

SoD Summary

The State of Our Democracy¹

Democracy Program.

Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, The Hague. 2006.

¹ This summary is based on the report “The State of our Democracy” which reflects the situation in the Netherlands in 2006. Developments since then have not been taken into account.

The assassination of Pim Fortuyn and the aftermath of the 2002 parliamentary elections generated political turbulence and a vibrant public debate on the functioning of the political institutions and practices in the Netherlands. This assessment was initiated by the Government of the Netherlands to record the situation and to promote discussion on Dutch democracy and the need for reform.

Key Recommendations

- The practice of committing offenders to psychiatric clinics (also known as TBS-System) for enforced treatment must be improved to ensure that proper protections are in place. Freedom of speech in the Netherlands must be protected and safeguarded.
- The socio-economic conditions of non-western ethnic minorities must be improved.
- Political parties have to become more open and inclusive, in particular for younger Dutch citizens.
- Cabinet should provide more information on Government policies in order to increase its accountability.
- Non-departmental public bodies must become more transparent and accountable. Effective control over autonomous regional police departments must be introduced.
- Citizens and organizations should become effectively involved in policy preparation.
- More transparent appointment procedures in public administration will increase political confidence.

Origins: Why perform a SoD assessment?

The assassination of Pim Fortuyn and the aftermath of the 2002 parliamentary elections generated political turbulence and a vibrant public debate on the functioning the political institutions and practices in Netherlands.

On the other hand, the Balkenende Cabinets led a discussion on values and norms, followed by a programme of political and economic reform. These policies have also changed the face of democracy in the Netherlands.

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The Four Pillars and the assessment

Citizenship and the Constitutional State

Nationality and Public Spirit

Dutch nationality is granted to every person with at least one Dutch parent, or anyone born in Dutch territory and who has not acquired another nationality by the age of five years. Dutch nationality can also be acquired through naturalization. Citizenship is lost in case of acquisition of other nationality, and can be withdrawn in cases of fraud, involvement with war crimes, genocide, or engagement in military service with enemy states. Non-citizens have the right to organize, demonstrate and freedom of speech. There are approximately 1.7 million non-western members of ethnic minorities living in the Netherlands: Turkish, Surinamese, Moroccan and Antillean peoples compose the largest part, and there are also some 5,000 Roma and Sinti persons. The Netherlands is signatory to the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), and in 2004 ratified the [Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#). However, Dutch implementation of the latter convention does not include the mentioned minorities under its umbrella. Tolerance towards homosexuality has increased, and same-sex marriages and adoption rights exist. [The Equal Treatment Commission](#) (CGB) is in charge of overseeing cases of discrimination of any kind: during 2005, the most judgments were related to discrimination based on age (100 cases), gender (53 cases), and race/nationality (37 cases). The Dutch Constitution and the major political institutions are widely supported by the population: almost 75% of the population considers democracy to the best form of government, while a mere 12% of the population prefer a republic instead of a constitutional monarchy. Dutch political institutions have

contributed to moderation and reconciliation between distinct social forces, and consultation and consensus between public and private organizations and the government is strongly pursued. One example of this is the existence of the [Social and Economic Council](#) (SER), which involves both employers and employees in discussions on social security, employment and economic growth. Nevertheless, the *polder model*, a concept referring to the Dutch consensus seeking democracy and consultation economy, a result of the 1982 [Wassenaar Agreement](#), has come under increasing criticism since the end of the 1990's due to its relative exclusion of agents outside the industrial relations framework and its incapacity to perform and deliver swiftly.

The Constitutional State

In the Netherlands the policy of legal tolerance of certain activities based on pragmatism leads to a sort of arbitrariness in the application of law: punishable actions might not be persecuted by the public prosecutor's office if these actually serve a greater general social interest by being left alone. For instance, this has led to prioritize dealing with large scale drug production and trafficking by establishing the "coffee-shop policy" and tolerance of minor scale narcotic consumption; it has also led to the authorities abandoning actions against businesses that sell soft drugs without the correct license. The constitution and laws are widely accepted, although enforcement has been resisted in urban "autonomous zones" and "no-go" areas, and the presence of international criminal groups as the Hells Angels test the authority of Dutch laws. Public officials and civil servants are fully subjected to constitutional requirements, while the independence of the judiciary authority is

ensured and its management depends on the [Council for the Judiciary](#). Legislation guarantees equal access to justice, and the use of dispute resolution mechanisms are widespread. The right to a fair trial and impartial treatment is fundamental in the Netherlands, and there are several mechanisms supervising the compliance with this principle. However, during the last few years there have been increasing complaints against the Dutch courts in the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECHR), particularly concerning restrictions on civil rights within the framework of combating terrorism. On the other hand, the practice used by the courts of committing criminal offenders to psychiatric clinics for enforced treatment has seen errors committed that are contrary to protecting individual rights. Nonetheless, notwithstanding some major errors by the public prosecutor's office, surveys indicate that 60 to 65% of the respondents have a good degree of confidence in the judiciary and judges. To further improve the fairness of the system, a commission to review closed criminal cases has been operating for the past few years and reports directly to the Attorney General.

