

Turkish Delight for the Low Countries? The Cosmic Schools in the Netherlands and the Lucerna Colleges of Belgium

Karel Steenbrink¹

The Netherlands and Belgium have a long tradition of schools run by Christian churches but financed fully by the state. In both countries this was the result of a complicated historical struggle with anti-religious trends in society. In the past, Christian organizations were also strong in the fields of health care and providing for the poor. From the 1960s on, hospitals and social security were taken over by the state, but the Christian influence survived in the field of education, notwithstanding the ongoing secularization in society and a decrease in the role of Christianity.

In the Netherlands, 65% of all primary and secondary education is still given in fully subsidized schools that are mostly administered by a Protestant or Catholic board. Religious institutions are now rather weak in the media and in health care. In politics the Christian Democratic Appeal party has continued to be a dominating force since 1980 and the prime minister would very often be a member of that party. From 1994 to 1998, the Christian democrats held no cabinet posts in the government for the first time in 80 years. But they returned. From 2002 to 2010, the Netherlands was again run by a government under a Christian Democrat, Jan Peter Balkenende. So, education and politics seem to be the last remaining strongholds for the influence of religion in Dutch society.

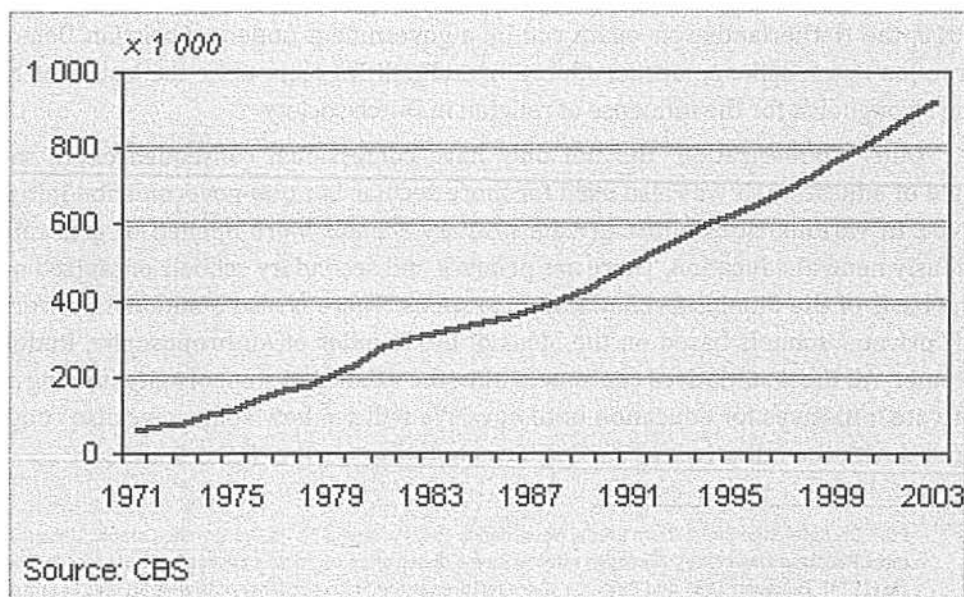
Dutch "pollarization" did not only have confessional consequences. In the field of education, it was also used for more secular but non-governmental initiatives. In various cities elitist private primary schools were opened to give religiously neutral education. There are primary and secondary schools organized on the basis of the Montessori and Dalton systems. There is also a national network of "private" schools based on the ideas of the founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner. All these initiatives continue within the existing system of state funding of private initiatives for education until now. We will see how some have also cooperated with the initiatives of the Cosmic initiatives in the Netherlands.

¹ Prof. Dr. Karel Steenbrink (born Breda, Netherlands 1942) received his Ph.D. from the Catholic University (now Radboud University), Nijmegen after writing a dissertation on *Islamic Education in Modern Indonesia* (1974). Between 1981 and 1988, he was a lecturer at the State Academy of Islamic Studies in Jakarta and Yogyakarta (Indonesia). He taught at McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies and at Utrecht University since 1993. He is Professor Emeritus of Intercultural Theology.

In Belgium we see a similar development, with some differences due to historical background. Belgium never experienced the strong secularizing trend of the French revolution. Churches are still owned and maintained by the state and the majority of the priests, ministers, and rabbis (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) enjoy a basic salary from the government. Religious education for these religions is given in all schools. In the 1990s the Belgian government recognized a single Muslim organization, *Executive*, as eligible to receive similar subsidies from the Belgian government, but many details still have to be worked out.

1.1 The Problem: The Arrival of “New Citizens” since the 1960s and Consequences for Educational Policy

The economic boom that started in Western Europe after World War II first brought migrant workers from the northern Mediterranean area, i.e. Italy, Spain, and Yugoslavia. This happened in the 1950s. Starting in the mid-1960s, a continuing stream of migrants from Morocco and Turkey settled in the Low Countries. Although they initially planned to come only for a short period, most of them ended up staying permanently and thus formed the new Muslims of the North Sea countries. In 2008 they accounted for 6% of the Dutch population or slightly over one million people, about 375,000 of whom are of Turkish and 350,000 of Moroccan descent, out of a total population of some 17 million.



Growth of the Muslim Population in the Netherlands.

