

**Address by Rob Zaagman, Director Europe Department, at the launch of the Dutch Russian Law Association, Peace Palace, The Hague, 5 November 2018**

Learned participants,  
Distinguished guests,  
Mnogo-uvazhaemye damy i gospoda,

It is an honour to be invited to speak at the inaugural meeting of the Dutch Russian Law Association and to address such a distinguished group of legal academics and practitioners. I admit to feeling a similar sense of trepidation as when I took my exams in international law three decades ago. That was not at the law faculty in Leiden, which you will be visiting, but in Utrecht – which, of course, is much better than the one in Leiden, so you will miss out on something!

Where better to have this meeting than in the grand building of the Peace Palace? Its history was already mentioned - one could say that this impressive building has a partly Russian soul. In 1913, the key to the Peace Palace was handed over to the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Unfortunately, the Court's work could not prevent the world wars which devastated so much of Europe and other parts of the world. This Sunday, the eleventh of November, the centenary of the armistice which stopped the fighting of the First World War will be commemorated. However, what many in the West do not know is that fighting in the eastern part of the continent continued for several more years.

After 1945, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the primacy of the rule of international law received new impetus. The International Court of Justice was established in The Hague, as were other international courts and tribunals. The Hague became known as "the legal capital of the world", to quote several UN Secretaries-general. Of course, the Peace Palace is the most telling symbol of that position.

After 1989, almost everywhere in Europe democracy, the rule of law and human rights took hold. Many of these issues were discussed at a four-week conference in Moscow in September 1991, where I served as the jack-of-all-trades of the Dutch delegation. On the heels of the failed coup, all were determined to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and human rights, first and foremost my Russian colleagues, many of whom were lawyers. That was in Moscow - I know that most of you are from St. Petersburg, so you will be satisfied to know that in 1992 I visited your beautiful city as well, albeit just for a few days.

Of course, with regard to the issues of democracy, rule of law and human rights there is no question of, as one might say, "tranquil tenure" - they need continuous protection and promotion, and the legal profession plays a very prominent role in that regard.

It is the commitment of Russian and Dutch scholars and practitioners of national and international law which has brought us to the Peace Palace. Today, the Dutch Russian Law Association is officially launched. It is a very important initiative in its own right but also in the broader context of the bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Russia. That relationship goes far beyond the peace conference of 1899. Russia is an integral part of Europe. For the Netherlands, the relationship with Russia is important for historical,

political, economic and cultural reasons. The Netherlands is the number three trading partner and investor in Russia. Peter the Great was already mentioned. Anna Pavlovna, the sister of Czars Alexander and Nicholas I, was queen of the Netherlands from 1840-1849 and even has a polder named after her. She is a direct ancestor of our Royal Family. Former Queen Beatrix, the mother of our King, once said that her flashes of temper were due to the Russian blood in her veins!

Russian entrepreneurs, artists, professionals, football players and coaches have made the Netherlands their home. Some temporarily, some for ever – and some have been here for quite a while, such as the Wladimiroff family.

However, as we all know the relationship with Russia is currently in a rather difficult phase. Dutch policy is that for the time being, regrettably, there can be no business as usual with Russia.

At the same time, the Netherlands strongly strives to maintain its dialogue with Russia. We pursue it on the political level where necessary and possible – Foreign Minister Stef Blok was in Moscow in April – as well as at the level of civil servants. Crucially, this dialogue is also promoted in the form of people-to-people contacts.

To give you but a few examples, this dialogue takes shape in the cultural cooperation between Russian and Dutch museums and theatres, through activities in the educational sector and the exchange of students, and via other channels. His Majesty's Embassy in Moscow and the Consulate-General in Saint Petersburg with their extensive networks are indispensable in furthering this dialogue.

The Dutch Russian Law Association is a prime example of these efforts. The Association is, as it were, born out of a project called Amicus Curiae which started in 2016. With financial assistance from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the coordination and implementation of this project is in the apt hands of our Consulate General in Saint Petersburg. I salute consul-general Lionel Veer and Hugo Brouwer, who are here today. But above all, it is brought about by the commitment and involvement of people present here today.

The objective of this project is the quote professional development of a new generation of lawyers from the north-west of Russia unquote. Its objectives and methods have already been set out by Professor Arkady Gutnikov.

Amicus Curiae fits within the broader objective of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote the rule of law on the European continent. Some of the activities aimed at furthering this are implemented under the so-called MATRA program. Matra is short for the Dutch words for "societal transformation" "maatschappelijke transformatie", try pronouncing that! One of our Russian guests told me she is studying Dutch – Katja Brouwer, it is possible to learn our language, isn't it?

Among the primary objectives of Matra are capacity building and institutional reinforcement of the judiciary and the public sector. Courses include fostering knowledge and understanding of the rule of law and professional integrity among young civil servants.

Moreover, all participants become members of an alumni group which, we think, strengthens the sustainability of the training results and provides the participants with very useful networks.

The Dutch Russian Law Association has similar objectives, as already explained by Mr Wladimiroff. Its members will pursue their dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experiences after the Amicus Curiae project has ended. The DRLA thereby constitutes an inspiring example of how the short-term results of a temporary project can be made sustainable for the long term.

In the broader bilateral relationship between Russia and the Netherlands, the importance of the Dutch Russian Law Association should not be underestimated. It shows that, even when other aspects of a relationship are under pressure, people to people contacts are always possible and cooperation can be mutually beneficial.

I would like to express my hope that many legal experts from both the Netherlands and Russia see the benefit of becoming a member of the DRLA and by means of their contact through the association, increase mutual understanding of their respective countries. Moreover, I hope that this initiative will become an inspiration to similar projects on how to improve the sustainability of projects' result.

Let me conclude by expressing my gratitude to everyone without whose efforts and personal commitment both the Amicus Curiae project and the Dutch Russian Law Association could not have come about. Also, I would like to congratulate you on the establishment of the DRLA.

Bol'shoye spasibo za vashe vnimanie.  
Thank you very much for your attention.