He concluded that while decentralization of the League and therefore European cooperation within the framework of the League might be quite useful on certain occasions, the prospects for a United States of Europe in a constitutional (or supranational) sense were not good. If at all, the United States of Europe might be considered in an intergovernmental sense.<sup>58</sup> While he thus left a small opening for potential cooperation, his general evaluation – strongly informed by his appreciation of Coudenhove-Kalergi – was not positive. Van Raalte's dismissive attitude toward the topic was probably compounded by his admittedly very busy schedule as a journalist and academic, which left little time for committee work.<sup>59</sup> Ernst van Raalte then did not continue his involvement in the committee. A new committee was fortified by six new members, amongst whom the europhile engineer M.D. Hage and the Eurosceptic director of the League of Nations section, Professor J.P.A. Francois.<sup>60</sup>

W. van Lanschot, the president of the Pan-Europa committee, who was also president of the VeV at the time, reported to the general assembly of the VeV in 1932.<sup>61</sup> In presenting the generally positive findings on this question, he emphasized three points: the importance of situating European cooperation within the framework of the League, the special position of countries with colonial territories and the need to avoid competition between continents. The questions the committee had asked itself were whether Briand's plans agreed with the VeV's aims and whether the VeV should cooperate with European societies in the Netherlands. They began by assessing the larger field of initiatives for European cooperation and acknowledged the diversity of 'Pan-European' plans. While all projects agreed on a greater degree of European cooperation, they differed about whether cooperation should be pursued with respect for national sovereignty or whether immediately a central European government should be created. Other differences concerned the countries that could participate and whether 'territories, colonies and possessions on other continents should be included in a European union'.<sup>62</sup> The committee discerned three main types of 'Pan-European' projects. Paneuropa represented the first type, which they described as aiming at a federal and customs union excluding the Soviet Union and Britain, but including colonies (the committee did acknowledge that over time Paneuropa's position on Britain was changing and becoming more inclusive). The second type discerned by the committee worked for the creation of one central European government, which would have power over the national governments similar to the powers of the federal government in the United States. This was the line of the *Vereeniging ter Bevordering van de oprichting der Vereenigde Staaten van Europa*. The third type of project envisaged the creation of a 'Union Européenne' as outlined by the French memorandum. This aimed at cooperation between the European states within the framework of the League and was, as will be shown, closest to the ideas of the VeV.

In its comments about these projects, the committee foregrounded two recurring Dutch points: the position of colonies and a preference of economic (trade) over political cooperation. The committee pointed to a perceived inconsistency in the terminology of Paneuropa. A federal and customs union that excluded Britain but included the European colonies should not be supported, as it was 'neither Pan-European nor pan-European'.<sup>63</sup> While such a union would abolish tariffs between the European states, it would raise the barriers around Europe. It would pit Europe against other continents and intensify the conflict of interests. The inclusion of the colonies in such a union would considerably raise the chances of such conflicts. Modern colonial policy was used to give a moral twist to these rather *Realpolitik* considerations. The claim was that colonialism was necessary because it opened up certain undeveloped territories to the world, to the benefit of both the inhabitants of those territories and of the world. This implied that European colonialism would go against the interests of both the local populations and the rest of the world.

The idea to govern these territories in the interest of the European states, whose inhabitants and industries would enjoy preferential rights, would go against the principles of modern colonial policy and could lead to serious conflicts. Such a confederation could put the Netherlands with its extensive overseas territories in a very difficult position, because in the Dutch East Indies it would have to break with the open-door policy in respect of Britain, the United States and Japan.<sup>64</sup>

In the oral report, the committee reiterated the notion that ‘the Netherlands were not just a European state and [that] therefore the *Coopération Européenne* would have to refrain from meddling in colonisation.’<sup>65</sup>

The committee was of the opinion that European cooperation would have to grow ‘organically’ from the bottom up through regional consultation; the establishment of a central European government was undesirable. They criticized Briand’s foregrounding of political questions. Contrary to an argument that has often been made since the Second World War, the committee argued that plans which sought political cooperation had to be avoided since such cooperation would leave smaller nations with very little influence.<sup>66</sup> However there was little to fear, as the committee pointed out that there was very little reality to these political plans. Instead, the committee emphasized the great importance – particularly for economic recovery – of agreements for regional or general European economic cooperation such as the agreements of Oslo or Ouchy. As long as these plans were specific and respected the rules of open multilateral cooperation the League had stipulated, they could be beneficial (despite opposition to these plans from Britain). These insights can be connected to developments in the 1950s when the Netherlands proposed the Beyen plan for a European customs union.<sup>67</sup> These considerations then also highlight the relevance of the Dutch interwar case for the later development of European integration.

