



New NIASD contact information

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NIASD NEWSLETTER APRIL 2006

1. Introduction

The Netherlands Institute for Academic Studies in Damascus (NIASD) proudly presents its first quarterly newsletter. As of the 1st of January 2006, our institute has made a fresh restart with our new administrator, Leiden University. We are presently working hard to get the institute operational again. The institute itself moved to a new location in the East Mezzeh district of Damascus, in a more functional, yet very charming building. While some institutional and organizational matters are still taking much time, we can already shed some light on various upcoming activities.

2. Institutional and Organizational Issues

Revising the contract with the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education, in accordance with NIASD's Vision for the Future

As many of you already know, on the 21st of September 2005, an agreement was reached in The Hague, that NIASD will be largely financed, at least during 2006 and 2007, by the Dutch Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, and of Foreign Affairs. This funding has indeed become available. During this meeting support was expressed as well for NIASD's Vision for the Future, that was finalized in July 2005. In that document a widening of the scope of our activities is proposed: apart from the field of science and education, the institute will operate in the fields of culture and international co-operation as well. Our more detailed policy plan for the year 2006, which was finalized in December 2005, also reflects this wider perspective.



In order to realize this vision, NIASD provided the Syrian Ministry of Higher Education in February this year with a proposal for a revised contract, to be concluded with Leiden University. That draft laid down the legal framework which would allow our institute to indeed operate in the three fields mentioned. The draft contract has been discussed with the Syrian Ministry and with Leiden University and by the end of March a final version of the draft contract was finalized. In April this year this final version is to be signed by the president of Leiden University, Prof.dr. D.D. Breimer, and by the Syrian Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Ghias Barakat. On the 1st and 2nd of June, Prof. Breimer and Mr. John Kroes of Leiden University will pay a visit to Syria.

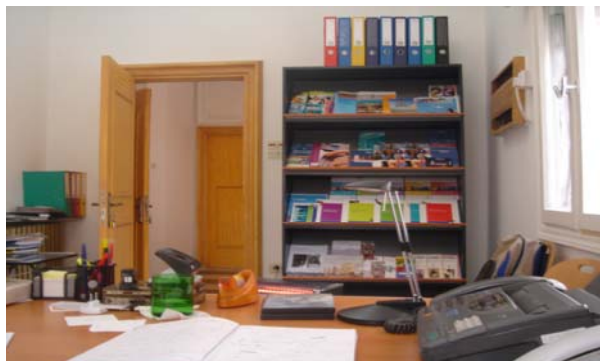
New location of NIASD: Farabi Street 85, East Mezzeh, Damascus

In February NIASD moved to another location in Damascus, in the modern part of the city. The building basically is a large apartment which offers all the facilities NIASD needs in order to operate properly: two offices, two classrooms, a central room in which around 40 persons can be seated, a large library that can be used for teaching as well, and finally three guestrooms with air conditioning and private bathrooms (in total five guest beds).



During the last few months much of the furniture has been installed in the new building, as well as new computers and computer networks. In all our guestrooms there is a table and a chair for study in private, while guests can use wireless internet and international telephone lines in their guestroom as well. Computers with internet are also installed in the library. For teaching purposes a movable tv set with dvd player is available for the two classrooms. In the central room of NIASD a

beamer and large projection-screen have been installed, enabling NIASD to present movies and documentaries to a larger audience, and to host presentations in which power point or



website-projections are being used. A big table allows for larger meetings.

New NIASD staff

Mrs. Astrid Rijbroek, M.A., acting director of NIASD since March, 2005, was appointed acting director for the first three months of 2006 as well, and director of NIASD as of the 1st of April 2006, taking over the position of Kim Duistermaat. Astrid has studied Middle Eastern studies at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (the present Radboud University), and has worked as an intern at UNWRA in Syria. She has lived and worked in Syria for more than nine years and played a key role in the restart of NIASD.