Fundamental Rights

According to statistical reports and surveys conducted during the 2002-05, property crime and violent crime decreased by 9.3% and 10.8% respectively, while the percentage of citizens who felt unsafe decreased from 30.8% to 24%. Freedom of movement is not legislated and is implicitly assumed, exceptions being the admission and expulsion of aliens, and extradition processes. On this question, asylum policies were reformed in 2003 in order to discourage unfounded applications, resulting in sharp decrease of submitted applications and faster decision times. Freedom of speech is legally based in the Constitution, the ECHR and ICCPR, and it is only restricted in cases of hate and incite to violence, or when needlessly injurious. Surveys indicate that 70% of the respondents hold freedom of speech to be important than social and economic rights or equal treatment. However, registered instances of threat and the use of violence against freedom of speech have increased during the last few years, most notably demonstrated by the assassinations of the politician, Pim Fortuyn (2002), and film maker, Theo van Gogh (2004). Rights of association and to demonstrate are also protected constitutionally, and are limited only in the interests of public order. The freedom to practice religion, or protect one's own language and culture is grounded in several treaties and the Constitution. However, anti-Semitic manifestations are relatively frequent, and there is an ongoing discussion on whether freedom of religion and expression of culture has not gone too far as to increase social inequality. Various organizations deal with human rights in the Netherlands, including the [Data Protection Authority](#), the Equal Treatment Commission, the [National Ombudsman](#), and the [Netherlands Helsinki Committee](#). This has prompted the creation of a national human rights institute.

Economic and Social Rights

Although discrimination in the labour market is prohibited, certain social groups are underrepresented, especially women, ethnic minorities and youth. Citizens have the right to social security if they meet certain conditions including lawful residence. In this respect, ethnic minorities rely more on social security benefits than indigenous Dutch. Primary basic needs are guaranteed for the majority of the population; nevertheless, debt levels among low-income earners and support agencies like food banks have increased during the last few years. Medical insurance is compulsory for every citizen. Both abortion and euthanasia are legally regulated. The Netherlands has extensive legislation protecting health and safety at work, consumer rights and the environment. In this sense, the Dutch record is better than the general European level: in 2005, the percentage of accidents causing physical injury amounted to 4.5%, lower than the European average of 5.4%. The right to free education is enshrined in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#). Primary and secondary education is compulsory: its observance is supervised by the municipal authorities, and civic education is provided in both cycles. In 2004, 65% of citizens between 15 and 64 years had completed higher secondary education, and the gap between men and women, and between indigenous and non-indigenous Dutch, is decreasing. Employees have the right to join unions, and the government promotes deliberations between employers and employees, offering space for collective agreements. Through the SER, employees and employers advise the Cabinet and the Parliament on the outlines of socio-economic

policy. Trade unions have to fulfil requirements of internal democracy, efficiency and effectiveness; however, there can exist a very wide distance between members and union officials. Union membership has decreased since the 1980's: in 2003, 25.6% of the working population was member of a union, and young workers' participation in unions has sharply decreased during the last 20 years. In spite of this, 85% of the total work force is represented by trade unions on labour condition regulations and, due to existing legislation, collective agreements have not lost importance. In 2003, a [Corporate Governance Code](#) was drafted at government instigation, and has achieved wide acceptance despite having no legal status. Market hindering activities are investigated by the [Netherlands Competition Authority](#) and the [Netherlands Authority for the Financial Markets](#).