Source: Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek(Statistics Netherlands), 2006

In Belgium the percentage of Muslims is also about 6% (600,000 out of 10 million people). The number of Moroccans is slightly higher than that of Turkish migrants because many Moroccans have a basic knowledge of French, which is spoken in the southern part of Belgium (Wallonia).

Because of their position as low-paid labourers, most of the migrants lived in the poorer districts of the major towns of the countries where they rented small houses. This was not their own choice, but in most cases cheap housing was assigned by municipal authorities. The majority by far of migrants live in the larger cities and very few in suburbs or in villages in rural areas. From the 1980s on, there was a rise in "black schools" in the old centres of all major cities where children of migrants became the majority. Students of ethnic Dutch and Belgian origin moved more and more to the suburbs for education, and the established schools in the old districts were short of pupils.

It was not only Muslim families who arrived. While very few migrants arrived in the Netherlands from the former large colony of Indonesia, many more came from Surinam (only 20% of them Muslim) and the Antilles, while a large number of people from Ghana have settled in Amsterdam and people from Cape Verde in Rotterdam. There were virtually no Muslims among these latter groups. Nevertheless, the general public now more or less identifies the "black schools" with Muslim-dominated schools and view them as lower class, with bad scores in Dutch and low expectations for further education. The same can be said about the 400,000 black people who arrived from the former Belgian colony of Congo (also known as Zaire).

From the 1980s on, more and more Muslim children have gone to Protestant or Catholic primary and secondary schools. A strange reality in the Dutch and Belgian system of education developed: schools that were formally associated with a Christian denomination had a large population or even a majority of Muslim pupils. In one case, in the small town of Ede, there was an attempt to transform a Protestant school into an ecumenical Christian-Muslim school. But in this case all "white" children were finally removed from the school by their parents, and the project that started in the late 1980s was a failure. The school finally merged with a non-denominational public school and nothing remained of the idealistic ecumenical, interreligious project. Another suggestion was to "change colour" and turn Christian denominational schools into Muslim schools. This proposal never became reality. There were some local directors who made steps into

this direction. At Calvin College,² a Protestant high school in Amsterdam with a majority of Muslim students, a Muslim trainee was taken on temporarily in the early 1990s but later rejected for a permanent position as a teacher of religion, notwithstanding his successful performance at the school. His (Protestant) colleagues supported this Muslim teacher, but the supervising board rejected the idea. In a similar case, the bishop of Rotterdam, Adriaan van Luyn, annulled the appointment of a Muslim to teach religion by the director of a Catholic secondary school in Gouda in the mid-1990s. The view was that, notwithstanding a large number of Muslims in these schools, religious instruction should be given according to the schools' formal Protestant and Catholic background. In 2004, however, the Protestant Hermann Wesselink College in Amstelveen (a suburb of Amsterdam) was able to appoint a Muslim woman to teach religion (not only Islam but religion and spirituality in general) with the consent of its supervising board. The debate and developments are still going on.³

In Belgium, there have been several attempts to start Islamic schools according to the system that also allowed Christian schools, but until now they have not been very successful. In the Netherlands, the results remained modest as well, but the number of Islamic schools was able to grow steadily. In 2008 there were 43 Islamic primary schools fully subsidised by the Dutch government. This is a small number compared to a total of 8,000 primary schools, and no more than 3% of Muslim students in the country have opted to attend Muslim schools. This is quite different from the ongoing popularity of Christian denominational education that nowadays surpasses the proportional spread of Christianity in society. There were two denominational Muslim secondary schools: the Ibn Ghaldoun School of Rotterdam, to be discussed below, and a Muslim secondary school in Amsterdam that started in 2001. The latter had to close in 2010 due to the low quality of its education.

There are two problems related to the social position of the recent Muslim migrants and their children now living in the Netherlands and Belgium. The first is the socioeconomic one: How can a poor section of society receive more opportunities? The second is the cultural gap: how can a foreign community with different religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds be integrated into these societies?

² Dutch educational terminology may be confusing for other nationalities. *College* is commonly used for a secondary school, while *hogeschool*, (literally 'high school') is the equivalent of the American college, an institute of higher education for a B.A. degree or M.A. (sometimes even an M.A.). Private (*bijzondere*) schools are not under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education but established by private institutions, mostly religious denominations but in quite a few cases also by non-religious organizations. They are in most cases financed 100% by state funds and therefore subject to government permits and inspection.

³ Boersma 2005.

In the past, the Dutch solution was some kind of segregation or “pillarization”: let each group have its own tradition, its separate development. There was a growing protest against this traditional Dutch solution especially after 2001, and respect for a multicultural society became weaker. More and more politicians and social leaders wanted integration and demanded that the various new migrants show acceptance of the basic ideals and practices of Dutch society and culture.

1.2 Rotterdam: Islamic Primary and Secondary Schools and the Start of Cosmicus College

In 1988 the Al-Ghazali primary school in Rotterdam was one of the first Muslim schools in the country. Two other primary schools followed. In 2009 the foundation SIPOR (*Stichting voor Islamitisch Primair Onderwijs Rijnmond*) was responsible for three primary schools in the harbour city: Al Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and the Noen School. Also, a secondary school was established in Rotterdam in 2000, the Ibn Ghaldoun School with some 800 students, in 2009.