Mr. Taco van der Zwaag, LL.M, was appointed deputy director of NIASD as of the 1st of January, 2006. Taco studied law at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam and has worked for more than three years as a legislative lawyer at the Dutch Ministry of Justice. He has studied Arabic at Damascus University in Syria since September 2003, alternating study with short term legal expert jobs in legal support projects in Pristina, Kosovo (EAR) and Beirut, Lebanon (UNDP). Since June 2005 Taco has assisted the institute in realizing its restart, as of September 2005 in the restart project co-financed by the Dutch Embassy.

Ms. Alissar-al-Chami, NIASD assistant, started working for the institute full time as of the 1st of January, 2006. Alissar has extensive experience with many aspects of the institute, since she has worked as a part time assistant for NIASD since April 2003. She studied English Language and Literature at Damascus University.

Mr. Waleed Shekho is a new NIASD employee. On the 1st of January 2006 he started his job as general utility & security man, and doorkeeper. Waleed studied Sports Education in Lattakia at Tishreen University, as well as in Damascus at Damascus University.

Mrs. Nanda Wedjesuriya continued her job as housekeeper of the NIASD building.



NIASD's first Committee of Recommendation

This January NIASD presented its first Committee of Recommendation on the website of the institute: www.niasd.org. The diverse professional backgrounds of the 21 members of the committee reflect the fields in which NIASD operates. The committee strengthens the institute in its efforts to attract additional financial means for the activities of the institute. Furthermore, individual committee members may (and already do) provide NIASD with valuable suggestions and insights. The 21 networks of the committee members also offer the institute relatively easy access to many important contacts. In the past few months we have already profited from this new opportunity.

3. NIASD clusters of theme activities

In order to increase the visibility of the institute, NIASD distinguishes between activities of others which the institute supports & facilitates, and activities initiated by NIASD itself. From the month of September 2006 onwards NIASD will dedicate each period of two months to a specific theme. Within these two months the institute will organize a cluster of activities in which that theme will be studied and discussed from the angles and perspectives related to the three operational fields: science & education, culture and co-operation. In the period up to September 2006 we have limited ourselves to one such a cluster. That cluster has materialized in the following three day event.



Mini-festival “Connected” on journalism, mass media and intercultural communication, scheduled for the 8th, 9th and 10th of June 2006

This mini-festival largely consists of two intertwined workshops on journalistic skills and intercultural communication, delivered in Arabic by two specialists: Mr. Youssef Azghari of Avans University in Tilburg and author of “Cultuurbepaalde communicatie” (Nelissen, Soest 2005), and Mr. Youssef Ahmed, free lance journalist for various Dutch newspapers including *Algemeen Dagblad*, *Trouw* and *De Volkskrant*. The workshops are targeted at young Syrian journalists and students of journalism, and aim to enhance their insights in the various ways in which mass media influence public as well as personal opinions, and their effect on communicating with “the other”. During the mini-festival the potential in mass media for connecting people from different cultures will be analyzed and studied as well. The mini-festival is to be closed on the 10th of June in the evening by a three hour semi-public event with interviews, spoken columns, visual displays and discussions. At the moment the needed governmental approval for “Connected” is pending.

NIASD theme for September- October 2006: Access to Literature (working title)

The focus of our activities within this cluster will be on the various factors and actors that determine the availability of Arab literature in Dutch and of Dutch literature in Arabic. In this context two themes will be covered: 1) the relevant factors in translation policies and decisions; 2) the opportunities of the digital and multimedia age, such as digitalization of literary heritages, multimedia publications and promotion of literary productions through websites of authors and publishers.

NIASD theme for November-December 2006: Modern Urban Planning (working title)

In the present world with rising city populations adequate approaches to urban planning become increasingly important. During the past few decades new approaches have been developed in The Netherlands, reflecting the need for a more integral approach, and for

participation by inhabitants, companies and other stakeholders in the planning process. In Syria some smaller initiatives in this direction have surfaced as well. In the period of November-December 2006, NIASD intends to focus on new developments in Modern Urban Planning, in various forms (master class, lectures, documentary) and to combine this with a marketing event for study programmes in The Netherlands in the field of Urban Planning.