Representative and Accountable Government

Free and Fair Elections

The government and the bicameral Parliament comprise the legislative power of the Netherlands. The government is formed by the King (the Monarch) and the ministers according to the Constitution; Article 41.1. Parliamentary elections frequently lead to different compositions of the governing coalition. The legislature is elected by all Dutch citizens, who are at least 18 years old on the day of the election, whether they reside in the Netherlands or abroad. Every Dutch citizen is eligible for appointment to the public service, and to vote or be elected to office. The voter rolls are administered by the [Municipal Database of Personal Records](#). Registration is permanent, except for those residing outside the Netherlands who have to register themselves in the Municipality of The Hague before the elections. Irregularities and abuse are rare. The [Electoral Council](#) is an independent administrative body that acts as the central polling station for the Legislative and European Parliament elections; it also acts as an advisory body to government and the parliament in suffrage and electoral issues. There are few impediments to register candidates and parties, while incumbent parties do not have to satisfy conditions to register their candidates. Parties that field candidates in all constituencies, or those who won one or more seats in the previous elections, have access to radio and TV broadcast time made available by the [Dutch Media Authority](#). However, it is the media that decide how much attention will be devoted to old or new candidates and parties, leading to a mutual dependence between career politicians and professional journalists. The [proportional representation list](#) system is used to elect every representative body: This allows a very close representation of the electorate, but it also gives increased power to party elites. Although voting has been voluntary since 1970, [turnout rates](#) for parliamentary elections fluctuate at around 80%, while municipal, provincial and European parliament turnout rates are considerably lower. Election results are deemed legitimate and accepted by all.

The Democratic Role of Political Parties

Although there are no statutory regulations on the internal organization of political parties, other codes and laws establish the requirements of internal democracy. In general, the system simultaneously attempts to facilitate the formation of political parties and to stimulate participation in elections on the one hand, while regulating this participation in order to ensure only serious parties will actually run for office. In order to obtain registration a party must have a charter of the association, be registered in the commercial register, and not be in conflict with public order. There are also some requirements that restrict participation in a parliamentary elections: besides presenting written statements of support from voters, each candidate must place a deposit that gets refunded only if the party wins more than 75% of a quota. Subsidy mechanisms are secured for those parties that attain one or more seats in Parliament. These public funds must be allocated to political formation and education, membership activity, campaigning activities and establishing international contacts. In 2000, membership contributions accounted for 46.4% of total party incomes and state subsidies composed 26%, while only 4.8% of these incomes came from private donations. Moreover, every private donation exceeding €4,537 must be disclosed. Campaigning is regulated at the municipal level, while at the national level it is limited by the availability of financial resources and access to the media. Campaign expenditures increased by 38% between 1998 and 2002 but are still lower than international standards. Statistics show that the older major parties have lost almost 50% of their membership over the last 30 years, while opposition parties have increased their membership considerably. Since the introduction of general suffrage, no party has been able to gain a majority of the House of Representatives, and cabinets are determined by the parties after a rather long period of negotiation and consultation. Since 1981, only 4 parties – [CDA](#), [D66](#), [PvdA](#), and [VVD](#)- have formed government, the average lifespan of a cabinet being almost three years. Opposition parties, on the other hand, can hold the cabinet accountable. In this sense the use of parliamentary procedures has increased drastically during the last few years: the opposition parties have posed most of the registered parliamentary questions and submitted almost 60% of the total bill proposals since 1945. However, the origin of a bill is very important: government parties have been able to enact their own bills four out of nine times, while opposition parties are able to secure less than a quarter of their proposed bills, and more than half of the bills proposed by government and opposition parties together have been enacted. The electoral laws establish parliamentary factions, not political parties, as the major legislative actors. These factions are composed by partisan or non-partisan MPs and may have their own internal regulations. In spite of this, floor-crossing is very rare and faction cohesion has increased during the last 30 years. Moreover, the number of splinter groups is relatively low, and the chances for dissident MPs being re-elected are very limited. In general, parties in the Netherlands take its main decisions through general conferences or meetings of members. Nevertheless, due to declining membership and confidence in political parties, calls for more internal democracy and direct involvement of party members in candidate selection have been made. Different ethnic, cultural, religious and class backgrounds are all represented in the Dutch party system.

Funding and form

Fully funded by the government, the assessment process and the report was coordinated in 2006 by the [Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations](#).

This report is intended as a preliminary study to assist in policy-making options for the next cabinet. It derives from the analysis of regulations, statistics, expert opinions and public information.

Furthermore, it was planned to be a complement to the results of the Citizen's Forum and the National Convention.

The assessment team collected recommendations and contributions from different actors in the public, private and civil society spheres. A website [Onze Democratie](#) was created in order to allow citizens to contribute to the process.

