

## Trust, social cohesion, citizenship and the state in an economic downturn



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## Foreword

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the UK/Netherlands bilateral conference, named after the Dutch town of Apeldoorn where Minister of Foreign Affairs Jozias van Aartsen and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook inaugurated the first conference. It was particularly appropriate that Jozias van Aartsen, now Mayor of The Hague, was one of our keynote speakers in Belfast.

Ever since 1999 the Apeldoorn Conference Series has furthered the development of close relations and understanding between the UK and the Netherlands, by bringing together a broad range of British and Dutch thinkers, practitioners, opinion formers and potential opinion formers to discuss topical themes.

Belfast offered a perfect setting for the 2009 Conference, exploring the theme "Trust, social cohesion, citizenship and the state in an economic downturn". The opening excursion to the Shankill and Falls Road areas of the city allowed delegates to start networking immediately and to consider the practical and social dimension of the theme at first hand.

The wide range of attendees at the Conference – from all over the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, across many professional fields and of different ages – resulted in a real

breadth of perspectives and opinions. Supported by the quality and status of the plenary speakers, the theme was tackled with considerable energy and skill, evidenced by this Conference Report.

Of course, the relevance of this year's Conference theme revealed several new possibilities for further collaborative action between us on both sides of the Narrow Sea. In particular, there was enthusiasm for closer cooperation between business, politics and social action. But above all, this edition of the Apeldoorn Conference promoted and expanded the already extensive network of fellow countrymen, which we consider invaluable to fostering cooperation and understanding between the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in the years ahead.

### PAUL ARKWRIGHT

British  
Ambassador to  
the Netherlands

*P. Arkwright*



### PIM WALDECK

Ambassador of the  
Kingdom of the  
Netherlands to the  
United Kingdom

*Pim Waldeck*







Great Hall, Stormont Parliament Building



The Peace Wall, Belfast

## Conference Report

The tenth anniversary Apeldoorn Conference met in a changed world. Previous Conferences had all occurred during times of economic growth. They examined politics and society through the prism of widespread, if not universal, prosperity. In contrast, the 2009 Conference had to address the problems faced by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands – and modern societies more generally – after the most difficult year for many economies in living memory; at a time when most developed countries were piling up massive government deficits; and where the problems we all face had to be addressed needed new solutions – or, at any rate, solutions that did not require large injections of new public money. Hence the title of the 2009 Conference: “Trust, social cohesion, citizenship and the state

in an economic downturn”. The Conference took place in Belfast between October 4 and 6, 2009. On the first afternoon, before any formal sessions, the participants from government, diplomacy, politics, business, journalism, academia and the voluntary sector were taken on a walking tour either side of Belfast's “peace line”, a high wall that physically separates the Protestant/unionist Shankill Road area from the Catholic/nationalist Falls Road area. The wall, and the people, murals, plaques and commemorative gardens on either side of it, provided a salutary reminder that even after a decade of peace in Northern Ireland, the project of building trust and social cohesion needs a great deal of time, patience and understanding.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

## Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas

Dame Judith reminded participants that the recession was far from the only big challenge facing the world. Speaking with the experience of having been the first woman leader of London's financial district, the City of London; the Provost (head) of King's College, Cambridge, and the chairman of a company involved in the regeneration of London's West End, she listed a number of major initiatives that were under way, but whose success could not be taken for granted: to tackle climate change, to rein in Iran's nuclear ambitions, to bring peace to the Middle East and to combat terrorism.

Tackling the global recession touched all these concerns. In this uncertain world, smart governments and smart international institutions, such as the G20 and the International Monetary Fund, were vital – but they needed to recognise the limits to what they could achieve. Dame Judith said: "Innovation, trade and the private sector will have to lead us out of this recession eventually, and governments will have to resist intervening too much".

Indeed, she saw "a huge opportunity to reverse decades of centralisation in the United Kingdom". Greater local autonomy was vital, for one of the effects of centralisation was to generate ludicrous amounts of bureaucracy that strangled initiative and overrode common sense. Among the unintended outcomes she cited were the failure to protect abused children, and the arbitrary exclusion of overseas students who, had they been admitted, would not only have enhanced the finances of UK universities, but enlarged the subsequent pool of talented adults willing to invest in Britain: "We need therefore to seize



Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas

opportunity that the financial crisis has given us, to rebalance the relationship between central government and agencies, and between the state and the individual."