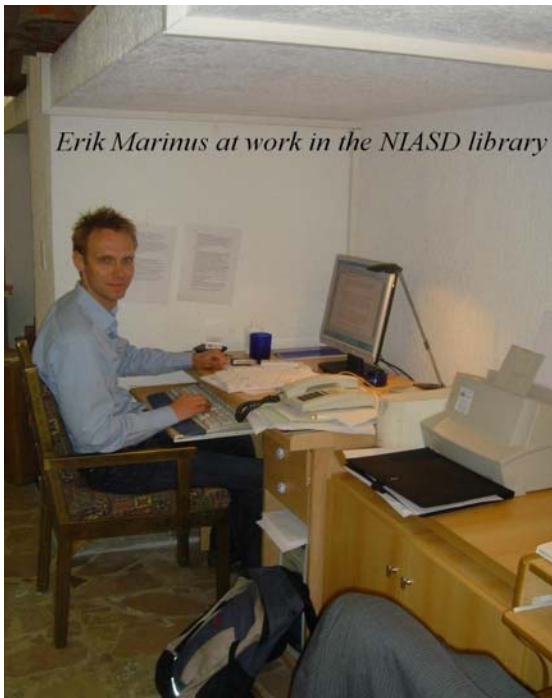
4. Science and Education

Questionnaire on interests in and possibilities for academic co-operation in the field of research and education, January 2006

At the end of 2005 and in the first part of January 2006, NIASD has distributed a detailed questionnaire amongst most of the university faculties both in The Netherlands and Syria, with the aim to identify the interests and possibilities for academic co-operation in the field of research and education. The response we have received to this questionnaire, which we are analyzing at present, forms a helpful tool in identifying potential subjects and partners for co-operation in the field of education and research.

New online internship network: first Dutch intern placed in Aleppo (2nd of April, 2006)

In the last months of 2005 an online internship database was established on the website of NIASD, with the goal to provide suitable internships in Syria for Dutch students. While the basis and the underlying agreements regarding this internship system have been fully developed, NIASD is still working on increasing the number of available internships and also hopes to extend the network to internships in The Netherlands for Syrian students.



Nevertheless, NIASD is proud to announce that, in the mean time, the first Dutch intern has been placed through our new internship network. Ine Smeets, who studied Arabic & Islam at Radboud University in Nijmegen (masters cum laude, August 2005) started her internship at Issa Touma's Le Pont Art Gallery in Aleppo, on the 2nd of April, 2006. For the coming six months Ine will be involved in the preparations for the 2006 International Photography Gathering in Aleppo. The theme of this event is "Meeting the Middle East".

Two Dutch interns at NIASD (March-June)

From the 8th of March until the 31st of April, 2006, Erik Marinus is working as an intern at NIASD. Erik studied history at the

University of Groningen and graduated in 2005. Erik: “I have the honor of being the first intern of NIASD. I am preparing two clusters of activities for the Netherlands institute in Damascus, a city totally unknown to me. The provisional themes are Access to Literature and Modern Urban Planning and the activities will take place in September-October and November-December, 2006. It is my job to find out what has already been organized on these themes by other actors in Syria and to help NIASD to develop a new and relevant perspective for its activities in these fields.”

On the 30th of April, 2006, *Meltem Halaceli* will start her two month internship at NIASD. Meltem’s internship consists of two parts: 1) mapping the Syrian cultural and artistic scene, and 2) organizing a meeting of Syrian artists and cultural organizations in NIASD with the goal to determine possibilities for co-operation with organizations in The Netherlands and to inform the Syrian cultural players on our own cultural activities. Meltem is studying Arabic language and culture at the University of Amsterdam.



Arabic Summer Course, from the 2nd until the 27th of July, 2006

During the last few months NIASD has prepared its summer course Arabic for Dutch and Flemish students, which will take place in the institute from the 2nd until the 27th of July. The application deadline runs until the 15th of May, 2006, but we have already received almost enough applications to run three groups: Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced.



Dutch course, new Beginners group started on the 18th of April, 2006

The lessons Dutch have started again in NIASD on the 18th of April, with a beginners group for which in total 7 students have registered. NIASD employee Waleed is attending this course as well. The course will run for ten weeks: 2 evenings 2 hours of lessons a week (in total 40 hours). The teacher is Mr. Martijn Leeftink.

