

The Netherlands is a trading nation

Locking the door will weaken the economy

As the dust of the electoral landslide is settling and all parties are wondering whether and how they can see beyond their own perspectives, there is also time for reflection. The winning parties are making a case for a halt to the influx of international students, unfairly lumping them in with other immigrants. This does not work, as we now know from Denmark. The Danes had taken measures to reduce the number of international students. These measures turned out to be so harmful that they are now, under pressure from the Danish business community, being urgently reversed.

Arguments

So here are some arguments why the Netherlands as a trading nation benefits so much from international students. I will talk no more about those things you already know. Those huge shortages in almost all sectors of the Dutch labour market. And the spectre of an ageing population that will soon devour up to several dozen percent of our workforce. And keeping our regions vital and liveable. There is, after all, much more.

International students generate hundreds of millions for our economy. Money that we use for investments and facilities in our own country. As early as during their studies, they work and consume, of course. Those who stay – some 25% after five years – earn back the cost twice over for the Netherlands in no time. A student from Europe brings in over €10,000, a student from outside Europe even around €80,000.

Especially in places like Tubbergen, Rucphen and Heerlen, the shrinkage is making itself felt. With the door locked for young, international highly educated people, the public facilities in such regions will soon become impoverished. In Heerlen a hospital is already in danger of closing because staff can no longer be found.

As important as they are: it is not the lunch cafés and other service businesses that are the growth engine of agricultural innovations around Wageningen, the transition of the Rotterdam Port, Brainport and the Game Hub in Breda. Their success is the *result* of growth. Not the cause. The growth engines are companies that operate in a global environment, creating new products and services through research, innovation and creativity. They largely lean on foreign workers and on Dutch workers who are well prepared for an international environment. In these companies, English is the norm.

The Netherlands is pre-eminently an open, international economy. Take our tourism sector as an ultimate example. The contribution of this sector to our economy is €95.8 billion, almost 10% of our GDP. *And* 6.9% of all employment. To keep this sector healthy, we and other universities of applied sciences that educate tomorrow's professionals, opt for mixed student populations, with national *and* international students.

Contributions

The issue of international students is not an immigration issue. It is a win-win in which young people come to us to study, work and contribute to a healthy economy and a strong society. Of course we should not close our eyes to the issues surrounding (student) housing and solve that. We also want to make a greater contribution to the preservation of Dutch as a language of instruction.

It would demonstrate strategic insight if parties who want to introduce a freeze honestly admit that they are harming the economy, especially in those regions where they score well politically. Locking the door will weaken the economy. The Netherlands is a trading nation.

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