The Ibn Ghaldoun School⁴ had to cope with many problems. Notwithstanding full government subsidies, it proved to be difficult to find a proper building for the school. While the school claimed that most of the students would come from the districts north of the Maas River, the buildings that were made available by the municipality were located in the southern districts. Therefore, the growth of the school was hampered with respect to number and quality of its students. The Dutch educational system has a great variety of profiles for schools on the secondary level, and until now Ibn Ghaldoun has only been able to provide the lower forms of secondary education. Moreover, a government inspection publicized some negative remarks about these schools (and many other Islamic schools). A 2007 report mentioned that some financial irregularities had been found in 87% of the Islamic primary and secondary schools. Ibn Ghaldoun had spent € 1.2 million on student and staff trips to Mecca, had spent too much money on transporting students to the school, and had also put board members on its payroll without having them do proper work. The € 1.2 million had to be returned to the government.

In 1995 the *Stichting Cosmicus* (Cosmicus Foundation) was established by students and young graduates of Turkish origin in the Netherlands as a foundation with the purpose of supporting (mostly Turkish and Moroccan) students from primary school through college and university in their study and personal

⁴ Its formal name is *Ibn Ghaldoen Scholengemeenschap*, also ISG. Literally this means that it is a community of schools, because it provides various types of secondary education.

development and to help them launch a thriving career. Cosmicus' first activity of was a lecture on education in Amsterdam, and many meetings and lectures followed. Members of Cosmicus were active in classes for pupils of primary and secondary schools who could do their homework under strict oversight, educational help and inspiring supervision. The successful older students of Turkish descent could serve as role models of success in the new country. The same model was also followed by other Turks and some Morrocans at home or in community centres. The first chairman of Cosmicus, Ümit Taş, searched a Latin-Dutch dictionary of 1910 and found the word *cosmicus*, which could mean the "universe," "worldly," as well as "citizen of the world." The second chairman was Turan Yazir who was succeeded in 2002 by Gürkan Çelik. Universities, municipalities, and private funds donated subsidies for activities, especially for the mentor project. From the early years on, some ethnic Dutch people also joined the leadership of the organization.⁵

Cosmicus branches were established in all major university cities of the Netherlands. Its headquarters were initially in Amsterdam, in Utrecht between 2000 and 2002, and since then in Rotterdam. The Cosmicus Foundation is known for its academic network, training for leadership, conferences for job career planning, as well as for sports and social events like lectures and *iftar* meals (breaking the fast in a festive manner at the end of the day during Ramadan) and even Christmas. One of its means of communication is the magazine *de.Cascade* with articles by Dutch and Turkish authors on a variety of academic and social subjects. Conferences at the universities of Rotterdam, Tilburg, and Nijmegen resulted in a small book on promoters of peace that discussed, among others, Desiderius Erasmus, John Paul II, Fethullah Gülen, the Dalai Lama, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.⁶

A special activity aimed at very young children was the publication of a Dutch translation of six Turkish books for children from ages 6 to 12. The Cosmicus Foundation is quite adept and well experienced in seeking Dutch funds for its activities. For the package of six children books it received funding from well-known cultural funds: the VSB Fonds (associated with Fortis Bank) and the Oranje Fonds (associated with the Dutch royal family).

The main goal of the activities was to break through the ceiling that prevented gifted young people of Turkish descent and other migrants from starting a good professional career in their (new) homeland. In short, the Cosmicus Founda-

⁵ Yusuf Alan, "Avontuur en Elan," in *de.Cascade*, (Spring 2004); a vivid description of the tutoring work in community centres for students at elementary and secondary schools in Maurice Krul, "Success Breeds Success: Moroccan and Turkish Student Mentors in the Netherlands," <http://www.international.metropolis.net>.

⁶ Celik 2005.

tion wants to create an elite group that can match native Dutch young professionals. In this sense, it is not much different from the emancipation Abraham Kuyper initiated for the orthodox and lower middle class Protestants in the 1880s. In that period of well-organized segregation, it was always the elite from the various "pillars" of Dutch society who sought contact and cooperation in order to keep the country running and secure a good place for their own group.⁷

The Cosmicus Foundation has about 1,000 members. They are not formally linked to a Gülen organization or network, but many of them cherish the person and ideas of Fethullah Gülen as a main inspiration for their social activities. Many are involved in local activities like extra lessons and educational assistance for children in *buurthuizen* (community centres) in districts with many migrants. In Amsterdam some 700 pupils follow these classes organized by an organization called "White Tulip" (i.e. the Turkish tulip active in the white Netherlands) and their score on the national test for children finishing primary school was, at 535, considerably higher than the average 520 of the city of Amsterdam.⁸ An even more intensive method of assistance for education is the boarding house, mostly for students of secondary schools. In Rotterdam, as in all major cities in the Netherlands, there are boarding houses established by people of varying denominational backgrounds: Milli Görüs, Süleimanci, Fethullah Gülen, and Nurculuk. Most boarding houses have about 30 boys. Cosmicus itself has never managed a boarding house.