The committee concluded that it would support ‘general European cooperation by or in the framework of the League’ – as long as certain conditions were met. Conflict between continents had to be avoided and ‘of course such a “European Union” would have to refrain from matters that also relate to non-European states and from the relationship between European states and their overseas territories, colonies and possessions’.<sup>68</sup> Cooperation which respected these conditions was highly desirable, and ‘should be supported as much as possible by the VeV.’<sup>69</sup> European cooperation was desirable because the European states were dependent on each other. This argument in favour of cooperation could in principle apply to states across the world, but the VeV accepted the argument that ‘the many economic, cultural and other interests that they had in common’, were matters that either only concerned the European states, or that could more easily be addressed by just these states.<sup>70</sup> Thus, despite the fact that the influential Eurosceptic Francois was on the committee, European cooperation came to be supported by the VeV. The general meeting of the VeV agreed that their programme should include support for organized cooperation between the European states in

the interest of economic recovery and with respect for the structure of the League. This resolution was incorporated in the Action Programme of 1933.<sup>71</sup> In 1934 the *Pan-Europa* committee recommended that the local branches would continue to pay attention to the question of European cooperation.<sup>72</sup> The *Pan-Europa* committee continued to exist until at least December 1936.<sup>73</sup>

## **Epilogue: The Netherlands in Europe after World War II**

During and after the war enthusiasm for European cooperation grew considerably in the Netherlands. Firstly the impact of the war cannot be underestimated. Where World War I had led to a spur in European initiatives across Europe, these arguments became even more poignant after 1945, especially in the Netherlands. When the Dutch foreign policy climate is examined, three profound shifts had taken place. The policy of neutrality was no longer tenable, the United States had taken over Britain's guarantor position and were stimulating instead of obstructing European initiatives and, over the course of the late 1940s, it became clear that the Netherlands would no longer have an empire in the East. This meant that a number of the objections to European cooperation from the interwar period lost their importance, while the main argument in favour of European projects that had emerged during the interwar period, to stimulate trade (which seemed unachievable on a global scale) remained as relevant as ever. Pursuing global and European interests was no longer by definition incompatible and was often done under the umbrella of Atlantic cooperation.

## **Conclusion: Dutch interwar internationalism**

My analysis of the attitude of the VeV shows the tension and later overlap between forms of internationalism. It shows what type of European project could be discussed in the Netherlands, the influence of the wider transnational European context on Dutch debates and more generally the importance of the extra-European, colonial context for European cooperation, as well as the negative influence that the Paneuropa Union and Coudenhove-Kalergi had on the thinking about European cooperation. The Dutch geopolitical situation – a small European metropole with its colonies spread across two continents – suggested support for a universal world-spanning organization such as the League. Initiatives that harboured challenges to the League were viewed with suspicion and Coudenhove-Kalergi's critique of the League did exactly that. Moreover, his plans for common European control of the colonies were rejected since they contravened modern colonial practice and risked provoking inter-continental conflict – not to mention hurt national pride. Finally, the suggestion that his plans might entail a customs union clashed with the Dutch free trade tradition. Despite Paneuropa's negative influence on the thinking about European cooperation, other forms of European cooperation were examined with some interest and enthusiasm. This even led an

organization such as the VeV with its close links to the sceptical Ministry of Foreign Affairs to adopt European cooperation as one of its goals. This more positive attitude emerged over time under the influence of a number of international developments. Firstly there was Briand's initiative and the changing position with regard to European cooperation of the IFLNS. Secondly, there was the changing economic situation which led to the acceptance of multilateral economic conventions by the League. These made exceptions to the MFN-clause and thereby regional economic cooperation possible. Given that global economic cooperation was proving impractical, regional initiatives would be on the Dutch international economic agenda until well after WWII.