## Jozias van Aartsen

The Mayor of The Hague, former Foreign Minister and former leader of the VVD (Liberal) group in the lower house of the Dutch parliament, recalled that the Netherlands had traditionally been a high trust society, in which people of different religious affiliations retained their culture but respected each others'. It was, for example, widely accepted that the state should fund schools dedicated to different religions and denominations. However, in recent decades, the decline in religion, the rise in individualism and the growth of migration created a new dynamic. On the one hand it enriched Dutch society; on the other hand it provoked new tensions.

These trends require us to rethink how government should operate – and at what level. The Mayor argued for both greater decentralisation and a greater role for the European Union. In The Hague he was investing in projects to revamp public spaces, stimulate

new housing projects and create work experience placements for young people – all things that would both help to mitigate the effects of recession and bring about lasting improvements to the city. As for the EU, the challenges of migration and asylum needed to be tackled internationally, as must the task of supervising the financial institutions.



Jozias van Aartsen

The Mayor warned that we should not "reduce social cohesion to an immigration issue". Social exclusion affected all groups, not only ethnic minorities. A more rounded view was needed – not least because tension is not always a bad thing: the histories of London and The Hague show that change and evolution are often the product of tension and reforms undertaken to tackle them.



Trust holds the key. Productive change depends on it. People need to trust both private institutions, such as business, the media and banks – and public institutions, such as local councils, parliament and the civil service. And we must always remember that trust “takes years to build, but can be destroyed with a single blow”. Trust has diminished in recent years, for some people in a fundamental way, when they lose faith in society altogether.

Municipal government has a vital role to play, because this is where citizens encounter government most directly, through the local administration of policies, wherever they have been decided. The Hague is the home of the courts that deal with international peace and justice: it “has a duty to guarantee peace and justice for its own citizens, too”.

### Lionel Barber

The editor of the Financial Times explored the decline in trust in many countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States. These flowed from a combination of long-term factors (“a..sense that the governing elite has lost touch with the ordinary citizen”, and “forces of

fragmentation” unleashed by such things as immigration and technology) and more short-term impulses, such as outrage at the behaviour of bankers before and during the global recession and, in Britain, the scandal that erupted earlier in 2009 over the expenses of Members of Parliament.



Lionel Barber

What is to be done? Mr Barber’s first, “modest” proposal was that politicians should make credible promises, and then stick to them. So-called “binding” emissions targets for 2050, to curb climate change, were not credible; and Tony Blair was wrong not to hold a referendum on the European Union’s Lisbon Treaty, having promised one on the previously-

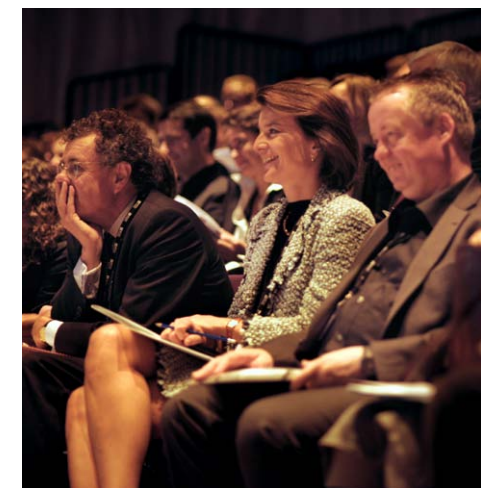
planned EU constitution: “to withdraw that promise on the grounds the Lisbon Treaty was substantially different, was to elevate cynicism to a level which would make even Machiavelli blush”.

Across Europe, a contrast could be drawn between a major, specific promise that was kept – to introduce the single currency – and one whose absurd grandeur condemned it to be broken and largely forgotten: the promise made at the Lisbon summit in 2000 to make the EU “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment, by 2010”.

Beyond that, Mr Barber recommended four steps to tackle the trust deficit. Although he spoke specifically about Britain, his underlying analysis held lessons for many countries. First, “tackle the weaknesses in the banking system which has had to be bailed at a cost of more than a trillion dollars to taxpayers around the world”. Second, reinvigorate our political culture: in the UK, local government and Parliament need to be strengthened “at

the expense of an overweening executive dominated by a quasi-presidential prime minister”. Third, the UK needs “a new constitutional settlement” – a charter of rights, a strengthened and democratised House of Lords, and more power to Britain’s regions. Fourth, “the media needs to take a hard look at its own house”. Here the problem was that the “tabloidisation of news coverage” would grow worse, “if established news media feel obliged to chase every rumour or comment appearing in the blogosphere”.

Drawing these proposals together, Mr Barber said tackling the trust deficit “is not simply the business of politicians; it must be a broader responsibility shared by leaders of the community”.



