

National concerns and international collaboration.

The Dutch and the Germanization of Nazi occupied Eastern Europe^{1,2}

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INTRODUCTION

Everywhere in Nazi occupied Europe, collaboration with the occupying forces was endemic. For the implementation of their policy, German occupying forces depended on the helping hand of 'indigenous' people. At least for some of the citizens and organizations of the various occupied countries, cooperation with the new rulers also seemed favourable.

In this regard the history of the occupied Netherlands is hardly an exception. The country was invaded by German troops in May 1940. In less than five days, after the harborcity of Rotterdam had been bombed by airplanes of the *Luftwaffe*, the war was over and the Dutch army surrendered. In many respects the organizational arrangements in Norway were taken as an example for the Low Countries. Similar to Norway the Dutch head of state and her ministers had fled the country, leaving a beheaded, yet well-organized Dutch administration at the occupier's disposal. On May 25th Hitler decreed the installation of a Reich Commissioner, like he had done for Norway, who would be responsible for the Nazification of the supposedly racially kindred Dutch. The Austrian lawyer and Nazi statesman Arthur Seyss-Inquart was appointed for the job. Identical to the Reich Commissioner of Norway, Seyss-Inquart should lead the Dutch 'by soft

¹ Rebut: 17/09/2015 Acceptat: 17/11/2015

² This contribution is largely based on the research carried out for my monograph *Hitler's Brudervolk: The Dutch and the Colonization of Occupied Eastern Europe, 1939-1945*, which will be published by Routledge in July 2015.

hand' into the Greater Germanic Reich. Through propaganda and education the Dutch should be convinced of both the historical inevitability and the benefits of this absorption.³

Initially, the Dutch population and government showed willingness to conform to the new situation. German rule was more or less accepted and the routine of daily life was more or less resumed.⁴ With time, this changed and relations became more hostile as German demands on both people and administration of the Netherlands grew. At the same time, however, the number of members of the Dutch National-Socialist Movement (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*, or NSB) steadily increased. After its sensational electoral success in 1935, when almost eight percent of the Dutch voters had chosen for the NSB, the party's support dried up in the second half of the 1930s. Early 1940, the Party had counted just over 30,000 members (0,33% of the total Dutch population of approximately 9,000.000 million people). Yet by the summer of 1941 this number had swollen to over 90,000. Two years later, when chances of a German military victory appeared small, still more than 100,000 Dutch citizens were openly backing the NSB.

Like in many places of occupied Europe, collaboration was widespread in the Netherlands, yet in the historiography of the first decades after liberation the phenomenon has been generally depicted as a deed of deviation. In both popular and academic studies of that time, the representation of collaboration and collaborators is strikingly identical: Dutch National Socialists were usually portrayed as socially and mentally disturbed, 'declassified' persons; outcasts, resentful losers and opportunists who saw their chances in May 1940.⁵

It is only in the last two decades that this dominant narrative has been challenged. Studies published in the 1990s and early 2000s reveal the multi-faceted nature of collaboration. Their authors show, that collaborators were often motivated by a multitude of factors and circumstances. Arguably, for policemen and civil servants, drilled in obedience and cursed with a well developed sense of duty, it could be hard to imagine doing something else than 'obeying orders from above'. Local and national officials could be tempted to comply 'to prevent worse' – that

³ As opposed to Norway however, the Dutch Nazis were not put in charge of an indigenous (national-socialist) government. Instead, the heads of the Dutch Departments were summoned to act as a provisional government. This considerably weakened the position of the Dutch Nazi-leader Anton Mussert and his movement, although in due time many of these civil servants were replaced by members of the Dutch Nazi Movement and from December 1942 onwards Mussert received some sort of recognition as Hitler declared him Leader of the Dutch Volk.

⁴ Chris van der Heijden, *Grijs verleden: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Amsterdam: Contact, 2001), 271-293.

⁵ Johannes J. Bolhuis et al (ed.), *Onderdrukking en verzet: Nederland in Oorlogstijd* Vol. 1-4 (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1949-1954); Theun de Vries, *W.A.-man* (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 1982).

is, to have their jobs taken over by local Nazis. Businessmen could decide to accept German business orders to enlarge their profits.⁶

More recently, historiography has taken yet another turn. Some important new studies question the commonly held perception that Dutch National Socialists were merely the weaker brothers and smaller copies of the ‘real thing’, i.e.: German National Socialists. Close-up studies of groups and individual members of the NSB point clearly at the ideological zest and political activism of Dutch collaborators.⁷ They were in favour of the creation of a Greater Germanic Reich that would provide the Dutch people, thanks to their racial qualities as ‘fellow-Germans’, a leading position in ‘the new European order’ of Nazi-propaganda.

This case study ties in with this latest historiographical trend and zooms in on the relation between the Dutch and the German partners in a specific instance of collaboration: the exploitation and colonization of the so-called occupied eastern territories. ‘Germanization’, a political program aiming for permanent conquest of larger parts of occupied Eastern Europe by bringing Germanic people in, at the cost of the non-Germanic local population, was indisputably an aspiration of the German National-Socialist regime. Although the migration of larger groups of settlers to most of the target-area should have to wait until German military victory over Soviet troops would be established, preparatory steps could (and should) be taken, and elaborate plan to cultivate the area and to exploit its resources was put into action almost immediately. Within a few weeks after Operation Barbarossa, plans for a Dutch contribution to the exploitation and colonization of the so called German occupied eastern territories – encompassing the Baltic countries, most of western Ukraine and Belarus – materialized. In November 1941, the first group of a few hundred Dutch farmers left their home country to take over farmsteads and collective farms in what had belonged before Barbarossa to the Soviet Union. In campaigns it was stressed that permanent settlement should have to wait, pending the conclusion of war, but many regarded themselves as pioneers, the first in a still to come ‘trek’ of Germanic men eastwards.

This view became general policy in June 1942, when the NSB took over the coordination of all economic activities of Dutch men and business in the occupied eastern territories. The Dutch East Company (*Nederlandse Oost Compagnie*, or NOC) was established as its central organization. Its extensive propaganda campaigns highlighted the unique opportunity for Dutch men to help building

⁶ See, for instance: Guus Meershoek, *Dienaren van het gezag: de Amsterdamse politie in oorlogstijd* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 1999); Peter Romijn, *Burgemeesters in oorlogstijd: Besturen onder Duitse bezetting* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2006); Hein Klemann and Sergei Kudryashov, *Occupied Economies: An Economic History of Nazi-Occupied Europe, 1939-1945* (London/New York: Berg, 2012).

⁷ Josje Damsma and Erik Schumacher, *Hier woont een NSB'er: Nationaalsocialisten in bezet Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010); Tessel Pollmann, *Mussert en Co: de NSB-leider en zijn vertrouwelingen* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012); Bas Kromhout, *De Voorman: Henk Feldmeijer en de Nederlandse SS* (Amsterdam: Atlas Contact, 2012).

a new Europe based on race. More than 5,000 Dutch volunteers applied for a position in the occupied eastern territories. They dreamt of 'Germanje', a larger empire of Germanic people on the European continent.