Despite this adoption of certain European initiatives, time and again the same *caveats* were made by the VeV when European cooperation in general was discussed, all relating to the Dutch empire: the Netherlands were not just a European country; the position of the colonies in a European project should be considered; there could be no competition between continents; and the position of the League could not be compromised. With these *caveats* the VeV showed the constitutive role colonies played in Dutch nationalism and thus its true Dutch colours: any European project that contravened these points could not be supported.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, the fact that economic cooperation between European states was supported also shows that as long as colonies would be excluded, the Dutch could support European cooperation despite British opposition and the tension between global/League and European internationalism could be resolved.

This analysis of Dutch interwar internationalisms demonstrates that the perceived natural complementarity of Dutch post-war internationalisms was not self-evident. It also shows and explains the origins of the Dutch preference for economic cooperation as put forth in for example the Beyen plan. These insights only become possible by understanding foreign relations as comprising not just the dealings of the Foreign Ministry, but also activities in the wider civil society field and its transnational connections.

## Notes

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- 9 Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede*.
  - 10 Ibid.
  - 11 Voorhoeve, *Peace, Profits and Principles*; Hellema, *Dutch Foreign Policy*. See also: Van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede*.
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- 44 The text only mentions *Coopération Européenne*. From the context it is clear that the *Comité Fédéral de Coopération Européenne* is meant. IISH, VeV, 14, Verslag van het dertiende congres van de Union internationale des associations pour la Société des Nations te Madrid, 18–24 May 1929; 1, Verslag van de XIIIde algemeene vergadering van de VvVeV, 19–11–1932.
- 45 Art. 1. J. Christu, *L'union douanière européenne* (Paris 1928) 212. Bibliothèque de Documentation et d'Information Contemporaine (BDIC, Nanterre), CFCE, 31–1–1930. While a Dutch section of *Coopération Européenne* also existed, no further information about the activities of this section could be found. Both the president of the VeV, J. Limburg, and the secretary of the VeV, the influential activist and publicist H. Ch.G.J. van der Mandere (1883–1959) were also president and secretary of the Dutch section of European Cooperation. IISH, VeV, 13, Jaarverslag 1929–1930.
- 46 IISH, VeV, 4, Vergadering Hoofdbestuur, 28–11–1928, 5–2–1929.
- 47 IISH, VeV, 1, Jaarlijkse Algemeene Vergadering van de Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, 26–10–1929.
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- 50 GR, Plate, 422, 32, Letter W. van Lanschot-A. Plate, 20-1-1932.
- 51 IISH, VeV, 5, Vergadering Hoofdbestuur, 6-6-1932, 24-6-1932. For discussions on the report see: IISG, Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, 4, Vergadering Hoofdbestuur, 8-8-1930, 9-9-1930.
- 52 Originally the committee had consisted of the three men. The economic committee requested that a fourth member be added to this committee, this was Miss E.C van Dorp. IISH, VeV, 2, Vergadering Hoofdbestuur, 5-2-1929; 13, Jaarverslag Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede 1928-1929.
- 53 Van Lanschot became a member of Paneuropa Nederland; Plate had set up a Dutch committee of the Union Douanière Européenne, the Entente Douanière Européenne and later also joined Paneuropa Nederland.
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- 56 Ibid.
- 57 Ibid., The Dutch terms used were 'staatsrechtelijk' and 'volkenrechtelijk'.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 GR, Plate, 422, 32, Letter W. van Lanschot-A. Plate, 20-1-1932.
- 60 The new committee included some of the previous members: W. van Lanschot was again president. Members: E. van Welderen Baron Rengers (vice-president), Professor A. Anema, E.C. van Dorp, Professor J.P.A. François, M.D. Hage, A. Plate, C.P. van Wijngaarden (secretary).
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- 68 IISH, VeV, 28-83-84, Advies van de Pan-Europa commissie aan het hoofdbestuur der Vereeniging voor Volkenbond en Vrede, 1932/1933.
- 69 Ibid.
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- 71 IISH, VeV, 28–96 Program van Actie 1933, GR, Plate, 422, Letter VeV to members, 19–1–1933.
- 72 IISH, VeV, 5, Vergadering Hoofdbestuur, 27–10–1934.
- 73 IISH, VeV, 7, Vergadering Dagelijksch Bestuur, 3–12–1936.
- 74 M. Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880–1931* (Singapore 2006) 21.