## THE WORKSHOPS

### Trust, leadership and the role of the state

This workshop agreed that the behaviour of the banks before and during the recession contributed to the decline in trust in many countries. But while our trust in those with power – whether in finance or government – had declined, there was less evidence that we have lost trust in our neighbours or “on the street”. In the case of the financial crisis, we need to be sure we understood what went wrong, so we could know how to prevent a repetition of the same mistakes. Corporate governance had failed; it needed to be revived.



We also needed more effective national governments and international institutions. These also lacked public trust, but they were indispensable. Government intervention had been necessary to save a number

of banks; regulations imposed by government were needed to prevent the worst excesses of the business world; and international co-operation was vital to counteract the power of global business. One of the challenges we face is how governments and international bodies can regain the trust they need if they are to be effective in discharging their obligations? The workshop proposed a number of steps that should be taken:

- Make use of new forms of communication to involve more people and to take better decisions faster.
- End over-regulation, so that common sense matters more than legal processes, and local decision-makers are less scared to take risks.
- Break complex decisions down into their simpler component parts, so that more people can understand the problems and trade-offs inherent in public policy, and so buy in to the tough decisions that often have to be taken.
- Decentralise more power, so that people are more closely

connected to the effects of the votes they cast. This is more important than worrying about turnout per se.

- Acknowledge that modern technology has done much to engage a large minority of younger citizens; but take steps to ensure that everyone has the means and the ability to take advantage of the communications revolution.
- Require schools and other educational institutions to ensure that each new generation of citizens understands their rights and duties, and the way a parliamentary democracy functions.



### Globalisation, migration and the labour market

Both the UK and the Netherlands have seen tensions associated with migration, and a backlash by minorities of white voters that have

fuelled the growth of far-right, anti-immigration political parties. And, as in the past, economic difficulties have exacerbated these problems. The workshop dealing with these issues produced an agreed critique of the present situation in both countries. The traditional social contract between citizen and state has broken down; our societies are not sufficiently inclusive; too much is said about the “drain” on society caused by immigrants and too little about the contribution they make; not enough has been done to convey the merits of diversity; and, sometimes because of an exaggerated respect for political correctness, we have not been honest about the social problems that do need tackling.

There are lessons to be learned from other countries, such as Canada and Australia in education, and from companies such as Shell and KPMG in employment, which have developed programmes to find and support talented ethnic minority students and adults, and to create institutions in which diversity is celebrated as a strength, not a weakness, and excellence is demanded of all.

The workshop believed that the

way forward requires both cultural and institutional reform. On the cultural side, the language of debate needs to change. For example, the word "migration" needs to escape its negative connotations; "British" and "Dutch" should not be regarded as equalling "white" (after all, 60 per cent of black and Asian people living in Britain were born in the UK); a new set of core values needs to be developed that create unity out of diversity; a wide range of role models needs to be established, so that everyone can see that success is possible; above all, a new sense of community that is inclusive, not exclusive, is essential.



Specific proposals included: use schools and the education system to teach and demonstrate shared values; revive some form of national service, perhaps taking the form of community action; set new targets for ethnic minority involvement in every level of

national and local life, for while positive discrimination does not work, target-led positive action does; celebrate role models in each community by building a network of "ambassadors" of excellence; encourage the growing commitment of companies to Corporate Social Responsibility to include commitments to diversity and equality.



#### **Solidarity and supporting the vulnerable in modern societies**

This workshop opened with presentations on life for the vulnerable in Britain and the Netherlands. Carmel McConnell, CEO of Magic Breakfast, a British food aid charity, told how breakfast clubs were helping to help children in London, where one in four pupils rely on school breakfasts. Here was a practical example of how to help victims of family poverty, for good nutrition is vital to concentration and

effective learning. The example also illuminates the wider problem of poverty itself, the need to engage with parents, and the universal truth that to tackle social problems, the beneficiaries must own the solutions rather than simply being recipients of national or local measures.