At the same time the NOC was hoping to solve some long-lasting issues of national concern. The conquered area in Eastern Europe would offer the extra ground needed for Dutch peasants whose future in the densely populated Netherlands seemed dark. Moreover, the occupied eastern territories would come as a substitution for the lost markets of Dutch maritime colonies and the loss of the nation's prestige as a colonial power. In this specific case, collaboration came about not only out of common political ideals, but also out of distinct national interests. Hence, the history of Dutch participation in the Nazi-project of Germanization shows that the sway of national agendas over international collaboration could be substantial. At the same time it lays bare, that the conceptual vagueness of 'the Greater Germanic Reich' was the cause of much friction between the two partners.

FIRST INITIATIVES

The prospective Greater Germanic Reich pictured by men like Hitler and Himmler would cover most of the European continent. It would stretch from the North Sea to the Caucasus, concerning both Eastern and Western Europe. Land should be conquered merely in the East, where a genocide program of settlers colonialism would be implemented: in this area, the additional 'living space' for the supposedly racially superior Germanic people would be created. People should be found in the *Altreich* proper, the communities of 'ethnic Germans' scattered across Europe, but also in Western European 'Germanic' countries, like Norway and the Netherlands. Already in December 1938 Himmler proclaimed in public that he intended 'to get, rob and steal German blood from all over the world.'⁸ How these fellow-Germanic peoples would relate to the Germans inside the new 'European' order was an issue that remained largely unsolved.

Soon after the conquest of Czechoslovakia (March 1939) and Poland (September 1939), Himmler must have realized that such ruthless methods seemed indeed in order, as the number of German candidates for the newly conquered lands remained disappointingly low. Campaigns to recruit German farmers for migration failed to attract many volunteers and by the end of 1940, less than 25,000 German peasants had been recruited.⁹ For the annexed Polish provinces, the German

⁸ Speech Heinrich Himmler to the audience of SS-generals in Munich (8.12.1938), printed in Bradley F. Smith and Agnes F. Peterson (ed.), *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Propyläen Verlag, 1974), 38.

⁹ Catherin Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford: Ox-

authorities looked in a different direction to solve the problem of peopling the area.¹⁰ The Latvian and Estonian governments were persuaded to agree upon a transfer of some 60,000 Baltic Germans: they would be candidates for settlement on former Polish soil. Shortly after, Russian authorities approved upon the 'return home' of some 130,000 ethnic Germans living in the Soviet-Union.¹¹

The need of racially qualified settlers became even more urgent after the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.¹² In various plans concerning the future of the Soviet territories, a ruthless population policy was suggested. According to the fourth version of the notorious General Plan East, for example, the non-Germanic population of the conquered territories of the Soviet Union should be reduced by millions. Settlers of Germanic descent should come in their stead. Recruitment should be started in Germany proper, but also amongst Germanic people of the occupied countries in Europe.¹³ To one of his trustees Himmler had mentioned the Dutch people explicitly, as 'by blood exceptionally highly qualified' candidates.¹⁴ Because of the limited possibilities for farming in their densely populated country, Himmler also expected that many Dutch men would be eager to leave.

Like Himmler, Reich Commissioner Seyss-Inquart was a passionate supporter of the Greater Germanic Reich. Within a week after the German assault on the Soviet Union, he spoke to a larger audience in the center of Amsterdam and plead his predominantly Dutch public to help colonize the conquered land.¹⁵ Shortly after, he visited Himmler in his new Ukrainian headquarters and travelled to Poland to discuss the employment of Dutch farmers.¹⁶ In the Netherlands, he

ford University Press, 2010), 162-163; Hans Umbreit, 'Auf dem Weg zur Koninentalherrschaft', in: Bernard R. Kroener, Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans Umbreit (ed.), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg V/1* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998), 247-248; Uwe Mai, "Rasse und Raum": *Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 87-93, 122 and 294; Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik: Die Zusammenarbeit von Wehrmacht, Wirtschaft und SS* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1991), 130-138; Mark Mazower, *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London/New York: Allen Lane, 2008), 184-189.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003), 81-82; Philip T. Rutherford, *Prelude to the Final Solution: The Nazi Program for Deporting Ethnic Poles* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 8.

¹¹ Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 174-180; Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 132-133.

¹² Mai, "Rasse und Raum", 301.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 310-315.

¹⁴ Letter Heinrich Himmler to Richard Hildebrandt, 7 January 1941, in: Nanno in 't Veld, *De SS en Nederland: Documenten uit SS-archieven 1935-1945* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 531.

¹⁵ *Het Vaderland*, 28 June 1941.

¹⁶ Koos Bosma, 'Verbindungen zwischen Ost- und Westkolonisation', in: Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher (ed.), *Der "Generalplan Ost": Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 201; Peter Witte et al. (ed.), *Der Dienstkalen-*

received Herbert Backe, State Secretary of Food and Agriculture and since the attack on the Soviet Union in charge of the exploitation of the conquered areas.¹⁷ Backe requested his host to approve of the recruitment of Dutch farmers, needed for the exploitation of the occupied Soviet territories.¹⁸ Practicalities were taken care of by Backe's representative in the occupied Netherlands, Friedrich Franz Graf Grote. Head of the section Food Supply and Agriculture within the German administration of the Netherlands, Grote coordinated and supervised Dutch agriculture.

Early in July, he approached his Dutch partners at the Dutch Department of Agriculture and Fisheries: the Dutch secretary general Hans Max Hirschfeld, general director of Food Supply Stephanus Louwes and general director of Agriculture Geert Ruiter. Both Hirschfeld and Louwes did not sympathize with national-socialism, yet Ruiter was appointed by Grote exactly because of his political beliefs.¹⁹

When the first talks on a Dutch contribution to the exploitation of occupied Eastern European soil were scheduled, Ruiter had not been formally appointed yet. In his stead came Cees Staf, director of a larger semi-governmental organization responsible for the cultivation of barren land and for the management of relief work for the unemployed.²⁰ Like Hirschfeld and Louwes, Staf was not a member of the NSB. Nevertheless, all three men agreed to offer their assistance to Grote and to start recruiting for agricultural work in the occupied eastern territories. In return for their collaboration, a share of the harvest would be sent to the Netherlands.

A small organization to coordinate the recruitment was set up by Staf, who himself assumed the position of chairman. An agricultural engineer and a specialist in emigration joined his team.²¹ Like Hirschfeld and Louwes, Staf and his two collaborators were aware of the precarious situation of Dutch agriculture. The occupation constituted new challenges, yet since the late nineteenth century crisis after crisis had hit Dutch agriculture. In particular after the First World War the central government decided to explore new paths to solve the problem. Impressive land reclamation projects were started to create more land for farming.

der Heinrich Himmlers 1941/1942 (Hamburg: Christians, 1999), 220.

¹⁷ Gesine Gerhard, 'Food and Genocide: Nazi Agrarian Politics in the Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union', *Contemporary European History* 18/2009, 53-56.

