



# Remco van der Kroft New Chairman of the NPCC

**Remco van der Kroft has been appointed the new Chairman of the Netherlands-Polish Chamber of Commerce. Bulletin asked him about his ideas for the chamber and what brought him to Poland.**

**Can you tell us something about yourself?**

Remco van der Kroft "I was born in The Hague, and grew up in Leiden where I also went to university. I have been living in Poland for a long time now. I'm married to Magda and we have two children - Zosia and Filip. Zosia will commence her studies at my Alma Mater next year. As a partner with Olczak-Klimek van der Kroft

Węgiełek, I mainly advise foreign investors (mostly Dutch) on their businesses in Poland - including setting up their entities, providing day-to-day advice and conflict resolution."

**What are your impressions of Poland and why have you chosen to live here?**

"We were on a school trip to Rome in October 1982 when our teachers gave us the opportunity to skip the organised programme and go the Vatican. Pope John Paul II was to canonise Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest who died in Auschwitz. This was during martial law in Poland and yet St. Peter's Square was filled with Solidarity flags and banners (carried of course by Poles living abroad). I will never forget the reaction of the audience when the Pope addressed them in Polish. This is how my love affair with Poland started.

In 1984, I joined the Dutch United Nations Students Association in Leiden when I was offered a spot that had just been freed up on a trip to Poland scheduled for early 1985. The preparation included my first ten lessons of Polish. We went by train and those were the days when armed border guards would enter the train at the GDR border and once again at the Polish border. I extended my stay and spent two weeks in Poland visiting Poznań, Toruń and Gdańsk. It was just under two years after martial law in Poland had been lifted and the communist regime was still very strong. In an odd way, this united the people against this common enemy. I was also struck by the lack of trust between people. I had one friend, let's call him "Grzegorz".

Other friends of mine showed me some Solidarity items and urged me not to mention anything to Grzegorz because they could not trust him. Only last year I learned that the apartment of those other friends was the place where three underground newspapers were printed: they had good reason to be careful. When I came back to the Netherlands, I started studying Law, Russian and Polish and I continued to travel to Poland regularly during the 1980s. In 1991, I started to work as a lawyer in Paris with the firm that is now Dentons, dealing with the laws of the post-Soviet countries. That firm acquired an office in Warsaw and since I knew some Polish I was soon asked to move to Warsaw.

In those days, before the NPCC was even founded, the monthly business drinks already existed on the top floor of the Marriott. Almost all the Dutch nationals in Warsaw would show up for a beer, some crisps and an opportunity to compare notes and complain about Polish bureaucracy. The Dutch ex-pats and other foreigners were almost always in charge at the time.

For Polish middle-management, the only two qualifications required were good English and being outgoing. In three months with the same company, people were able to rise to a level which back in the Netherlands required at least ten years of hard work. Unfortunately for the children of that golden generation, the millennials, Poland in the meantime has normalised and making a career today requires hard work and involves competition all the way.

During that stay, I met Magda and got married. For professional reasons, we moved to Rotterdam in the Netherlands in 1995 where our children were born. From 2001-2003 we spent two years in Chicago. After one year back in the Netherlands, I took a job offer from a French development company in Poland. I spent two years on the board of Apsys Poland at the time when we opened

Manufaktura in Łódź. After that, I went back into private practice and for the past five years I have had my own firm together with my three Polish partners."

### When did you join the board of the NPCC?

"I was asked to join the board of the NPCC in 2007. That was a turbulent time with a dwindling number of members and low attendance at events. In 2008, we changed the director and slowly but surely the NPCC started to get more members again and improved attendance at its events. I felt that we were missing an annual gala event and in 2010 we had our first Rijsttafel. This soon began to grow into the event with 300-plus guests that it is today.

In 2010, together with the then-chairman Erik Drok, we decided that the next step in professionalising the chamber was required and so a search for a new director was initiated, which resulted in hiring Elro van den Burg. Since then, the NPCC has grown from 90 members to 234. That is a great achievement of the NPCC and in particular of Elro."

### Why did you want to become the Chairman of the Chamber?

"I wanted to become chairman because after 10 years on the board I have my ideas of what

needs to be done to keep the NPCC thriving. To me, more important than further increasing the number of members, or maintaining the large number of events, is how the chamber and its events are perceived by its members. In order to achieve this, the board should listen to its members and involve them in organising the events. Furthermore, in my opinion, there should be a strong and visible role in the chamber for the managing director. These are just a few of the changes that members will notice in the coming months.

On the one hand, I would like the chamber to be the natural meeting place for Dutch ex-pats, Dutch entrepreneurs, and visiting Dutch business people. But on the other hand, we should also make sure that we offer something attractive for the Polish top and middle-management of Dutch-owned companies in Poland. The NPCC, in cooperation with the other bilateral chambers, should continue to be a voice for its members in this changing political climate.

Speaking of politics, there is one thing in particular that hurts me in Poland today and that is how divided the country is, with people on different sides of the political spectrum hardly seeming to talk to each other. This is so much in contrast with the Poland of the 1980s when almost everybody was united in their struggle against a system imposed by a foreign power." ★

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