Effectiveness and Public Accountability by the Executive

During the last few years the Dutch government's available resources and public sector workforce have decreased due to the corporatization of several public services. Downsizing and administrative

reforms of the public service have been implemented since the Balkenende II government (2003-06). This has involved both territorial and functional decentralization, particularly through the creation of independent, non-departmental public agencies. Although effectiveness has increased, there have been increasing criticisms regarding the lack of clarity and accountability of these agencies. As for control of the administrative apparatus, there is no direct contact between the houses of the Parliament and the civil service: it is responsibility of the respective Minister to inform the Houses and to respond to questioning about policies. Despite this limitation on the influence of politicians over the civil service, there appears to be both an amalgamation and competition between politics and the administration. In this sense, a lack of capacity of both MPs and civil servants has led the former to meddle in administrative issues, and the latter to withhold crucial information. Public confidence in the effectiveness of the Executive is low when compared to other public institutions. In 2005, confidence in the Balkenende II cabinet barely reached 15%, although it rose to 26% during the following year, while public confidence in the judiciary, the police and military have oscillated between 55% and 70%. Besides the right to submit motions and amendments, to decide on the budget and perform enquiries, the Parliament has two other mechanisms of control over the executive: the rule of ministerial accountability, and the rule of confidence. Yet these both have their particular problems. According to several reports, between 15- 20% of the parliamentary questions are not related to the control of the Government and pertain to other issues, while 35% of the civil servants interviewed responded that parliamentary questions are not always responded to in full. On the other hand, the fact that MPs vote too much along coalition lines also hinders the capacity to exercise control over the executive. The existence of advisory political committees whose chairpersons and members are party-appointed, usually by the major governing parties, and have strong ties with business interests, is also seen as an impairment to public accountability. Although open government acts and provisions are in place, statistics show that out of 1,000 annual requests for disclosure of public information, only 15% succeed. The lack of legal understanding and formal procedures surrounding this process together with slow response times by civil servants explain the lack of effectiveness of this mechanism.

Civilian Control of the Military, Police and Security Services

The military comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence, and unlimited parliamentary control over the military is possible. The Government, as commander-in-chief, decides on the execution of international operations, while the Parliament must be informed beforehand, and the House of Representatives has the right to vote on any mobilization. The [Netherlands Defence Doctrine](#) contains the fundamental guidelines for the execution of military operations which are limited to: the protection of the territorial areas of the Netherlands; the contribution to restore, maintain and promote international rule of law; and to support civil authorities in matters of accidents and disasters. In 2001, only 8.4% of all military personnel were female, and most of them were employed under the rank of major. However the first female officer was promoted to brigadier general in 2005. Policies have been enforced to ensure ethnic minorities are represented in the Defence forces, and these comprise almost 8% of personnel. The [National Police Services Agency](#) (KLPD) is under the general responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, and the activities of public order maintenance are administered by municipal mayors both at the local and regional level. However, this regional autonomy has not improved efficiency, and the municipal councils have little effective power over regional policy. The composition of the different police forces has become more inclusive for women and ethnic minorities, although cases of discrimination in promotion are still registered. The [General Intelligence and Security Service](#) (AIVD) comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. As of 2004, the leaders of all parties in the House of Representatives became able to exercise control over the AIVD. The [National Anti-Terrorism Coordinator](#), under the responsibility of the Ministries of Justice and Interior and Kingdom Relations, is in charge of putting together the more than 20 institutions dealing with terrorism in the Netherlands –including the police and the AIVD.

The Eradication of Corruption

Since 1992, integrity policies have been prioritized and successive Dutch governments have put forward several policies and measures in this regard. According to the [Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index](#), the Netherlands dropped from the 7th place in 2002 to the 11th place in 2005 as one of the least corrupt countries in the world. However, the frequency of corruption investigations has not increased significantly. These investigations are more frequent at the municipal level. Other actions, such as palm greasing, buddy politics and conflict of interest, occur more frequently than concrete indications of corruption. Perception studies indicate that Dutch citizens think that, in average, 12% of the members of government and the House of Representatives and 17% of national civil servants are corrupt, while 18% of the provincial and municipal politicians and civil servants would be seen to be corrupt. On the other hand, the links between corporate world, civil society and public sector have been historically strong in the Netherlands: this has been the basis for the *polder model* and the widespread insistence on consultation for decision making. In general, business representatives seek more to influence policy at the departmental level, than through the House of Representatives. Whistleblowers in the private sector have protection measures drafted by the [Labour Foundation](#). The Netherlands Competition Authority also protects anonymity and, in cooperation with the [Stichting Meld Misdaad Anoniem](#), receives anonymous phone calls passing information on corruption and crimes. Although there are no reliable statistics, some corruption cases have received media attention. Amongst them, the arrangement between private construction companies to divide amongst themselves government-awarded major projects, implying extensive shadow-bookkeeping.