¹⁸ Report Friedrich Graf Grote, 10 December 1941, Bundesarchiv Berlin (BA), R6, file 440.

¹⁹ G.M.T. Trienekens, *Tussen ons volk en de honger: De voedselvoorziening, 1940-1945* (Utrecht: Matijts, 1985), 10-41, 50-52 and 69-71.

²⁰ See for more information: http://www.parlement.com/id/vg09ll98m9zu/c_kees_staf. Last visited 29 March 2014.

²¹ Letter Hans Max Hirschfeld to G.J. Lienesch, and to Jan Hartland, both 19 July 1941, Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies Amsterdam (NIOD), 120a, file 3. Jan Hartland, *Emigratie en kolonisatie in dezen tijden* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1935), 16-17.

Staf himself was leading larger cultivation projects to change barren land into arable land. One of his collaborators had been involved in the development of emigration programs to relieve Dutch peasantry of population pressure. They now offered Grote their support for obvious reasons: participating in the ‘disclosure’ of the occupied eastern territories appeared attractive not only as a way to acquire extra fodder, but – perhaps in a later stage – as a way to acquire extra land for Dutch farmers.

On July 22nd, they met with the leaders of the professional organizations of Dutch farmers to discuss the new plans.²² The three men announced their newly established Commission for the Employment of Farmers in Eastern Europe (*Commissie tot Uitzending van Landarbeiders*, or CULANO). This commission aimed for the recruitment of some 3,000 Dutch men, mainly farmers, for work in the occupied East. In Ukraine, a piece of land of some 1,2 million acres in area would be their destination. They would be appointed managers in charge of confiscated kolkhozes, supervisors and assistant-supervisors of one or more farms or as tractor-drivers and mechanics. ‘For now,’ one of the men of CULANO maintained, colonization and permanent emigration to the area were not discussed, but the chance of permanent settlement ‘in a later stage’ was considered ‘highly probable.’²³ In pamphlets and public speeches this message was repeated over and again.²⁴

Obviously, the campaigns paid off and within weeks, hundreds of candidates had been registered.²⁵ Except for a smaller supervisory group of men that was personally selected by Staf, most of the applicants had been recruited by the National-Socialist organization for farmers, Agrarian Front (*Agrarisch Front*). Local officials sent the names of their applicants through to a nearby district employment office. Here they were screened again, first by an employment officer and then by the officer’s interregional supervisor. Both men wrote a report with their advice for CULANO.²⁶ Two certificates, of good health and moral conduct, were also sent to CULANO. Quite often a member of the CULANO-board interviewed the candidate for a third time.²⁷

By February 1942, some three to four thousand men had been approved of by CULANO, yet the number of recruits that eventually would leave the Nether-

²² H.M.L. Geurts, *Herman Derk Louwes, 1893-1960: Burgemeester van de Nederlandse landbouw* (Groningen/Wageningen: Nederlands Agronomisch Historisch Instituut, 2002), 195-197.

²³ Minutes of meeting of CULANO, 22 July 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 1.

²⁴ Report of meeting of directors Central Employment Office, directors of the District Employment Offices and others, 29 July 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 13.

²⁵ Letter CULANO-Head Office to Folkert Posthuma, 18 September 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 11.

²⁶ Letters Willem Gerhardt to Jan Hartland, 2 September 1941, 8 September 1941 and 12 September 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 15; various applications and notes on applications, NIOD, 120a, file 15.

²⁷ Minutes of a meeting of CULANO, 22 July 1941, and letter Cees Staf to CULANO-Head Office, 12 August 1942, NIOD, 120a, file 1 and 4.

lands was much smaller. This quantitative difference was largely due to the applicants themselves. Many appeared to have had second thoughts after a while: they requested a delay, or simply withdrew their candidature or did not show up.²⁸ Already in September 1941, Grote diminished the required number of volunteers from five thousand to five hundred.²⁹ In reality, less than four hundred volunteers would leave, two groups in November 1941 and two in March 1942.³⁰

There were other things that bothered Staf and his Dutch colleagues more. In their meetings with Grote, they had made it clear that they offered their cooperation for economic reasons, not out of political conviction. According to them, the recruitment and employment of Dutch volunteers had nothing to do with National-Socialist ideology. Yet as a matter of fact, Dutch National-Socialist organizations were claiming a leading part in the enterprise. Most recruiters were National-Socialists; most recruits too. Against his will, Staf had been forced to wave the first group of recruits goodbye in the company of Evert Jan Roskam, a prominent member of the NSB.³¹ In his speech for an audience of recruits, Roskam had politicized the entire operation. At the end of his talk, the farmers had brought the Nazi salute. In the Nazified Dutch press their departure was described as 'a historical farewell' of colonists and a continuation of former migration from Dutch men eastwards.³²

Even more troublesome were the rumours about the lack of care for Dutch recruits after they had left the Netherlands. In September 1941, Staf had travelled to Berlin to discuss the employment of Dutch farmers with German superiors. He was told that Ukraine was out of the question since the country was still a so-called military operating area.³³ Nevertheless, his German partners told him to continue recruitment. So he did, but when the first groups left for the occupied eastern territories two months later, it seemed that German authorities were not prepared for their arrival. Some two hundred recruits halted in Lodz (Litzmannstadt), in annexed Poland, where they were accommodated in barracks.³⁴ Slowly but surely, as weeks passed by, the Dutch volunteers grew impatient and began to grumble. Staf and his colleagues read their letters of complaint and heard the

²⁸ Letter Jan Hartland to Cees Staf, 12 February 1942, NIOD, 120a, file 4; list District Employment Office Emmen, 18 November 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 30; list District Employment Office Eindhoven, 16 December 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 31; list District Employment Office Deventer, 19 November 1941 and 16 January 1942, NIOD, 120a, file 28; list District Employment Office Bergen op Zoom, 18 December 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 26.

²⁹ Letter Jan Hartland to director Rijksinkoopbureau, 30 September 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 9.

³⁰ Letter CULANO to directors of District Employment Offices, 18 November 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 12.

³¹ Letter Cees Staf to Hans Max Hirschfeld, 14 January 1942, NIOD, 120a, file 3.

³² *Dagblad van het Oosten, Nationaal Dagblad, Het Volk*, 22 November 1941; *Nieuw Rotterdamse Courant* and *Deutsche Zeitung*, 23 November 1941. Note of Hans Max Hirschfeld to Geert Ruiter, 27 February 1942, NA, 2.11.07.01, file 12.

³³ Letter Geert Ruiter to Hans Max Hirschfeld, 25 September 1941, NA, 2.11.07.01, file 12.