More than 100 members of Cosmicus are professional teachers in primary and secondary schools and some in higher education. They gather twice a year for brainstorming sessions on strategy. During one of these sessions in 2003 there was a proposal not only to assist pupils of other schools but to start Cosmicus schools. Mehmet Cerit, a graduate in social work from Hogeschool Rotterdam and well versed in Dutch bureaucratic traditions, took the lead. In 2005 Cosmicus applied at the national Ministry of Education for permits and funding of three secondary schools in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Nijmegen. The application was not successful because the three municipalities gave a negative assessment of the plans.⁹

Cerit and other members of Cosmicus continued their efforts after this negative decision by the minister. They sought help from VBS, the *Vereniging Bijzondere Scholen*, the union of non-denominational private schools, and were able to

⁷ Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2006: 258-66.

⁸ Derya Kaplan, member of the Amsterdam City council in a statement on 5 March 2009, see <http://www.zamanhollanda.nl/nieuwsdetail.asp?id=381>.

⁹ Tweede Kamer vergaderjaar 2004-05, report of parliamentary debate on 6-9-2005.

obtain the support of the Rotterdam cooperative of private schools, the LMC Foundation. This foundation is an administrative cooperative between some 30 semi-independent schools, mostly on a denominational basis, in Rotterdam. L here probably stands for a Catholic Lidwina school: the abbreviation has become very well known, but its recent history and original name is already somewhat forgotten.¹⁰ This cluster of schools was able to find another way to obtain the local and national permits for starting the school, and Cosmicus College could open its doors as a secondary school already in August 2006. The Minister of Education reported this development to Parliament on 2 June 2006 and only positive remarks were made about this move at the debate with the parliamentary commission on education on 12 October 2006.

LMC was already a major player in the Rotterdam arena of education with five school communities at 27 locations in mid-2006. For LMC, with its predominantly denominational Christian background in a city with more than 50% adolescents of non-Dutch ethnic origin and a majority of them Muslims, this initiative was quite advantageous not only in accepting individual Muslim students in its schools but also in adding an organization with a different ethnic and ideological background to its cooperative. In 2003 LMC tried to start an "Islamic Junior Secondary School," but after protests from the existing Ibn Ghaldoun secondary school it had to cancel the project. In 2007 it tried to set up another school, Spectrum College, with the help of people with a Milli Görüs background, but this "colourful" endeavour was not successful because there were not enough students registered for the school.¹¹ In its efforts to broaden its institutional basis its collaboration with the Cosmicus Foundation was very convenient for LMC. To prevent bureaucratic problems, Cosmicus College was legally established as a new branch of an already existing school, Rotterdams Lyceum. All responsibility rested with LMC and, legally, the Cosmicus Foundation only has the status of an advisory board to the school. This legal construction not only received the support of government officials, but Minister of Education Maria van der Hoeven was so positive about the initiative that she gave € 300,000 in special subsidies for the start of the school. This was done after Mehmet Cerit and his fellow activists in Cosmicus had done intensive lobbying work by establishing good relations with Rotterdam aldermen for education and CDA politician Leonard Geluk (himself an outspoken and active orthodox Protestant). Finally, a Cosmicus delegation had a discussion

¹⁰ Another explication is Linker Maasoever Concentratie, i.e., a cooperative of schools on the left (or south) bank of the Maas River.

¹¹ The Dutch name of the school was *Islamitische School voor Basisvorming*, where *basisvorming* stands for the first two or three years of secondary education (Willemsz 2008: 20). See also the interview with members of the LMC Board Rald Visser and Tineke Drenthe in *de.Cascade online* (14 March 2007).

with Minister Van der Hoeven in mid 2005, and this smoothed the way for further realization of the plans.

In order to be accepted for the national system, Cosmicus could not rely on Islamic identity (and did not want to do so) but on its identity as a school to educate *wereldburgers* or "citizens of the world." Other arguments for its innovative character are its stress on the participation of parents, and the interaction between students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The emphasis on language training by native speakers and on natural sciences are elements that were used later in the debate as positive factors that made the school an innovation in the educational arena of Rotterdam.

World Citizenship as a branch of learning is still under development in the Cosmicus schools. Within that framework, many ideas are close to the values as formulated by NCDO, the Netherlands Commission for Durable/Sustainable Development. In May 2006, the specific goals of the school were formulated as

High quality education in small classes with special attention for the development of skills, active and participatory citizenship, support and involvement of parents in a stimulating and intercultural environment where students and their parents are educated to become citizens of the world.¹²

1.3 The Social and Political Debate about the Rotterdam Cosmicus School

As of 1 August 2006, Cosmicus College Rotterdam started in a former office building in Rotterdam Delfshaven (Westzeedijk 507) with 86 pupils, 84 of whom were of Turkish origin. The location is in the centre of one of the most ethnically diverse sections of Rotterdam and definitely not a prestigious location for a school that set high criteria for admission and wants to be an elite school. Soon, however, the school could move to a much better location, Witte Hertstraat 1. Notwithstanding the publicity about the new school in the press and through primary schools, apparently a vast majority entered through the network of mentors for homework and from some boarding houses. Cosmicus activists also visited mosques and spread flyers in their networks. This did not change much in Rotterdam up until the third year of its existence. In early 2009 there were some 180 pupils, but no more than 5 were of non-Turkish origin. One of the first criticisms of the initiative was therefore that world citizenship and the integration of stu-

¹² The brochure *Educatief Programma inzake Cosmicus College* 19 May 2006: "het bieden van hoogkwalitatief en kleinschalig leerling-gericht onderwijs waarin aandacht is voor competentieontwikkeling, actief en gedeeld burgerschap, ouderondersteuning en -betrokkenheid in een stimulerende en interculturele omgeving waar scholieren en hun ouders worden opgeleid tot verantwoordelijke wereldburgers."

dents of different ethnic origins in Dutch society was not really promoted by this school. This has been a difficulty in Rotterdam up until the present where critical right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn lived until he was murdered on 6 May 2002. His party was very critical of the Cosmicus initiative and labelled it an attempt to segregate Muslims.¹³ The results were much better in Amsterdam. The subscriptions for 2009 included 50% of non-Turkish origin here and even 30% non Muslim students.

