

Speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte at a lunch hosted by the Dutch government on the occasion of the Argentinian State Visit to the Netherlands

Speech | 28-03-2017

Your Majesties, Mr President, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

President Macri, what an honour it is to welcome you to The Hague. You represent the country that produced the greatest footballer of all time - after Johan Cruyff of course. And the country that gave us the most popular pope in decades, not to mention la Reina de Holanda. Clearly Argentina has a lot going for it, and I know you think so too. You once said, 'If we Argentines dare to unite we will be unstoppable.' And that's precisely what we're going to talk about today. About what happens when Argentines unite. What happens when Dutch people unite. And even better, what happens when our two countries unite and join forces.

Yo "poldeo", tu "poldeas", él "poldea". That was the headline of a column in La Nación last year when the Dutch Minister for Agriculture, Martijn van Dam, visited Argentina. In the column, journalist Félix Sammartino, explored the Dutch 'polder model'. He cited a well-known saying: 'God created the earth, but the Dutch created Holland.' And it's true, our ancestors refused to be defeated in their battle against the water. Instead, they made the water work for them, and turned it into land. The province of Flevoland owes its very existence to the draining of the Zuiderzee, an inland sea. Building the dikes, draining the water and keeping the polders dry required consultation and consensus. And as Sammartino discovered, that is the secret of the Dutch polder model. It's what turned an old Dutch noun for reclaimed land into a new verb meaning 'to seek dialogue and compromise'.

Anyone who studies Dutch history knows that dialogue and compromise are constant themes. That was true back in the 17th century, when provinces, cities and stadholders had to reach agreement. And it's still true today, two weeks after the parliamentary elections. Right now, Dutch politicians are busy exploring the options for a new government coalition, seeking out the things that unite them.

When you've been a politician for as long as I have, you have to learn to polder. A personal highlight of my career was the agreement we negotiated in 2013 with Dutch employers and trade unions. The economy had hit a low

point. We knew we had to make reforms to boost economic growth and employment. But we couldn't do it alone.

We had to have the Dutch people on board. And we succeeded. When push comes to shove, we Dutch always return to the polder model, and it never lets us down.

That's why we're also keen to share our approach with other countries. President Macri, in Argentina you've embarked on an impressive programme of reforms. And I know you're studying the Dutch model of dialogue and compromise with interest. As you said yourself, 'We've got to take confrontation out of the centre of politics. With fighting, no one wins; with dialogue, everyone wins.' And with that in mind I'm delighted that we've just signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at exchanging knowledge about the dialogue between employers, unions and public authorities. A fitting illustration of the close bond between our countries.

Your reform programme is already bearing fruit, Mr President. Since the end of 2016 the Argentinian economy has been growing again, and for this year the IMF has projected a growth rate of 2.7 per cent. You are working to build an open economy and foster international trade. These are positive signals at a time when many are retreating behind their borders. Your outlook strikes a chord with the Netherlands, as a small maritime trading nation that has always looked beyond its own borders.

Like you, we are aiming for inclusive globalisation. This offers scope for expanding our strong partnership even further. In economic areas, for example. There are plenty of opportunities in sectors like agri-food, water and logistics. We've seen that clearly in the past two days.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I believe our King and Queen can personally attest, if Argentinian and Dutch people unite we are unstoppable. Or, to complete what La Nación started: ¡Nosotros poldeamos!

Thank you.