³⁴ Letter Gerrit Jan van Bavel, 23 November 1941, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 32209.

stories about their undisciplined behavior. Within two months, some twenty to thirty men had returned home.³⁵

Aware of the deteriorating mood amongst the Dutch men, Berlin took action. Just before Christmas, it was decided that the Dutch volunteers should be directed towards German White Ruthenia. There they would be placed under German supervisors, yet because of climatological circumstances their transfer had to wait until spring.³⁶ Again, the volunteers were left in uncertainty and had to fight boredom. Quite a few required a reputation on the black market.³⁷ Eventually, they would be put to work, but instead of colonization in closed formations on the fertile soil of Ukraine, the volunteers were scattered across White Ruthenia, an area that was utterly poor and already in early 1942 full of partisan activity.³⁸ ‘We have just been here for a few days,’ one farmer wrote to his friends back home, ‘and all we hear is partisans and again partisans.’³⁹ As Germany’s partners, the Dutch volunteers were often the target of partisan actions. Within a year, more than twenty Dutch recruits had been killed. A few months later, that number had doubled.⁴⁰

COMMON GROUNDS

These new developments seriously tempered Staf’s and Hirschfeld’s enthusiasm. Their German partners were equally disappointed, above all in the caliber of the recruited men. They came to believe that selection should focus more on political engagement of the candidates. Although explicit criticism did not reach CULANO, it was clear that Berlin wished to look for other partnerships.⁴¹

In June 1942 that new partnership came into being. Earlier that year, Alfred Rosenberg’s Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (or *Ostministerium*) had spread its tentacles to The Hague. Right after the attack on the Soviet Union,

³⁵ Letter Giebel to A. Zell, 28 January 1942, BA, R6, file 440; letter Jan Remko Dertien to Cees Staf, 16 December 1941, Gelders Archief (GA), 0915, file 375.

³⁶ Report Reinhold, 8 December 1941, NIOD, 120a, file 58

³⁷ Letter Reinder van Veen to unknown, 28 May 1942, NIOD, 176, file 606.

³⁸ Letter Jelle Scharringa to Cees Staf, 15 February 1942, letter G. Hekkert to Cees Staf, 24 March 1942, letter W. van ’t Hoff to Cees Staf, 3 February 1942, and letter W. Stork to Giebel, 22 May 1942, NIOD, 120a, file 65; letter Johan Wouter van Ijzeren to his wife, 18 May 1942, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 70297; statement Hendrik van S., 15 July 1946, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 109853.

³⁹ Letter Reinder van Veen to unknown, 28 May 1942, NIOD, 176, file 606.

⁴⁰ Order of the Higher SS and Police Leader White Ruthenia, 1 August 1943, BA, R90, file 752; letter Kreislandwirt Vileyka to Generalkommissar in Minsk, 12 June 1943, and letter Kreislandwirt Vowchyn to Gebietslandwirt Vileyka, 25 July 1943, BA, R93, file 7a.

⁴¹ Report for Hans Max Hirschfeld, 18 February 1942, letter Landstand to Geert Ruiter, 6 March 1942, letter Smits to Geert Ruiter, 29 January 1942, and letter Friedrich Graf Grote to Hans Max Hirschfeld, 2 January 1942, NA, 2.11.07.01, file 12; report Friedrich Graf Grote, 10 December 1941, BA, R6, file 440.

this Ostministerium was created to administer the newly conquered territories. Although the Ministry rapidly grew into a colossal organization, Rosenberg's authority in the area was not undisputed. Other high ranked Nazis like Backe and Himmler also claimed their say with regard to the future of the eastern territories.⁴² Yet despite the general competition, Rosenberg succeeded in gaining control over the involvement of 'Germanic' manpower and capital in the exploitation of the area. It was agreed that migration of larger groups of settlers from occupied Germanic countries would have to wait until victory, but some smaller groups of Germanic 'pioneers' were welcome.⁴³

Early January 1942 Rosenberg met Anton Mussert, leader of the NSB, to discuss a Dutch contribution to the exploitation and colonization of the occupied eastern territories. With Seyss-Inquart's consent more talks were organized between Rosenberg's men and prominent members of the NSB.⁴⁴ Eventually, the Dutch Nazi Meinoud Rost van Tonningen was chosen to set up a new organization for the coordination of all economic activities of Dutch men, organizations and firms in the occupied eastern territories. In the late 1930s, Rost van Tonningen had become a well-known deputy for the NSB in the Dutch parliament. He was rewarded for his political loyalty by the new rulers after May 1940. Rost van Tonningen was put in charge of all socialist organizations in the Netherlands and was selected as president of the Dutch National Bank. In March 1941, he was also appointed general secretary of a new Ministry 'for special economic affairs'.⁴⁵ Ideologically, Rost van Tonningen stood closest to Himmler and his racist views on a new political constellation in Europe. He passionately supported the idea of a Greater Germanic Reich where Germans, Dutch and racially kindred people would live together. He also defended the German expansionist policy in Eastern Europe. According to Rost van Tonningen, the space in the East (*Ostraum*) was historically Germanic. For him, all temporary work of Germanic men in the

⁴² Andreas Zellhuber, "Unsere Verwaltung treibt einer Katastrophe zu...": *Das Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete und die deutsche Besatzungsherrschaft in der Sowjetunion 1941-1945* (München: Verlag Ernst Vögel, 2006), 169-170.

⁴³ Letter Hermann Göring to Alfred Rosenberg, 3 January 1942, and report Walter Malletke, concerning the talk with Gottlob Berger, 17 March 1942, BA, R6, file 443. Arguably, the approval from Hitler reached Rosenberg 21 January 1942, see: E. Fraenkel-Verkade (ed.), *Correspondentie van Mr. M.M. Rost van Tonningen I* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 850.

⁴⁴ Report Alfred Rosenberg, 5 January 1942, report Alfred Meyer, 27 January 1942, reports Walter Malletke, 27 February 1942, 2 March and 31 March 1942 and BA, R6, file 440; report Walter Malletke, 7 December 1942, NIOD, 265, file 28.

⁴⁵ On Meinoud Rost van Tonningen see David Barnouw, *Rost van Tonningen: Fout tot het bittere einde* (Zutphen: Walburg, 1994).

occupied eastern territories constituted preparatory steps on the way to colonization and permanent settlement of Germanic people.⁴⁶

In March 1942, Rost van Tonningen met Rosenberg's representative in the Netherlands. The two men discussed the nature of the prospective organization that should initiate, support, finances and supervise Dutch economic initiatives in the occupied East.⁴⁷ Two months later he presented his plans to Seyss-Inquart. A new organization, financially supported by the Dutch state, the Dutch National Bank, the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam 'and some larger trading and banking companies', would hold a monopoly on all Dutch economic initiatives.⁴⁸ Early June 1942, the establishment of the Dutch East Company was publicly announced.

From that moment, the NOC manifested itself both in the Netherlands and in the occupied eastern territories. Its head office was stationed in The Hague, where most of the estimated 260 employees were also working. Seven subsidiary companies were established: for construction works (NOB); for fisheries (NOV), for shipping overseas (NOR) and for domestic shipping (*Nederlandsche Oost Binnenvaart*); for dredging (*Nederlandsche Oost Bagger*); for the production of bricks and tiles (*Nederlandsche Oost Baksteen*); for Dutch trade (*Nederlandsche Oost Handel Maatschappij*). Their representatives were also accommodated in the buildings of the head office. Some fifteen employees were working in the occupied eastern territories; another seven in Berlin.