On 25 January 2007, on the occasion of the official and ceremonial opening of Cosmicus College in Rotterdam by Christian Democrat Minister of Education Maria van der Hoeven, € 300,000 were publicly promised as an extra stimulus for a successful start to this school, but there were many critical voices. Willem Vonk, rector of the Catholic City College Franciscus used strong words. According to a prominent newspaper, he used the words "volstrekt belachelijk" i.e. "absolutely ridiculous." Jan Kweekel of the Protestant Melanchthon College is quoted as having said that the school did not aim at integration but segregation: "[T]his school is fully oriented towards Turkish culture."¹⁴ They regretted the fact that Cosmicus College attracted students with a high score on the national test at the end of primary school and that "this is a group that we want to keep in our schools in the centre of the old city." The rectors of the two schools quoted above are also working within the cooperative LMC, but there is sometimes a keen rivalry among the various LMC schools. Mr Rasit Bal, an experienced manager of Islamic schools and former director of the collaboration office of the Boards of Islamic Schools in the Netherlands declared: "I have been involved in the start of many schools but never thought that things could be organized in such a smooth way. Apparently, there must be first a strong will for something. The law is then no problem."¹⁵

In the later reports about the school some doubts remained, but generally the actual situation was more important and more positively interpreted. In 2008 and early 2009, Cosmicus College in Rotterdam organized exhibitions on the exact sciences, in cooperation with staff and students at Delft Technical University and the University of Leiden. There was an overwhelming public interest in these meetings that were supported by major sponsors like the Rotterdam Harbour

¹³ City Council member Anita Fahmel in an intervention on 11 April 2007. See <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=383926>.

¹⁴ *NRC Handelsblad* (27 January 2007).

¹⁵ Quotes from a quite hostile article in *NRC Handelsblad* (27 January 2007). The article showed a picture of a few girls in the school. Of the five girls visible, four, or 80%, wore a headscarf. From my own observation in the school, the percentage of girls wearing headscarves is about 10-20%. Translated, the title of the article reads: "Controversy about New 'Turkish' Elite School" ("Controverse rond nieuwe 'Turkse' eliteschool"). The judgement by Bal is a reference to the Dutch version of the proverb "Where there is a will, there is a way" (*Waar een wil is, is een weg*). In this case "way" (*weg*) is replaced by law (*wet*).

Authority and Royal Shell Oil Company. These projects stressed the interest of the school in the sciences. On 16 May 2009 INESPO was organized by the young school as a national contest for students of Dutch secondary schools in the field of knowledge about the environment. It was held at VU University Amsterdam, sponsored by the national programme in this field and Cosmicus College as the central actor for secondary education. The Minister of Education Ronald Plasterk was present here as well. From 2010 and onwards this contest was held as an international project.¹⁶ Moreover, Cosmicus College has become known for its quality of education in modern languages. Native speakers have been hired to teach French and German. There are no problems in sports: physical education classes are coed, i.e. boys and girls together, without the problems that are experienced at some other schools with Muslim students in this respect. There was a Christmas tree and some social events like a grand Christmas dinner during the Christmas period, while classes went on as usual during Ramadan. Only the first day after the end of Ramadan and at Idul Adha Muslim did students have a day off, but there were no *iftar* meals in the school, and these Muslim celebrations were left to private homes. This led to some complaints by Muslim parents who thought that the school was too accommodating to Dutch public culture and not to the majority of students and parents.

In August 2008 Cosmicus opened another secondary school, in collaboration with the MSA, Montessori Scholengemeenschap Amsterdam. The MSA is a cooperative of secondary schools based on the Montessori educational system. The opening of the Cosmicus school in Amsterdam did not cause as much debate as the school in Rotterdam. The Amsterdam school also had a somewhat lower percentage of students of Turkish origin: only about 70% with a greater ethnic variety among the rest.

In 2008 a Cosmicus primary school with four classes started up in the Rotterdam district of Charlois. Here as well most of the students initially came from the network of Turkish ethnic families that sympathized with the ideals of Cosmicus.

1.4 Kuyper and Gülen: Segregation, Pillarization, and the Return of Religion in Society

In the international debate about Fethullah Gülen it is quite fashionable to compare him with other great men and women. In the Netherlands he has been compared to Erasmus, the broad-minded and realistic scholar who wanted to minimize the power of religious institutions and promoted the ideals of human-

¹⁶ See <http://www.inespo.org/main.php>.

ism.¹⁷ Carroll depicted Gülen through comparison and contrast with six western philosophers, from Plato to Sartre.¹⁸ Others have placed him among mystical teachers like Al-Ghazali and Rumi.¹⁹ In the Netherlands, initiatives by Gülen have been related to the Dutch process of social segregation and emancipation, also called "pillarization," understood as a process where groups are organized according to their religious denomination in education, medical care, politics, the media, sports, and many other aspects of society.