Yvonne Zonderop, a freelance journalist specialising in economics and politics, explored the concept of solidarity and how it has developed in the Netherlands. Historically it had signified cohesion among different social groups, not just cohesion within groups. However, the wider form of cohesion has weakened – a trend both symbolised and reinforced by the rise of the Dutch Freedom party, PVV, under Geert Wilders. New tools are needed to close different gaps, not only between black and white people, but between young and old, the secure and insecure, the economic winners and losers. Too

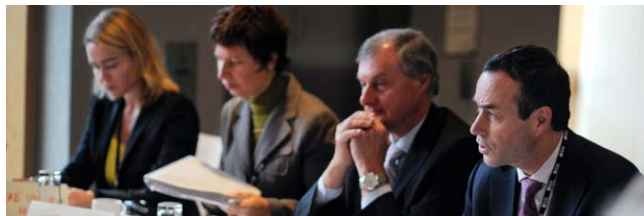
often social policy is perceived as a zero-sum game, in which the gains for some groups are matched by losses for others. We need to develop win-win strategies that show that everyone can gain from an improvement in the fortunes of the most vulnerable.

This workshop then broke into small groups to consider specific issues. A number of proposals emerged. They included:

- Enhance the role of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and the corporate sector: government cannot do everything.
- Identify those unable to participate fully in society (socially, economically, politically) so that the obstacles to their participation can be removed.
- Give public services a greater consumer focus, and improve access at local level.









- Consider establishing a National Volunteer Service, in order to provide practical help, achieve a degree of “social engineering” through the education system, and change the “emotional contract” between citizens and society.

### Human rights and communities

This workshop explored its brief against a difficult background: first, at a time when human rights are needed the most, the language of rights has been taken over by those who seek to abuse them; secondly, it is a moot point whether individual rights and the rights of the community be classified together, for sometimes they are liable to collide.



Indeed, in the view of some, national security and anti-terrorist measures that are intended to protect our liberties have instead emerged as major threats to human rights. We have witnessed this in the arbitrary detention of people, particularly those from

the Muslim community, only to be released without charge. Guantanamo Bay has become synonymous with this: Britain has witnessed the case of 12 university students who were arrested on suspicion of terrorism, detained incommunicado for months, released without charge and then deported to their country of origin.

The issue of human rights has been used as a pretext to go to war - But as a distraught Iraqi man whose seven children were killed in allied bombardment of Baghdad said: “What about the right of my children to life?” (Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person).

When questioned about their views, the participants of the group were unanimous in their support for the right of individuals to practice their religion freely. However, there were clear divisions when asked if women should be allowed to wear the burqa in public, with some strongly against. A similar discrepancy arose when the group was asked if they believed in freedom of speech, to which all responded positively. However, when asked whether the BNP

should be allowed to share its views on BBC’s Question Time, many of the participants responded in the negative, arguing that the right to free speech did not extend to the right to promote racial hatred.



### REFLECTIONS ON REBUILDING TRUST

Following the workshop sessions, participants spent the evening in the grand surroundings of Stormont, the home of the Northern Ireland Assembly. They were greeted by Anna Lo, an Alliance member of the Assembly, and the first person born in East Asia to serve in any UK Parliament or Assembly. In the Assembly Chamber, they were addressed by Lord Alderdice, another Alliance member, and first Speaker of the Assembly following its formation in 1998. (The Alliance Party is the province’s main non-sectarian party; the other parties are overwhelmingly either Catholic,

such as Sinn Féin, or Protestant, such as the Democratic Unionist Party).

Both speakers reflected on the challenges of rebuilding civil society out of the ashes of conflict. In particular, Lord Alderdice recounted how relations between bitter historic enemies gradually evolved through a series of apparently minor steps, such as the precise design of, and seating arrangements in, the Assembly chamber itself. Care always had to be taken to recognise the concerns of the rival politicians, and their need not to lose “face” in front of their supporters. Often compromises were reached on an interim basis (so that neither side need appear to surrender anything permanently) – although, once in place, these compromises tended to stick.



Anna Lo, MBE

Lord Alderdice's account provided a timely reminder that it is possible to build functioning political systems, and some degree of mutual trust, in even the least promising circumstances – but that the process requires patience, subtlety and creative thinking.



Lord Alderdice

## CONCLUSIONS

When the Conference reconvened on the final morning, there was general agreement on a number of propositions.

- Trust, and social cohesion, have diminished in recent years in both the UK and the Netherlands.
- Mainstream politicians have contributed to this process, to the benefit of extremist parties.
- National governments in both countries have been too inflexible, and too willing to suppress local initiatives with excessive regulations.

- Much more power and responsibility needs to be devolved to local level; the voluntary sectors has a potentially vital role.

- Special attention needs to be paid to the attitudes and civic knowledge of teenage children, if the next generation of adults is to play an informed role in the future development of civic society.

- New policies will have to be low-cost, or attract money from other programmes: public spending in both countries will be tight for some years to come.

- Technology used well can help to improve matters – but, used badly, can make matters worse.