Most of the existing economic activities and the supervision of Dutch employees in the occupied eastern territories were taken over. In autumn 1942, for instance, the NOC became responsible for the selection and care of the hundreds of Dutch men of the Labor Service Holland (*Werkdienst Holland*) in Ukraine. Within a year, the NOC also took control of the Dutch construction workers appointed by the SS Frontier Workers Enterprise (*SS Frontarbeiter Unternehmen*, or SS FAU). Their number had grown rapidly and by the winter of 1943 some 4,000 Dutch men were working for the SS FAU, in Ukraine, Russia and Latvia.⁴⁹

At the same time, the NOC also tried to encourage Dutch companies to invest in the occupied eastern territories by offering services. In this, the organization was not successful.⁵⁰ The NOC's endeavors were more rewarding with regard to

⁴⁶ Report Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, 'Die Niederländer im Ostraum' (undated), in: E. Fraenkel-Verkade (ed.), *Correspondentie van Mr. M.M. Rost van Tonningen I* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 677; letter Meinoud Rost van Tonningen to Hans Fischböck, 10 October 1941, in: *ibidem*, 711.

⁴⁷ Report Walter Malletke, 23 March 1942, BA, R.6, file 440.

⁴⁸ Report Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, 23 May 1942, in: David Barnouw (ed.), *Correspondentie van Mr. M.M. Rost van Tonningen II* (Zutphen: Walburg pers, 1993), 23.

⁴⁹ *Volk en Vaderland*, 14 and 28 August 1942, 4 and 11 September 1942; report S.U. Kotzulla, 20 May 1943, Central State Archives of Supreme Bodies of Power and Government of Ukraine (TS-DAVO), fond 3206, opis 3, delo 23.

⁵⁰ Letters Rost van Tonningen to Walter Malletke, 28 June 1942, and to Arthur Seyss-Inquart, 14

the recruitment and employment of Dutch people. Hundreds of men were recruited for jobs in agriculture. Most of them went first to one of the two Dutch education centers exploited by the NOC, respectively near Rohachiv (Ukraine) and Vilnius. Most of them were offered a job by one of the German local authorities after they had finished their education. They became supervisors or inspectors of Lithuanian or Ukrainian farms or they were put to work on one of the two larger rural estates that were leased by the NOC near Kiev.⁵¹ A few dozens of Dutch vegetable and fruit growers were employed, as well as a handful of specialists in dairy production or tobacco cultivation and some seventy men with experience in the excavation of peat. Dutch captains were commanding their crew on suction dredgers that were brought in from the Netherlands to the Dnepr; Dutch fishermen were stationed on the shores of lake Peipus.

The entire operation involved at least some 5,000 Dutch volunteers.⁵² In their post-war statements before their judges and prosecutors, most claimed to have been motivated by economic considerations. In fact, jobs in the occupied East paid well, yet it seems that hardly any volunteer had been living a life in great poverty before departure.⁵³ It must be assumed that most volunteers were led by political motives. By far the majority were members of the NSB and agreed with the program of Germanization. They were responding to the appeal of the NOC's propaganda to help consolidate Germanic rule in the area by settlers' colonization. 'To colonize is to transplant people,' a top official of the NOC had quoted Himmler, and presumably most volunteers agreed. Employment in the area would turn into settlement, and settlement into permanent Germanic rule.⁵⁴

They were convinced that the occupied eastern territories were historically a Germanic 'living space'. Hence, they came here to reclaim what was theirs.⁵⁵ They believed that with their presence in the occupied eastern territories they would

July 1942; report E.B.J. Gips, 29 June 1942, in: Barnouw, *Correspondentie* II, 31, 34 and 54.

⁵¹ List of recruits (undated), NIOD, 176, file 665.

⁵² Report of activities NOC, 1943 and 1944, NIOD, 176, file 15; lists of recruits (various dates), NIOD, 176, file 84.

⁵³ For salaries, allowances and scales of salaries, see NIOD, 176, files 435–442.

⁵⁴ Willem Goedhuys, 'Oost Europa', 8 August 1944, NIOD, 176, file 1064; report Willem Goedhuys, concerning history and future of Ukraine (undated), NIOD, 176, file 595.

⁵⁵ Jacob van den Berg, 'Oekraïne, land, volk en mogelijkheden', *Nieuw Nederland. Maandblad voor economie, staatskunde en economie* 10/3 (November 1943), 321–364.

protect ‘Germanje’, the utopian new Germanic empire that was transcending traditional political borders of European nations.⁵⁶

NATIONAL CONCERNS

At the same time, however, the enterprise served clear national purposes that had little to do with Germany, let alone with the concept of a Greater Germanic Reich. Like in the early days of CULANO, Rost van Tonningen personally and the NOC as an organization aimed for bringing relief to Dutch peasantry. Here, on the vast plains of the occupied eastern territories, the surplus of Dutch farmers could be accommodated and find the land they lacked in the Netherlands. Rost van Tonningen and other top officials of the NOC and the NSB imagined that Dutch farmers would be interested in work in the conquered parts of the Soviet Union because of the scarcity of land and pessimistic prospects for them in their home country. Leaflets and speeches mentioned the vastness and fertility of the land in the East – ‘extensive, lush fields, just waiting.’⁵⁷ Above all, the black earth of Ukraine was glorified. After their arrival, many recruits were awed by the wideness of the landscape in front of their eyes.⁵⁸ ‘This is all so very different to Holland, everything being so big, creating such a feeling of freedom,’ one pioneer wrote back home.⁵⁹ Another volunteer told his friend that he felt alive now that he had all the room he needed.⁶⁰

Thus, the occupied eastern territories would also offer the Dutch ‘living space’, particularly for the surplus of Dutch farmers. However, the expected gains were not only for agriculture. In June 1942, right after his first trip to the area, Rost van Tonningen summed up the wide range of economic possibilities for the Dutch in the occupied eastern territories: the Baltic harbors could be brought into development with Dutch investments, traffic on the Baltic Sea could be exploited by Dutch ships, fishing could be intensified and professionalized by Dutch fishers, and above all: Dutch trade, since the onset of the war severely reduced, could revive in the occupied eastern territories.⁶¹

Of all Dutch trade it would be in particular colonial trade that would benefit of the new markets. As the president of the Dutch National Bank and head of the Dutch Department of Finance, Rost van Tonningen was fully aware of the difficult situation under which international Dutch trade had laboured since the beginning of the war. Overseas colonial trade was completely aborted after the

⁵⁶ Song ‘Legioen der soldaten’ (undated), entered in his diary by H.Q.Verhaaren, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 55527.

⁵⁷ *Het Nationale Dagblad*, 24 July 1942.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹ Letter Jantje S. to unnamed friends, 23 December 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 28674.

⁶⁰ Letter Jan van Gilst to Matthijsen, 25 April 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 109701.

⁶¹ *Het Volk*, 27 June 1942.