Since the 1870s the Dutch Protestant leader Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) propagated a social strategy of this kind of segregation in order to establish more purely orthodox Protestant communities that could define their own way of life in many fields. It was, however, not only a movement looking backward to orthodox ideals but also a struggle to modernize and to gain influence in society. He was soon followed by Catholics in the Netherlands, and this system dominated Dutch society between 1880 and 1960. This strategy was basically a struggle for emancipation. VU University Amsterdam educated many of these lower middle class people in law, and the same was done for the Catholics after they established the Catholic University in Nijmegen (1923). More and more government officials, mayors, teachers, and medical doctors were educated in these Christian institutions, and they brought more wealth and influence to their circles. Therefore, this kind of social segregation led to upward social mobility. A milder process of social segmentation took place in Belgium at this time through differences between Catholics and religiously neutral liberals with socialists as a third group in this process.

Since the 1980s, scholars have been debating the possibility of the new and growing Muslim communities for using this model of "pillarization" for their emancipation as well. It has even been taken as the major theme for a study on "the reaction of the secularizing society that is leaving its period of pillarization towards the rise of a new religious community": the Christian Democrats considered Islam to be a major tool for the emancipation of Muslims and were willing to accept Islam as a new element in the last period of the traditional Dutch segregation policy. Some even welcomed Islam as an aid for the weakened position of religion in Dutch society. Others, however, especially liberal politicians, deemed that the period of segregation in Dutch society that originated in the strong position of the religion was over and that the new Dutch citizens had to adjust to this situation of a secular society with a strong separation between religion and

¹⁷ Gurkan *et al.* 2005: 89-91.

¹⁸ Carroll 2007.

¹⁹ Y. Alp Aslandogan in Yilmaz 2007a: 663-82 and Thomas Michel in Yilmaz 2007b: 183-202.

state.²⁰

This is not the place to go deeply into this debate that, ultimately, is a quite theoretical one, because all social scientists agree that the situation has changed very much. In the case of new arrivals in the Netherlands, the Muslims are ethnically divided, and the common religion of Islam can only partly unite the various communities. This can be seen in several activities inspired by Gülen in which people in the Netherlands are involved: Cosmicus College and the newspaper *Zaman* concentrate very much on the ethnic Turkish community in the Netherlands, while the *Dialog Academie* has much broader connections. In his widespread analysis of the cultural aspects of migration, Paul Scheffer mentioned that an important difference between the “pillarization” of the Kuyper period and modern times was that the orthodox Protestant and Catholic elite of the 1880s was quite significant and well educated, whereas the Muslim elite in the Netherlands is very weak, poor in number and quality. Liberal and well-educated Muslims in general do not seek ethnic or religious organizations but join general Dutch networks. Therefore, it is usually quite conservative persons who try to become leaders of the stricter Muslim communities.²¹ It must be clear from what has been said about the Cosmicus organization that most of its initiators were people inspired by Gülen, but this is not exclusively the case. Non-Muslim Dutch people also join the activities of the advisory board and many of the executive bodies.

1.5 Some Considerations about the Dutch Situation: Difficult Questions at the Successful Start of a Private School

On 5 February 2009 the Ministers for Home Affairs and Housing (*wonen en werken*) decided that a special study would be started to look at the boarding houses inspired by Gülen “because there are contradicting statements about these institutions.” Many experts consider these boarding houses to be places of emancipation where children of lowly educated and sometimes even illiterate parents can escape homes where Turkish is always spoken and Turkish television dominates the daily routine. In the boarding houses students are subject to a strict rhythm of sports and homework, while they also receive Dutch language training and extra lessons in order to perform better in the Dutch school system. Others stress the very strict discipline in the boarding houses, sometimes even to the point of authoritarianism. In addition, there are stories about pressure to recite the Qur’an, perform the daily prayers, and live according to Islamic rules. On 4

²⁰ Rath *et al.* 1996: 30-32.

²¹ Scheffer 2007: 173.

July 2008 Dutch Public Television broadcasted a documentary on activities related to Gülen, concentrating on the boarding houses. Two teenage boys were presented in the programme in a quite sensational way: their faces were made unrecognizable and their voices transformed so as not to be identified. They complained about discipline, physical punishment, and compulsion in religious matters. The programme in general stated that Fethullah Gülen had a double agenda: he sought influence under the mask of dialogue but in fact wanted to introduce *shari'a* law into Turkey and is seen as a threat to a pluralist and secular society. Here the debate of Kemalist versus religionist parties of Turkey entered Dutch television (in this case in the programme *NOVA*). In addition to some unidentified boarding houses the newly established *Dialog Academie*, the Dutch office of the newspaper *Zaman*, and the Cosmicus School, all three in Rotterdam were also connected with the Gülen movement here and discredited. Soon afterwards, members of the Dutch Parliament interrogated the government, which was initially quite assuring (because the intelligence officials saw no negative aspects of these initiatives), but the government ultimately decided on a further inquiry. The inquiry was done under supervision of Prof. Martin van Bruinessen and basically qualified activities in the Netherlands related to Gülen as legal and positive for the welfare and integration of Muslims into Dutch society. The report was published in September 2010.²²

