

Canada, the Netherlands share common concerns

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Canada and the Netherlands are "like-minded countries, both emphasizing North-South relations and human rights," says Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek.

That may sound more like Canada under Pierre Trudeau than Brian Mulroney, but it probably reflects what Canadians and the Dutch have in common.

The visit to Canada next week of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands should underscore the two nations' similarities.

Both, for instance, look at the problems of Central America in the same light, believing each Latin American state should be left alone to decide its own form of government. And both Canada and the Netherlands are convinced that the main problems of the region are economic, not political.

In international circles, as at home, the Dutch government is very concerned about the environment. Acid rain and water pollution are well-known issues. Like Canada, Holland places blame on its neighbors while taking some costly measures to clean up after them.

In NATO, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and at the United Nations, the Dutch usually see eye-to-eye with Canada.

Part of the warmth in this relationship comes from history. The Netherlands' security policy is firmly linked to NATO and to Europe. They were neutral in the First World War, but the Dutch were occupied in the Second World War and later liberated by the Allies, including Canada. They have learned a lesson about being allied with other like-minded countries.

The Dutch take their membership in the European Economic Community seriously; they are Europeans first and foremost. But they take pains to differentiate between economic goals and security ones.

They don't mind caucusing with their European friends on political and even security matters. Yet they recognize the importance of the transatlantic link and place particular emphasis on NATO's ultimate role as the defender of their freedom.

Thus, the Dutch have been a good European friend in court for Canada. This will take on increasing importance as

European countries try to unite in their own defence.

Both van den Broek and Defence Minister Willem van Eekelen see the Western European Union as a vehicle to build up the European pillar of NATO for the purpose of strengthening the alliance as a whole. They say that the situation has changed with Western Europe now a significant economic power. Its members must play a significant role in the defence of their own continent.

But in the same breath, van den Broek claims that his overall aim is to achieve a balance, to harmonize and not to create a substitute for the Western alliance.

The Dutch are traditional free traders. They want old trade barriers lifted and no new ones imposed. They strongly support the efforts of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in its current Uruguay round.

Financial and monetary stability are also indispensable goals for the Dutch today. To that end, they believe in European monetary co-operation — perhaps even a European Central Bank.

The Dutch describe their human rights policy as a no-nonsense one designed to achieve concrete results — an apt description of the Dutch people themselves and the way they operate.

On South Africa, the Dutch oppose a total economic boycott and the political isolation of South Africa. They advocate peaceful change and, to that end, a continuation of diplomatic relations and political dialogue with the P.W. Botha regime. Yet they are as determined as any to see the end of apartheid.

The betterment of mankind is a primary goal of Dutch foreign policy. International development aid is strongly supported by the Hague. And, like Canada, that country has much less trouble voting aid funds than defence ones.

In brief, the Dutch are international pragmatists. They are content with the role they play in the world, often frustrated by the behavior of the superpowers and realistic enough to believe sincerely in a rapprochement with their German neighbors.

Their closest relations are with Britain. But Canada comes very soon thereafter.

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