Japanese attack on the Dutch East Indies. Colonial merchant banks, trading companies and experts in tropical cultivation were basically out of work and Rost van Tonningen imagined that their expertise, money and energy could be directed towards the occupied eastern territories. This area could be the new Dutch colonial playground, restoring some of Dutch imperial splendor lost in the defeat to Japan in March 1942. In an early report Rost van Tonningen stated that the Dutch contribution should be presented as part of the long and rich history of Dutch colonization, abroad and in Europe. To turn the operation into a success, Rost van Tonningen suggested to put one single organization in charge, after the example of the Dutch East Indies Company.⁶² A few month later, he came up with a name of this organization: the Long Distance Society (*Maatschappij van Verre*). Resembling the Long Distance Company (*Compagnie van Verre*), established in 1594 by nine dauntless merchants from Amsterdam, who had prepared the way for the Dutch East Indies Company to rule international trade for decades, this new society would enable the Dutch to take advantage of the richness of the occupied eastern territories. The Dutch state, the National Bank and the cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam should guarantee full financial coverage and turn the Society into a cash-rich organization. The Society, he believed, should be accommodated by a Dutch banking institution that had lost its field of operation, preferably the Dutch-Indies Trade Bank (*Nederlandsch-Indische Handelsbank*).⁶³

In June 1942, Rost van Tonningen's desire to tie in with national colonial traditions was again traceable in the name of his new organization. Like the VOC (Dutch United East India Company) in the seventeenth century, the NOC would bring Dutch people to the colonized area and prosperity to the motherland. In that same month, during his first visit to the area, Rost van Tonningen advised to submit the indigenous population to Germanization 'with brutal means': years of colonial experience had taught the Dutch that local elites and national aspirations should be crushed.⁶⁴ In pamphlets and speeches the message was repeated that Dutch recruits would be particularly qualified for their work because of their national colonial heritage. Quite often recruits shared this viewpoint and considered themselves as the sons of a nation of colonial conquerors and rulers. Peasants, craftsmen and others were dreaming of Dutch settlements, where in the long run Dutch families could live.⁶⁵ In their opinion on locals their colonial beliefs resonated. These people were 'the colonial others': they were different, inferior,

⁶² Letter Meinoud Rost van Tonningen to Hans Fischböck, 10 October 1941, in: Fraenkel-Verkade, *Correspondentie* I, 711.

⁶³ Reports Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, 13 February 1942 and 4 March 1942, in: *ibidem*, 773 and 787.

⁶⁴ Confidential message Hermann von Harder, 27 June 1942, BA, R6, file 441.

⁶⁵ Letter Reinder van Veen to Daniel Krantz, 9 August 1942, and to Horst Wulff, 17 September 1942, NIOD, 176, file 607; letter Johan Lingmont to NOC-Department of Industry and Traffic, 4 October 1943, NIOD, 176, file 639; letter Jan Habing to NOC-Head Office, 8 August 1942, NIOD, 176, file 707.

untrustworthy and above all lazy.⁶⁶ Although they could be friendly, keeping them at a distance was advisable.⁶⁷ 'A volunteer should be secure,' a NOC-reporter noted, 'that his position is above the natives.'⁶⁸

DRIFTING APART

In June 1942, the contribution to the exploitation and colonization of the occupied eastern territories had seemed only advantageous. The launch of the Wehrmacht's assault on Stalingrad had given a boost to the confidence of the Nazi-regime in Berlin and its collaborators in occupied Europe. With great enthusiasm, the NOC had begun to plan its first activities. Fact-finding journeys to the occupied eastern territories were organized and dozens of experts in various economic branches were sent to the area to investigate the economic opportunities. Recruitment campaigns were started to attract new volunteers to widen their horizon, to go explore their chances in the East and to help building a new Europe. Agreements with German authorities were signed that would secure a more lasting part in the exploitation of the region's resources.⁶⁹ It was thought that this collaboration in the Germanization program would offer the Dutch people a first-rate position in Europe, alongside Germany proper and other Germanic people. Helping to conquer, cultivate and people the occupied eastern territories would also give the Dutch nation extra food and fodder. Furthermore: employment in the area should be a first step on the way to settlers colonization which would render the Dutch government land needed for its farmers: by working the land now, future appropriation would be safeguarded. The occupied eastern territories would offer unlimited possibilities for Dutch trade and business and would constitute a new place for Dutch colonial initiatives. Hence, the area would also contribute to the nation's colonial esteem and reputation.

The expectations were high, the prospects were good, but all dreams shattered: time had simply been too short. By early 1943 it had become clear, that the Battle for Stalingrad was lost and German troops were pushed slowly but surely back. In September 1942, Rost van Tonningen's nephew and the owner of larger plantations of rubber, palm oil, tobacco and coffee in the Dutch East Indies, had

⁶⁶ Report Willem Goedhuys, concerning history and future of Ukraine (undated), NIOD, 176, file 595; letter Marinus Hage to comrade Hartog, 26 July 1942, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 89943; report Markus Roos, 28 September 1943, NIOD, 176, file 598; letter G. Hekkert to Cees Staf, 24 March 1942, GA, 0915, file 375.

⁶⁷ Oostlandpraatjes, no. 2, NIOD, arch 176, 590; travel report S. Kijlstra from March 9 until March 21 1944 (undated), NIOD, 176, file 1041; report Bob van Maasdijk, concerning Dutch possibilities in the East (undated), NIOD, 176, file 132.

⁶⁸ Travel report S. Kijlstra from March 9 until March 21 1944 (undated), NIOD, 176, file 1041.

⁶⁹ First report of activities of the NOC (undated), NIOD, 176, file 15.

been visiting Ukraine to explore their chances. They were suggested a strip of land between Kursk and Kharkiv, in order to develop cash crops like tobacco. The two men indeed inspected the area, but what they witnessed was waste land, devastated by the war. The local market reminded one of a *pasar* in Dutch East Indies, but the people were not familiar with plantation labour. Even though they might have been still considering exploitation of this strip, the advance of the Red Army frustrated all their plans. Within a year after their visit, the area had become military battleground again.⁷⁰

In September, the frontline was creeping further upon the occupied eastern territories. A year after the NOC had begun its work the first groups of Dutch volunteers in the eastern part of the German *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* were forced to retreat. Shortly after, Kiev was evacuated. Dutch men, working on dredges on the Dnepr, had to leave their machines, only five months after they had arrived in the area. Seven months after the NOC had signed a lease contract, two rural estates in the Kiev-district were evacuated. With the departure of the NOC's representative in January 1944, just over a year after his arrival, all Dutch activities in Ukraine had ceased.⁷¹

In the adjacent *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, comprising the three Baltic countries and most of nowadays Belarus, the NOC was operational for a longer period and was also more successful, yet here, too, the military threat of the Red Army was felt from late 1943 onwards.⁷² Because of the military situation and the diminishing German chances on the eastern front, less people applied for a job in the area. In the autumn of 1943 the recruitment dried up. In what was left of the occupied eastern territories the number of Dutch volunteers steadily decreased.⁷³

As opposed to, for instance, the Dutch East Indies, 'colonial' rule in the occupied eastern territories was never unquestioned. The advancing Red Army constituted a constant external threat, but also inside the country there was severe resistance to German(-ic) rule over the land and people of the area. Whereas most Dutch recruits had pictured the land as rich and fertile, empty and virgin, inhabited by 'natives' who would be glad to be freed from the Bolshevik yoke and who would be willing to offer their services for they understood that the Dutch would bring prosperity, the reality was very different. Cities had been bombed by the German air force or deliberately demolished by retreating Russian troops. In rural areas, Dutch volunteers were witnesses to poverty and neglect. They encountered

⁷⁰ Report Jan Jacob van Leeuwen Boomkamp of his journey from 23 August until 15 September 1942 (undated), NIOD, 176, file 540; letter Helmut Körner to Meindert Rost van Tonningen, 2 September 1942, NIOD, 176, file 742; letter Johan Lingmont to NOC-Department Industry and Traffic, 4 October 1943, NIOD, 176, file 639.