It may be interesting to relate the debate about Fethullah Gülen and the network that uses his name with the Milli Görüs movement. Between 1999 and 2006 the Amsterdam branch of the Milli Görüs movement received a quite positive response in Dutch society because of the liberal positions taken by its major spokesman and leader Hacı Karacaer who wanted to use his mosque and organization for the emancipation and integration of his fellow Turkish Muslims into Dutch society. He even received substantial government subsidies for his plans to build a grandiose mosque integrated into a shopping centre and a mixed housing project in Amsterdam West. In May 2006, after a raid of Milli Görüs' German headquarters, Hacı Karacaer had to resign as its Amsterdam director and all plans had to be delayed or even cancelled. It is quite clear that one big organization does not always show the same face everywhere.

As for the Cosmicus Foundation that started the school in Rotterdam, religion did not play any role in this secondary education. There is no religious instruction in the school and only the ideal of being a citizen of the world, a *wereldburger*, is strongly promoted. There is no dogmatic secularism either. Some students and

²² For the text of the report see *De Fethullah Gülen Beweging in Nederland*, and the website of Utrecht University, http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/th/2011-0106-200308/Bruinessen_De%20Fethullah%20G_252_inbeweging%20in%20Nederland.pdf.

some staff wear headscarves, but many others do not. The school emphasizes excellence in modern languages and has hired native speakers for German and French. A substantial portion of the classes are given in English. There are no Arab classes in the school. There is no sign of Turkish nationalism; instead, it is forbidden to speak Turkish. Among themselves, however, students still use Turkish quite often. The school has offered courses in education and Dutch to parents but these were not successful. Instead, at a meeting of staff and parents some parents asked the staff to use "our own" (= Turkish) language. This was refused by the staff of the school. The school seeks excellence in biology and chemistry, and the staff and students held a successful demonstration for the whole city of Rotterdam in 2008 and another one in early 2009. Observers acknowledged the secular character of the school and openly wondered about the truth of the matter: Did Gülen himself or (part of) his movement change from a purely religious goal to the more secular one of global harmony and world citizenship, or is there a hidden agenda?

Paul Scheffer has already been quoted above as someone who denies the possibility of a successful reanimation of "pillarization" for the modern Muslim community because of ethnic divisions among Muslims. Scheffer also mentions another difference between modern Muslims and the orthodox Protestant and Catholic communities who could be emancipated thanks to a strategy of segregation during the period 1860-1960. He observed that the Dutch communities had been well established for centuries as rival minorities. Islam has a long tradition as a majority religion and no record of a successful minority creed. Therefore, there is no long practice of religious tolerance. The *dhimmi* system did indeed show some tolerance, but only on the basis of a majority religion with rights that were far superior to those granted to minorities. Scheffer remarks that Islam can have a place in Western Europe only when Muslims are willing to defend freedom of religion for other religions. "This is seldom shown in mosques, where often the fundamental values and the institutions of the liberal democracy are rejected."²³ Some of these fundamental values are related to the freedom not to be a believer, about equal rights of women and homosexuals. Should these be required of Gülen, himself or of the variety of his network, members of movements that are somehow inspired by him? Cosmicus College in Rotterdam is a true proof of the importance, vitality, and elasticity of the inspiration of this prominent figure of our time. But the condition of modern Rotterdam and the opportunities given there to non-denominational private initiatives are such that future must show how differently these young professionals will develop over against the wise but already

²³ Scheffer 2007: 174.

old imam.²⁴ Cosmicus members like to emphasize that only a tiny minority of Muslims are radical and that there is a broad moderate, liberal, and even strongly humanistic stream among Muslims. This is one of the reasons why they want to show the stress on science and biology at Cosmicus College and why they put so much energy into organizing the first national contest in the field of environmental science, INESPO.²⁵ Several Dutch people who sympathize with Gülen told me that their great teacher is strictly orthodox in religious matters but flexible and modern in secular matters. This seems to be a good description of the Cosmicus activists who are not specialists in the field of religion and want to refrain from a technical explanation of Islam and focus on good modern education and solutions for practical life.

1.6 Lucerna Schools in Flanders

The Gülen or Hizmet movement does not have a tight top-down organization but should be characterized as a loose network of independent initiatives. Teachers, journalists, and perhaps primarily businessmen, are the three most important groups. Through a development that is not connected with the Dutch Cosmicus schools, Lucerna schools have been set up in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, Flanders, since 2003. Lucerna means "light," "candle," and therefore I thought initially that the name was given after the great corpus of writings by the Turkish Muslim scholar Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur* (=Letters about Light). But none of those involved with these schools agreed with this. The initiators of these schools were familiar with the speeches, writings, and websites of Fethullah Gülen but found the writings by Said Nursi too complicated. In 2003 a chapter of Hizmet activists started a private secondary school in Schaarbeek, one of the 19 administrative municipalities that form the city of Brussels. In 2004 three secondary schools followed: in Antwerp, in the industrial town of Genk, and in Melle (close to Ghent; the school later moved to Ghent). These four schools together were big enough to ask for recognition of the schools and for government subsidies that were quickly given. Belgian government officials told me that it is easy to talk with the business people of the Gülen oriented movements because they know the local laws and rules and like precise financial reports. Since 2010 two primary schools have been added, in Antwerp and Anderlecht, another administrative municipality within greater Brussels.

