Van partij naar partij: Nederlandse ondersteuning van politieke partijen in Europese landen in transitie
Evaluatie Matra Politieke Partijen Programma 2000-2005

In opdracht van het Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, DZO/UM
Executive summary

The aim of Het Matra Politieke Partijen Programma [The Matra Political Parties Programme] (mppp) is to strengthen the network among the political parties represented in the Dutch Lower House and their sister parties in a number of countries in Central and Eastern Europe and in neighbouring countries of the European Union and to contribute to training party leadership of the sister parties. Dutch political parties do not receive the subsidy directly; a foundation attached to the party must apply for it. cda, ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks, PvdA, sgp and vvd all make use of this scheme.

The mppp is based on the party-to-party concept. Dutch parties identify sister parties with which they have an ideological connection. One chooses a partner per country for ‘twinning’.

This evaluation covers the period 2000-2005; its aim was to investigate the mppp’s effectiveness and efficiency. Subsidies granted over this five-year period amounted to a total of 6,730,000 Euro.

Research done includes interviews carried out with the party foundations and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, studies of documents and records, and interviews in four countries (Hungary, Romania, Turkey and Georgia).

The research reveals that party foundations carry out the mppp with great dedication. Almost 800 activities were initiated during the period investigated. This means that most were small-scale activities costing relatively little. One attempts to strengthen sister parties by means of training sessions, conferences, and meetings featuring various themes and networking. Field studies show that those participating in the activities have benefited personally but that effects at party level are difficult to determine.

The mppp was originally conceived as support for political parties in countries with prospects for eu accession on the short term. Since then the list of countries has changed a number of times. The list of countries during the evaluation period included: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Georgia, Jordan (July 2004), Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslavian republic of Macedonia, Morocco (July 2004), Moldavia, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Belarus. The intention is to phase out activities in 2007 in the eight countries that entered the European Union in 2004.

As a consequence of these amendments and of entry into the eu, the implementation of the mppp is shifting to countries where the political situation is unstable, where chances for eu membership are uncertain or absent, and where a plural, democratic society is solely a distant possibility. It is difficult for Dutch political parties to select a sister party in these countries based on a relationship to programme. The evaluation shows that the work in countries of this sort is impossible without a clear strategy, a vision as to party support, knowledge of topical, political context and coordination and fine-tuning among the Dutch party foundations and with party foundations from other Western countries.

The mppp is an exceptional subsidy programme in the sense that the recipients of the subsidy are connected to political parties. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs manages the programme. The foundations submit annual requests for subsidies to the Ministry and are accountable in writing for everything related to a subsidy once granted. The Ministry refrains from judging content and from commenting on strategic choices and activities because it cannot interfere with the autonomy of the parties. Because the Dutch Lower House solely establishes the amount of the subsidy granted but does not play a role in controlling the quality of the mppp or evaluating it, neither the Ministry nor the Lower House comment to party foundations on the content of their activities or their ways of working. This means that both the necessary stimulus and the required advice that could lead to quality improvement and programme enrichment are lacking.
Field studies show that in Hungary all the Dutch parties have achieved a reasonable level of cooperation. A number of large Dutch parties felt it necessary to withdraw their active participation in Romania because cooperation with their sister parties was problematic. The consequence is that the mppp does not support all the political movements in Romania.

The mppp is starting up as yet in Georgia and Turkey. Identifying sister parties is a slow process. For this reason, three large Dutch parties have decided to develop collective projects in Georgia. Turkey’s primary need is mutual contacts through which one discovers the other’s political situation and learns from the other. Not ‘help’ but ‘dialogue’.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations. An independent committee with representatives from both the political parties and the Ministry could better oversee both programme management and quality. The mppp should take on the character of a real subsidy programme with formal demands and evaluation and selection criteria, making it easier to assess the results the programme delivers.

It would be better for party foundations to work on a strategy with a longer term, incorporating a clear vision of party development, and an offer of activities per country, best fitting the actual political situation there.