⁷¹ Report of activities of the NOC in the first quarter of 1944, NIOD, 176, file 15.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

people in rags, living in huts made of wood or clay and straw. Modern means of communication, like radio and telephone, were absent almost everywhere. In most places on the countryside the Dutch could not use electricity, tap water or central heating. The fields were often full of weeds and equipment needed to perform the work – ploughs, harrows but also simple utensils like a spade, a hammer or some nails – was in general hard to get.⁷⁴

Although most Dutch men were much better off than the local population, for some volunteers daily life was far from rosy. Most of the expropriated farms in Belarus and Ukraine were in a desolate state, without personnel, gear or cattle.⁷⁵ The Dutch education center near Rohachiv in Ukraine was almost completely empty when the Dutch arrived here. Everything that could be moved, had been stolen. In Rivne, men employed by Werkdienst Holland were constantly complaining about the lack of care. According to NOC-officials, their complaints were justified: they noticed that the men did not receive enough food, proper shoes and uniforms and that they lacked showers and laundry facilities.⁷⁶ Living conditions for most of the workers assigned to units of the SS Frontier Workers Enterprise were generally even worse. From the summer of 1943 onwards, they were sent to building works just behind the front line, some to a swampy, mosquito infested area in northern Russia. Without proper footwear, clothing and sanitary facilities, many soon fell ill. Officials of the NOC sent alarming reports on the ‘degenerated, demoralized, impoverished’ men they had met, yet little was done to improve their situation.⁷⁷

In many cases, the lack of cooperation from the local population was adding to the general feeling of discomfort amongst Dutch volunteers in the occupied eastern territories. Although collaboration had been initially rampant in the area, particularly in Ukraine, many locals soon turned away from their ‘liberators’ once it was clear that their German friends were merely interested in their country

⁷⁴ *Het Nationale Dagblad*, 24 July 1942; Letter Remt Lambert Buringh to unknown, 30 August 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 40752; letters Jan Remko Dertien to Cees Staf, 28 March 1942, and G. Hekkert to Cees Staf, 24 March 1942, and W. van 't Hoff to Cees Staf, 3 May 1942, GA, 0915, file 375; letter Gerrit Jan van Bavel to NSB-Breda, 7 May 1942, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 32209; letter Jan van Gilst to Matthijsen, 25 April 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 109701.

⁷⁵ Letter Remt Lambert Buringh to unknown, 30 August 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 40752; letters Jan Remko Dertien to Cees Staf, 28 March 1942, and G. Hekkert to Cees Staf, 24 March 1942, and W. van 't Hoff to Cees Staf, 3 May 1942, GA, 0915, file 375; letter Gerrit Jan van Bavel to NSB-Breda, 7 May 1942, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 32209; letter Jan van Gilst to Matthijsen, 25 April 1943, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 109701.

⁷⁶ Report Buitink, concerning Werkdienst Holland in Rowno, 30 November 1942, NIOD, 176, file 363; letter H. Zootjes, 4 February 1944, NIOD, 176, file 16; report T. van der Zee, concerning his experiences in Rowno and Kiev, 21 January 1943, NIOD, 265, file 138; observations by P.A.G. Volckers, concerning his visit to Rowno from 21 January until 2 February 1943, 5 February 1943, NIOD, 176, file 136.

⁷⁷ Inspection reports, 24 November 1943 and 5 December 1943, NIOD, 176, file 855; report B.J. Hoekstra, 14 December 1943, NIOD, 176, file 857.

for their own interests. The ruthless German occupation policy –the reprisals, lootings and hunt for manpower – severely disturbed the interethnic relations in the area. In this climate of oppression and violence the willingness to cooperate decreased quickly. In occupied Belarus armed resistance had always been substantial: its vast swamps and dense forests were also excellent terrain for guerrilla warfare.⁷⁸ In Ukraine and the Baltic countries partisan activities came to bloom in the course of 1942.

As part of the foreign occupying forces, Dutch volunteers and their houses also became targets of partisan actions. In Lithuania, partisans were seen in the vicinity of the Dutch education center and peat moors. The men were convinced that larger groups of Jews, escaped from the Vilnius ghetto, were in the nearby forests, just waiting to take revenge.⁷⁹ In the next year, both the Dutch in the moor and on the farm were more than once attacked by partisan groups.⁸⁰ In Latvia and Estonia, SS Frontier Workers were particularly vulnerable to partisan attacks. The barracks of the Dutch Frontier Workers near the Estonian concentration camp in Vaivara were more than once attacked by partisans. Dozens of men were kidnapped or killed.⁸¹

The most notorious incident took place in Rohachiv in June 1943. Late in the evening a group of some fifty partisans had approached the Dutch education center. At that time, some 32 farmers were accommodated in the buildings of the center. They decided not to fight the intruders and waited unarmed for them to arrive. After some talks, weapons and munition were handed over, as well as some clothes, shoes, valuables and vodka. Three bottles were given back to the Dutch as a reward for their cooperation. After shaking hands, the partisans had left.⁸²

Although no one was killed, the behavior of the Dutch volunteers was condemned in sharp words by German officials in the area. Reich Commissioner of Ukraine Erich Koch, for instance, wrote to both Rosenberg and Himmler's second man, Gottlob Berger.⁸³ 'I would rather have no Dutch men at all, than have

⁷⁸ Beorn, *Marching into Darkness*, 35–36 and 91–118.

⁷⁹ Letter T. Volker to NOC-Head Office, 25 August 1943, NIOD, 176, file 628.

⁸⁰ Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 243–250; report of activities of the NOC in the first quarter of 1944, NIOD, 176, file 15; statement Dekker to NOC-Department Insurance, 25 July 1944, NIOD, 176, file 481; letter J. Rottier to Daniël Krantz, 31 March 1944, NIOD, 176, file 599; letter Marinus Ekko Vorenkamp to Daniël Krantz, 4 April 1944, NIOD, 176, file 630; report Willem Hendrik H., 21 September 1943, NIOD, 176, file 719; letter Sophia Lingmont-Van Dorp to Daniël Krantz, 29 February 1944, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 24858; reports Jan Lukszo, 17 March 1944, B. Hoekstra, 15 March 1944 and 27 March 1944, and Johan Lingmont, 30 March 1944, and letter Johan Lingmont to Daniël Krantz, 4 April 1944, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 94374.