International educational fair Academia Syria 2006, the 16th, 17th and 18th of April, 2006

NIASD was present this year on the international educational fair Academia Syria 2006, which took place in Le Meridien Hotel in Damascus on the 16th, 17th and 18th of April. At the fair the institute represented Leiden University, providing visitors with information on the various bachelor and master courses available at that university. In addition to that we informed visitors to our stand about the other courses in The Netherlands with the help of Nuffic information materials.

And furthermore ...

In the first quarter of 2006 NIASD established contacts with two new private universities in Syria: the University of Kalamoon and the Arab European University. NIASD assisted the latter in writing a draft co-operation agreement with a Dutch university. The institute purchased and sent several books on the request of the World Arts Museum in Rotterdam and the University of Amsterdam; translated a HAS Den Bosch certificate for the Syrian student Bassam Al Saidi, and informed several Dutch students about study possibilities in Syria. This April, Dutch promovenda Ms. Luit Mols stayed in NIASD in order to make photographs for her PhD. In March, NIASD accommodated Mr. Dr. Graham Philip of the Department of Archaeology of the University of Durham (UK).

5. Culture

Meeting Dutch Anna Lindh Foundation network (the 9th of March, 2006)

NIASD was represented by Taco van der Zwaag at the first meeting, hosted by the European Cultural Foundation in Amsterdam on the 9th of March, 2006, of the Dutch network of the Anna Lindh Foundation (the Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures - ALF). At present NIASD is the only member of the Dutch network, which is located in the Mediterranean region itself. During the meeting Taco briefly introduced our institute and invited the other members of the Dutch network to make use of the NIASD facilities for their Euro-Mediterranean activities.

NIASD Filmprogramme 2006, first feature film will be shown on the 27th of April, 2006

Starting in April 2006, NIASD will each month present a Dutch feature film with Arabic subtitles. The launch of our filmprogramme 2006 will be on Thursday the 27th of April, with the film "Shouf Shouf Habibi", the best visited Dutch film in The Netherlands in 2004. Thanks to financial support of the Dutch organization Holland Film, the film will be introduced at NIASD by film director Albert ter Heerdt himself. For May 2006 the film "Leef!" from Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen is scheduled to be shown.



Damascus workshop 'Here is the Centre of the World', 10th – 22nd of May, 2006

NIASD will host the Damascus workshop which is part of the intercultural and transnational collaborative art & research project, titled 'Here is the Centre of the World'. This project is organized by DAI, the Dutch Art Institute in Enschede, The Netherlands, and brings together artists and art students from various parts of the world. In the Damascus workshop the artistic use of public space will be a main theme. The practical part of the event will take place in the Midhat Pasha Street, or the "Straight Street", in the old city centre. Governmental approval for this workshop is pending.

And furthermore ...

In January NIASD accommodated and facilitated professional photographer Mr. Dirk Jan de Vries and brought him in contact with several cultural players in Syria. This February NIASD assisted a group of four Dutchmen in acquiring access to several buildings in the Jewish quarter of the old city centre of Damascus.

6. Cooperation

Conference on Cultural Affairs of the Dutch Embassies in the Middle East and Northern Africa, the 24th and 25th of April, 2006

NIASD is the proud host of a cultural affairs conference with participants from the Dutch Embassies in the Middle East and Northern Africa. This conference is attended as well by civil servants of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture & Science, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a delegate of SICA (Foundation for International Cultural Activities) and, last but not least, Mr. H. Pröpper, the director of the Foundation for the Production and Translation of Dutch Literature in Amsterdam, and member of NIASD's Committee of Recommendation.



And furthermore ...

In the first quarter, NIASD started mapping the field of international co-operation in Syria and established preliminary contacts with various players in this field, amongst which JICA, the Aga Kahn Development Network, the EU-Delegation in Syria, GTZ, HIVOS and the 'Syria 2025' project, funded by the Syrian State Planning Commission and UNDP. We have advised Euromed Youth Trainer/Expert Mr. Melhem Mansour on a project proposal concerning training Syrian youth workers. We also met with the Dutch experts involved in the EU funded 'MAM' (Municipal Administration Modernization) project, and with Dutch RIZA experts involved in water management projects in Syria.