



# Stichting Nederlandse Onafhankelijkheid

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## **Independence in a community of values**

**Jury report for the Dutch Independence Award, July 26<sup>th</sup> 2022**

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Every year, on 26 July, the Netherlands celebrates its independence in a modest way. We have only been doing that for five years, although the history of our independence goes back much further than that of other countries. Countries mostly, that do make a great commemoration of their 'Independence Day'.

The Dutch Independence Foundation wants to make all inhabitants of our country aware of its special history that began on July 26, 1581, the day on which the States General of the United Provinces renounced a tyrannical foreign ruler with the Act of Abjuration (Plakkaat van Verlatinghe).

Even more important than the lessons of the past, is a vision for the future. Independence is not a static concept. Until now it has mainly been used to indicate the independence or sovereignty of a country. But how future proof is state independence in a globalizing world? Should we not gradually adapt that concept to today's requirements?

In order to stimulate new thinking about independence, the Dutch Independence Address was established five years ago. A selection of prominent speakers has since then formulated their vision on independence in the 21st century - annually on 26 July: Piet Hein Donner, Jan Terlouw, Herman van Rompuy, Caroline de Gruyter and this year the esteemed Ukrainian novelist Andrei Kurkov.

In addition, this year for the first time the Dutch Independence Award will be presented. It is an award, aimed at the international community, for people who, in addition to thinking about the concept, also 'act' on independence. For those who offer perspectives on the way in which states could or should relate to each other and deliver real change. Not in thought alone but also in outcome. People who keep the concept of independence alive by renewing its content.

One such person is Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine. His country is currently fighting for independence in an unequal battle with Russia. Ukraine's survival as an independent nation has been jeopardized and President Zelensky leads a country fighting its autonomy with weapons since the Russian invasion in February this year.

At the same time, he also heads a government that is building support for Ukrainian independence through concrete policies and confrontational but also binding diplomacy. His call for military aid in the form of arms supplies is answered by several countries.

However, Volodymyr Zelensky's main weapon is not a tank or a howitzer, but the community of values he wants his country to be a part of. His vision of an independent Ukraine is not based on nationalism or independence without obligations but aims to guarantee sovereignty within a group of like-minded nations.



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At a moment in history in which Great Britain opted for an independence outside the European Union and a time when politicians in many EU Member States are turning against the EU, Volodymyr Zelensky offers inspiration to world leaders who realize that they too, more than ever, can and should deploy this pacifist weapon of the community of values.

The idea that 'more Europe' could lead to more independence of countries is not new. In his Independence Speech of 26 July 2019, former Dutch Deputy Prime Minister Jan Terlouw stated that political and social developments show that independence of countries does not actually exist. Because as soon as nations trade with each other, they make themselves dependent on each other. "You can be independent on a desert island but not in a world that is globalizing." According to Terlouw, the question is therefore not how we remain independent, but to what extent "we can monitor and preserve our independence where it is really necessary and functional".

His words have gained wisdom over time. Especially since even economic dependence has now proved to be no guarantee for peace. In 2020, the former Belgian Prime Minister and President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy elaborated on this in his Dutch Independence Address by confronting people who opt for less Europe. "More Europe is necessary for more independence", he said. Participation in the European Union can actually guarantee the independence of countries.

These insights have become ever more meaningful over the last months, as they have been translated into action by the President of Ukraine. Action that has resonated with the leaders in Europe because of the war on our continent, but certainly because of Ukraine's loud and crystal-clear diplomacy.

With these considerations, the Dutch Independence Foundation today has the honor to present President Volodymyr Zelensky with the first Dutch Independence Award.

*The Dutch Independence Award for Volodymyr Zelensky was presented to the ambassador of Ukraine Maksym Kononenko on **26 July 2022** in Wassenaar by the President of the Senate Jan Anthonie Bruijn. This jury report was drawn up under the responsibility of the Dutch Independence Foundation by Herman Nieuwenhuis and Geerten Waling. For the occasion of this judging, the board of this foundation has placed itself under the independent chairmanship of Prof. Dr. Mathieu Segers.*