⁸¹ Letter G. Maar to NOC-Department Insurance, 17 February 1944, NIOD, 176, file 494; report NOC-Department Insurance, 24 January 1944, NIOD, 176, file 536; letter NOC-Department of Information to NOC-Riga, 21 March 1944, NIOD, 176, file 125.

⁸² Note of a talk between J.R. Swart and Daniël Krantz, concerning the partisan attack in Rogatchew (undated), NIOD, 176, file 665

⁸³ Letter Helmut Körner to Alfred Rosenberg, 30 June 1943, NIOD, 176, file 1050; letter Erich

to tolerate their continuous dealing and trading, their undisciplined behavior and their displays of laziness,' Koch commented furiously and he suggested to bring them to court for treason.⁸⁴ Asked for an explanation, Rost van Tonningen replied to Rosenberg that the incident at the school illustrated above all things the need for professional military protection of Dutch volunteers. The center in Rohachiv, he explained, had been guarded by Dutch farmers untrained in the use of weapons. Their opponents had been heavily armed partisans. All in all, Rost van Tonningen found their behavior reprehensible, but all the same he could understand and felt compassion.⁸⁵

This difference in appreciation of the events in Rohachiv was not an isolated dispute. With time, tensions between the two Germanic partners had been growing. In the early summer of 1942, Rost van Tonningen had agreed to make a contribution on four conditions: the NOC would be the single partner in the matter of Dutch employment in the occupied eastern territories; the employment of Dutch workers would be on a voluntary basis; Dutch and Germans would be treated equally; and, finally, the employment of Dutch volunteers would be under Dutch supervision. The cooperation, in other words, would be between equal partners. At the same time, Rost van Tonningen demanded some autonomy. His ultimate goal was the acquisition of land to establish exclusive zones of Dutch settlement. As for now, he could settle with the idea of Dutch working in closed formations and the control over Dutch economic activities in the occupied East.

The format of this collaboration might have seemed clear, but in the reality of the occupied eastern territories, conquered but still seriously disputed terrain, the four conditions were hard to meet. The Germans the Dutch volunteers and officials encountered, were seldom their partners, but often their superiors. Many suspected the Germans of being unwilling to share their authority with the Dutch. Instead of cooperation on the principle of equality, the Dutch enterprise appeared to be mostly subordinate to German supervision and superiority. The ideal of a Greater Germanic Reich, where all Germanic men would be equal, might have looked good on paper, but in an area conquered and greatly defended by German military force, it was hard to materialize. Ultimately, German authorities could unilaterally decide what to do- and to leave out their Dutch partner.

This was exactly what happened after the incident in Rohachiv. Ignoring the words of Rost van Tonningen, Koch decided to punish the Dutch. Without

Koch to Alfred Rosenberg, 28 August 1943, NIOD, 176, file 599.

⁸⁴ Letter Gottlob Berger to Heinrich Himmler, 3 September 1943, in: In t Veld, *De SS en Nederland*, 1199-1200.

⁸⁵ Letters Meinoud Rost van Tonningen to Walter Malletke, 16 September 1943, to Alfred Rosenberg, 21 September 1943, and to Hanns Albin Rauter, 27 October 1943 and 28 October 1943, and report Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, concerning his visit to Camp Ommen, 13 October 1943, in: Barnouw, *Correspondentie* II, 285, 286, 310, 326 and 328; list of personnel, 1 September 1944, and short report concerning the NOC (undated), NIOD, 176, file 1067.

consulting Dutch authorities, Koch ordered his police force in Rivne to find a suitable way to take revenge for the weak performance during the partisan attack. Sixteen men of the group of the Dutch farmers who had been present that night, were arrested. They could decide whether they wished to remain in German custody ‘until further notice’, or to attend a military course provided by the SS. All men chose the last option and were brought to Hegewald, part of the Ukrainian Zhytomyr district, where they were indeed trained. Yet contrary to the agreement, they were not released after their training had ended. It was said that Himmler himself had wished to absorb the men into his *Waffen-SS*, ‘so they could prove not to be cowards.’ Those who refused were sent back to the prison in Rivne; others stayed in Hegewald, until the evacuation of the colony in November 1943.⁸⁶ Rost van Tonningen and others protested, but it did not help. German authorities had stopped listening to their Dutch partners.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

What had begun as a small scale initiative of Dutch and German officials in agriculture in July 1941, evolved from June 1942 onwards, after the take-over by the NOC, into a wide range of Dutch economic activities in the occupied eastern territories. This part of Europe would offer new markets for Dutch enterprise and Dutch colonial trade. As the war had cut the ties between the Dutch motherland and its overseas possessions, the prospective new continental colonies would come as their substitute. Dutch colonial splendor would be affirmed and revived.

At the heart of the NOC’s political program was a desire to create exclusive Dutch settlements. These settlements should be predominantly rural and absorb the surplus of Dutch farmers. The solution to the seemingly permanent crisis of Dutch agriculture was sought in the move of Dutch farmers to the supposedly wide, fertile and virgin fields in this part of Europe. For both the NOC and the volunteering farmers involved the establishment of Dutch rural enclaves was the main aim. In this respect they did hardly differ from earlier initiatives coordinated by Dutch senior civil servants who had been averse to national-socialism, yet at the same time supported the employment of Dutch farmers in the occupied East to release the population pressure on Dutch rural areas.

At first, it seemed that these national ambitions and the transnational objective to create a Greater Germanic Reich were astonishingly easily combined. In the summer of 1942, the NOC and the Ostministerium agreed on the joint Dutch-

⁸⁶ Letters W. Bekker to NOC-Directorate, 3 November 1943, Willem Hendrik van Eek to W. Bekker, 6 November 1943, and Daniël Krantz to Meinoud Rost van Tonningen, 18 February 1944, NIOD, 176, file 665; police records Izaak Beerens, 12 October 1945, NA/CABR, 2.09.09, file 51446.

German enterprise and the four conditions formulated by Rost van Tonningen. Their honeymoon was soon over. Partly this was due to the tough living conditions. The occupied eastern territories were not the imagined land of abundance. Poverty was one thing, the growing civil disobedience and partisan activity another.

A more structural cause for friction between the two partners was the unclear nature of their collaboration. Favorite Nazi-concepts like the New European Order or the Greater Germanic Reich were open to multiple interpretations: relations between the Germans and their racial kins in the occupied countries of Europe had been never clarified or fixed. Whereas the Dutch partner in the Germanization program had been anticipating some sort of Dutch sovereignty and undisputed authority and had been expecting, because of their racial qualities, to be treated as equals, the local German authorities were generally not inclined to do so. To them, the Dutch presence in the area was merely a German favour. In the harsh circumstances of the occupied eastern territories the idea of Germanic brotherhood was secondary to the consolidation of German rule and the accomplishment of German goals.