Mirjam Sterk

What, then, are the obstacles to reform? Discussions at the

Conference identified three:

- There is much evidence that voters do not want more power and responsibility to be exercised at local level. Given the choice, they prefer nationally-imposed standards rather than decisions made according to local priorities that could mean, for example, variable access to health care. In debates in the UK about the future of the National Health Service, few voters want what has been damned as a “postcode lottery”.

- It is not enough to devise a menu of proposed reform. Priorities must be set. There was, for example, a heated debate about whether Muslim women should be banned from wearing the burqa in public. Not only were strongly contrasting views put forward; some participants questioned whether this was an issue that should be at the forefront of our minds at all. Without a clear set of priorities, there is a danger that many ideas will be advanced, but none with the strength and momentum that are needed to achieve success.

- Neither the Netherlands nor the UK has adequate mechanisms for achieving the kinds of reforms that are needed. Nor, arguably, do they have the right political culture.

The loss of trust, and the rise of extremist parties, have left many mainstream politicians nervous and defensive. At the very time when confidence in reform is most needed, it is most lacking.



Peter Kellner

All three obstacles apply to one of the most radical ideas advanced at this Apeldoorn Conference: that all teenagers should be required to engage in a civilian version of “national service”. If it were run properly – and that is a huge “if” – it could achieve a number of goals: helping the next generation if adults become more responsible and civic-minded; exposing teenagers to people from different cultures and social backgrounds, and so breaking down the barriers between them; recreating a social solidarity that has been lost in recent decades.





Ambassador Paul Arkwright

Support for this idea was widespread; nobody spoke out in principle against it. Yet there is no head of steam in either the Netherlands nor the UK to implement it; and much work needs to be done not just to win legislative approval, but to marshal

public opinion – above all, that of teenagers and parents – behind it. Overall, this observer felt that the tenth anniversary Apeldoorn was highly successful in identifying the social challenges facing the UK and the Netherlands, and the need to tackle them in the teeth of tough economic and financial conditions. There was a notable sense of urgency, and a widespread consensus about the destinations for social policy. But more work may be needed on the way to reach those destinations. We know broadly where we want to go, but how do we get there? A question, perhaps, for the next Apeldoorn Conference.



Stage curtain, Grand Opera House, Belfast



Assembly Chamber, Stormont Parliament Building

## Conference Participants

### PLENARY SPEAKERS

Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas DBE	Chair, The New West End Company
Jozias van Aartsen	Mayor, The Hague
Lionel Barber	Editor, Financial Times
Anna Lo MBE	Member of Legislative Assembly for Northern Ireland
Lord Alderdice	President of Liberal International and former Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly

### CONFERENCE MODERATORS

Peter Kellner	President, YouGov
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### WORKSHOP CHAIRS

Anna Carragher	Chair, Grand Opera House Trust
Wim Mijs	Chief Executive Officer, Netherlands Bankers' Association

Prof Dr Paul Schnabel	General Director, Netherlands Institute for Social Research
Yasemin Tümer	Entrepreneur, RYT Holding

### WORKSHOP SPEAKERS

Prof Dr Paul Cliteur	Professor of Jurisprudence, Law Faculty, University of Leiden
Trevor Hall CBE	Executive Vice Chair, Windsor Fellowship
Lionel Barber	Editor, Financial Times
Carmel McConnell	Founder/CEO, Magic Breakfast
Peter O'Neill	Executive, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
Matt Poelmans	Director, Burgerlink (Citizenlink), ICTU
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Yvonne Zonderop	Freelance Journalist

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Dr Neil Jarman	Director, Institute for Conflict Research
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Adriana Lukas	The Mine! Project
Shona McCarthy	Director, British Council Northern Ireland
Ross McCrea	Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Action for Children Northern Ireland



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Heleen Terwijn	Founder, IMC Weekend School
Prof Dr Coen Teulings	Director, Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, (CPB)
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Lousewies van der Laan	Chef de Cabinet, International Criminal Court
Lobke van der Meulen	Consultant/Researcher, KnowledgeLand
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Prof Dr Niek van Sas	Professor of Modern History, University of Amsterdam
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Ambassador Pim Waldeck	Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Kingdom
Lord Wallace of Saltaire	Leader of the Liberal Democrat Lords Group
Brian Wilson	Intercultural Dialogue Consultant, British Council Northern Ireland
Graham Wladimiroff	Secretary to the Board of Management and Supervisory Board, AkzoNobel
Ben Woldring	CEO, Bencom BV
Patrick Yu	Executive Director, Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)

# Conference Organisation

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