Civil Society and Popular Participation

The Media in a Democratic Society

Media independence in the Netherlands is not under threat. The country has been considered for several years to top worldwide freedom of press by [Reporters Sans Frontières](#). In this sense, freedom of speech is enshrined and all social groups are guaranteed access to public broadcast. However, the murder of Theo van Gogh and incidents between journalists and the courts regarding the disclosure of material have produced public debate during the last few years. On the other hand, despite existing regulations to protect privacy, the redressing mechanisms are not very effective: 77% of the population considers that personal privacy is under threat. The Dutch Media Authority is in charge of ensuring compliance with established media regulations, and guaranteeing equal access to media, quality, diversity and independence. Public broadcasters are obliged to distribute their broadcasts between fixed percentages of information and education (35% minimum), culture and arts (25% minimum), and entertainment (25% maximum). The [NPS](#) has to meet higher percentages in culture and art broadcasting (40% and 20%, respectively), and has established minimums of programming for minorities (20% for television and 25% for radio programming). Public broadcasting must realise the goal of attaining a 33% market-share of television viewers. In this sense, there are restrictions on property and cross media ownership: commercial broadcasters are not allowed to own 33% of the daily newspaper market, while publishers controlling more than 50% of a regional newspaper cannot own any regional broadcasters in the same region unless there is a public regional or local broadcaster guaranteeing plurality of news supply in the area concerned. Studies show that the legislation hinders Dutch media competitiveness vis-à-vis foreign corporations: Dutch media have limited scope for action and expansion, while foreign -particularly European- media corporations can merge with Dutch media under the more favourable European jurisdiction. On the other hand, despite the media regulations, media concentration is high: in each sector, three major suppliers dominate between the 80% and 90% of the market. Moreover, even though 95% of the population consumes news from at least 66 different news titles, four of these together have 50% of the market share. The political leaning of journalists also does not appear to affect the coverage of news: although most journalists declare themselves leftist or centre-leftist, research also indicates that coverage is dominated by the ruling coalition. Parliamentary work is also determined significantly by the media: at least 30% of the parliamentary discussions and questions are generated by news events. On the other hand, during the last 10 years the government has worked towards providing infrastructure and necessary skills to ensure Internet access. As a result, 83% of the population had Internet access in 2005, compared to 3% in 1995.

Public Participation

Civil society organizations are regulated. The government is not involved in the actions of CSOs unless they are indicted by the courts. According to studies, social and political participation in the Netherlands has increased during the last 30 years, particularly through membership of sport clubs, nature, environmental, and international aid organizations. On the other hand, membership of political parties, churches and broadcasters has decreased. Participation of ethnic minorities is considerably lower than that of indigenous Dutch, except relating to religious organizations. Legal provisions establish equality of access and participation for women in politics and public life. In this sense, 46% of the public administration is composed of women, although the proportion varies according to the sector. Moreover, 51% of volunteer workers in the Netherlands are women, particularly at schools and healthcare centres. Yet, equal political participation faces obstacles related to cultural and employment conditions. This has led the establishment of goals for increasing women's participation, which have been recommended to political parties. As a result, the establishment of [voluntary quotas](#) has allowed women to make up 40% of the Cabinet and 39% of the House of Representatives, and higher levels of representation have also been achieved in decision making positions. However, representation at the provincial and municipal levels, as well as in management and mid-level offices, is significantly lower. Failure to comply with gender equality provisions led the state to cut subsidies to the [Reformed Political Party](#) in 2006. During the last few years, government focus has also been placed on the low levels of ethnic minority representation. The main reasons explaining this low participation are a) institutional discrimination, b) candidate selection mechanisms and ideological orientations within political parties, and c) the absence of governmental campaigns stimulating participation. Government programmes tackling these issues have allowed ethnic minority participation in the public service to increase from 8.4% to 9.3%, as well as the number of municipal councillors. However progress is limited: increased participation is seen mostly in major cities, and out of 800 executive civil servants, barely three come from an ethnic minority.