²⁴ Celik 2008: 10-11 and 41-46 presents an educational philosophy attributed to Gülen and partly inspired by the humanistic ideas of Ibn Miskawayh. There are no specific Islamic themes in this analysis.

²⁵ For this contest and demonstration of biological research see <http://www.inespo.org/main.php>. The event took place for the first time on 16 May 2009.

In comparison to schools inspired by Gülen in many other countries (we only visited schools in Turkey, Albania, and Indonesia, but there are schools in many more countries) the Flemish and Dutch schools are not prestigious elite schools. Worldwide sympathizers of Gülen or members of the Hizmet movement are called the “Jesuits of Islam” because of the high quality of their primary and secondary schools, but in the Low Countries they are known more as emancipation schools. Their ideal is to offer good education to children of migrants with a lack of knowledge of the local language. In the Low Countries they are not built through private funds from rich businessmen, because they are basically subsidized by the government. They need social networks of support, a new spirit to free them from the pessimism of the migrant environments. Initially, most pupils were from Turkish families, sometimes even up to 90% (Rotterdam, Anderlecht). They all try to increase the number of other students to achieve the ideal of an intercultural school. The teaching staff has only a small number of Turkish people because most are of original Dutch or Flemish background.

The buildings constitute an extra problem for these schools: they were not given the best equipment and buildings with modern facilities. In Anderlecht they use an old factory that was empty for several years and then transformed into a school building. It is located in an industrial area where several factories that went bankrupt are now standing empty. It is not really an exciting place for a new school, but it is part of the emancipation process. In Anderlecht and Schaarbeek, as well as in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, they are part of the migrant communities of the big cities. It is from there that they started their work for emancipation.

1.7 Turkish Delight for Dutch and Belgian schools

Cosmicus School in Amsterdam, connected with a Montessori school, defines its own style of world citizenship. They visit the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, where the history of the Jewish Holocaust is made visible and training is given for tolerance and respect for ethnic minorities, especially Jews. They also joined the United Nations Programme for the millennium goals in environment, sustainability, and world peace. The educational identity of the primary schools in Rotterdam and Arnhem is also the idea of world citizenship. They do not teach religion but teach a kind of international ethics as the moral basis of the school. In early 2012, in a Cosmicus primary school in Rotterdam, this idea was transformed into a project *I love Holland*, where the pupils of this extreme multicultural school had to experience dressing, dancing, talking, and eating according to the many cultures and nationalities of this school. In another project, *Recognizing Colour* they had to visit various countries in a symbolic way, while searching for “visas” in their

“passports.” The playing field, the inner court of the school, was transformed into an ocean where they could find ways to get to other countries. Children are taught here to be true citizens of the world!

Is Cosmicus and Lucerna a Turkish solution for Dutch and Belgian social and educational problems? In this initial decade it seems to make a promising contribution to the problem of education for new minorities in the Low Countries, not via the established system but through participants of the new migrants. The “Gülen method” of efficient support in homework for students in community centres, the establishment of schools with a special character, a broad spectrum of meetings and open lectures, publications – all have definitely contributed to better results of the second generation youth of ethnic Turkish origin and other students. It is still uncertain if the Cosmicus schools will really lead towards a new style of “pillarization” or to a new educational identity, the education oriented towards world citizenship. The content is there, the reception by societies in the Low Countries until now has not been strong enough, but there are signs that these hard-working, intelligent, very earnest people provide a welcome contribution to people and culture of these countries.²⁶

²⁶ I thank Gurkan Celik, Mehmet Cerit, Özcan Hidir, and Leen and Conchita Postma-Scheffer for their information about Cosmicus and comments on earlier drafts of this study. I also thank the staff of the various schools for their willingness to receive my wife and me on various occasions. I am alone responsible for the presentation of the facts and the interpretation of the movement.

References

Boersma, Paul. "Moslima geeft godsdienst op christelijke school. Kan dat?" In: *SBM* (November 2005): 8-9.

Carroll, B. Jill, *A Dialogue of Civilizations: Gülen's Islamic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse*. Somerset NY: The Light, 2007.

Celik, Gurkan *et al.* (eds), *Voorlopers in de Vrede*. Budel: Damon, 2005.

—. *The Gülen Movement: Building Social Cohesion through Dialogue and Education*. Tilburg University 2008 (Doctoral Dissertation).

Eijnatten, Joris van, and Fred van Lieburg. *Nederlandse Religiegeschiedenis*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2006.

Rath, Jan *et al.* *Nederlands en zijn Islam. Een ontzuilende samenleving reageert op het ontstaan van een geloofsgemeenschap*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1996.

Scheffer, Paul. *Het land van aankomst*. Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2007.

Willems, T.J. "Ervaringen van een islamitisch schoolbestuur in Nederland." *School en Wet* 88 (2008)3: 15-23.

Yilmaz, Ihsan. *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*. Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007a.

— *Peaceful Coexistence: Fethullah Gülen's Initiative in the Contemporary World*. Leeds: Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007b.