Responsive Government

Citizens have the right to submit written requests to government authorities, and free access to government information is guaranteed. Since 2006, citizens can also submit initiatives to the House of Representatives. The Government has also sought to improve its services and information provision, particularly through e-government initiatives, while the National Ombudsman and the Committees for Petitions of the Senate and the House of Representatives give citizens the opportunity to insist on unattended complaints. Despite representatives being easily accessible, barely 5% of the Dutch electorate has occasional contact with a member of the House. Quality charters stating mission, goals and services provided are established for every government agency in contact with citizens, and several of these have been drafted in consultation with citizens and social organizations. Satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands has increased since the mid 1980's from 52% to 80% of the population. However, according to government-sponsored studies, in 2003 over 80% of citizens thought that the government did not fulfil their expectations, while accessibility to central and local governments was deemed insufficient by 74% and 61% of the respondents respectively. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents considered that citizens are hardly or not at all involved in policy making.

Decentralization

The Netherlands is a unitary decentralized state with a three-tiered administration formed by a) the central government, composed of Ministries, High Councils of State, advisory bodies and non-departmental public bodies; b) the regional level, composed of the provinces and water boards; and c) the local level composed of the municipalities. Since the 1980's, central governments have transferred important tasks to municipalities and provinces, including spatial planning, welfare sector, work and income, and care for disabled citizens. Provinces and municipalities have autonomous authorities, although these must enforce rules imposed by higher organs, and can be

subject to supervision by law. Elections are held every 4 years for provincial parliaments, water boards and municipal councils. The Monarch appoints Mayors and Commissioners, who preside over municipal and provincial executives respectively. Provincial authorities are in charge of dealing with spatial planning, water and the environment, economy, nature and landscape, and welfare and culture issues. The municipalities and provinces receive the bulk of their budget from the central government, and both organs can also receive revenue by collecting dues and taxes. Administration of water management and infrastructure is run by water boards, which depend on the provincial authorities. The municipalities are responsible for providing a habitable environment and welfare to the citizens, as well as executing laws and regulations at the local level. Municipal council, provincial parliament and other meetings are open to the public, and citizens usually have a voice in these meetings. Moreover, since 2002, citizens have the opportunity to submit requests for advisory referendums in all municipalities. However, at the provincial level, permanent committees, including concurrent stakeholders, can be established: this practice has led to bypass parliamentary meetings in the decision making process. There is a long lasting tradition of collaboration between local governments and private partners: for instance, in healthcare municipalities execute the direction while the actual implementation is left to various private and quasi-government organizations, such as the Municipal Health Services, home nursing organizations, and homecare institutions.

Democracy Beyond the State

The International Dimension of Democracy

According to the 2005 [Globalisation Index](#), the Netherlands was the 5th most globalized country in the world, particularly in economic and political terms. Despite significant economic dependency on the EU, there is apparently little interest towards it by Dutch citizens. This is shown by the [turnout rates](#) for European Parliament elections, which are considerably lower than national and municipal rates. Studies indicate that Dutch politics is not sufficiently engaged in policy preparation at the European level, while Dutch Parliament has little control over the contributions of ministers and civil servants in Brussels. Thus, the EU ends being used by Dutch politicians as justification for difficult policy choices. On the other hand, the characteristics of the EU bureaucracy, particularly the *lobbyocracy* and dominance of business interests, appear to scare away Dutch citizens. The Netherlands is represented directly or indirectly in the governing bodies of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the UN system, and other major international organizations. This is reflected in the monetary contribution provided by the Netherlands to 129 international organs, amounting to €1.14 billion. However, despite complying with standards of accountability and transparency, the effectiveness of this spending has been questioned by the Court of Audit of the Netherlands. The Netherlands is signatory to the major human rights treaties and is an active promoter of international law and human rights, participating in major multilateral fora (UN; EU; [Council of Europe](#)). The 2000 Aliens Act regulates access and residence in the Netherlands, and was devised to filter out inadmissible applications in order to limit long term uncertainty of asylum applicants. However, this legislation has been criticised for precluding the consideration of complex cases, and limiting the time and space for assistance with the application procedures. Moreover, this act has been questioned by the ECHR, the Council of Europe, the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#), amongst others, in regards to repatriation policies, repeated violations of the right to family life and a lethal fire at the asylum seeker's centre at Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.

Links

Brief (Dutch):

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2007/07/27/de-staat-van-onze-democratie-2006/briefaanmaatschappelijkeorganisaties.pdf>

Full report (Dutch):

<http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/bestanden/documenten-en-publicaties/rapporten/2007/07/27/de-staat-van-onze-democratie-2006/rapport-destaatvanonzedemocratie2006-definitief-5.pdf>

Full report (English):

<http://www.sod.idea.int/files/DutchSoDEN.pdf>

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