



Tweede Kamer

DER STATEN-GENERAAL



The House of Representatives at work



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Democracy in The Netherlands

The Dutch parliament is called “the States General” (Staten-Generaal in Dutch). It consists of two chambers: the Senate (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal) and the House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal). Once every four years the Dutch citizens entitled to vote, elect the people who will represent them in the House of Representatives, so the elections are the basis of the parliamentary democracy.

The members of the Senate and the House of Representatives represent the people of the Netherlands. But how do they know what their voters want? First of all, the voters express their political opinion by voting for a specific

political party. Once elected, the representatives of the people will make sure that they remain well informed about what is going on in society, by paying working visits, doing work placements and conducting surveys and hearings. Moreover, they deliver lectures and take part in discussions. Many political parties have set up think tanks, where the Members of the House of Representatives (MPs) can debate issues with scholars, scientists and experts.

The House of Representatives

The main duties of the House of Representatives are co-legislation and checking that the Government carries out its work properly. The House of Representatives also plays an important role in policy-making. MPs are elected directly by the Dutch voters. In national general elections those people entitled to vote decide which 150 MPs will represent them during the next term.

Members' rights

MPs have certain rights in order to carry out their duties as well as they can. For instance, they have the right to amend bills proposed by the Government or to propose bills themselves. They can ask the government to take action on a certain issue, or they can give their opinion on the policies of the Government. MPs have the right to ask questions of the members of the cabinet and to call them to account.

The Senate

The Members of the Senate are elected indirectly, by the Members of the provincial councils. The latter are elected directly by the Dutch people. The main task of the Senate is co-legislation. A bill adopted by the House of Representatives must be approved by the Senate in order to become law. The Senate does not have the right to amend a bill, however; it can only adopt or reject it. Nor do Senators have the right to propose a bill.

The Government

The Government comprises the Queen and the ministers. The Queen is formally part of the Government, and she discusses state matters with the Prime Minister on a regular basis. However, the ministers are responsible for all acts of government; the Queen is inviolable.

The cabinet

The cabinet comprises the Prime Minister, the other ministers and the state secretaries. The cabinet formulates and is accountable for the Government's policies. The Prime Minister acts as president of the cabinet and chairs the weekly "Council of Ministers". During the formation of a cabinet it is determined which parties can work together to form a coalition. Subsequently, the leaders of these so-called coalition

parties negotiate a Coalition Agreement and the composition of the new cabinet. The so-called cabinet formateur, who is the intended Prime Minister, selects the other members of the cabinet. The members of the cabinet are officially appointed by the Queen.

Coalition versus opposition

In the Netherlands, at least two political parties are needed to form a cabinet that is supported by a workable majority in parliament. The political parties that make up the cabinet are called coalition parties. Parties that are not included in the cabinet are called opposition parties. They can be said to oppose the coalition parties. The opposition parties do not support the cabinet at all, or only partially. They would prefer a cabinet of a different composition and a different Coalition Agreement. The opposition often tries to block or amend the Government's proposals. Coalition parties should adopt a critical attitude towards the Government, but they are more likely to support the cabinet's policies than reject them.



The House of Representatives at work

The work of MPs largely consists of attending meetings and voting on political issues.

These activities are preceded by the necessary preparations, such as the close examination of documents, working visits, opportunities for the public to make their opinions heard, consultations with the voters and the general public.

The plenary sitting

The plenary meeting or sitting is held in the Plenary Hall. A plenary meeting can be held if at least 76 MPs (half plus one of the total of 150) are present in the building of the House of Representatives. A lot of work is done in committee meetings, but important issues are almost always dealt with in plenary sittings, for

instance general (political or financial) considerations, debates about important topical issues and the deliberations on bills and budgets. Final decision-making also takes place in plenary sittings, e.g. voting on bills, amendments and motions. The House of Representatives follows an agenda that is drawn up several times a week during the so-called “arrangement of business”.

Committee meetings

Specialist issues are dealt with by standing committees. MPs who specialize in the subject concerned discuss the Government’s policy in this field with a minister or state secretary in a committee meeting. Most committee meetings are held to discuss general policy issues. MPs ask questions, and the member of the cabinet replies. Policy documents and bills can also be discussed in committee meetings.

Committee meetings on policy documents and bills “unburden” the plenary meetings. In a

committee meeting, all kind of specialist and technical aspects can be dealt with in detail, so that in the plenary meeting only the headlines still have to be discussed.

Joint sitting

A combined meeting of both chambers of the States General is called a “Joint Sitting”. The President of the Senate chairs Joint Sittings. A Joint Sitting is held at the State Opening of parliament, for instance, every year on the third Tuesday in September.

President

The President of the House of Representatives chairs the plenary meetings. MPs and ministers of the cabinet may not address each other directly, but have to speak through the chair. If the President is absent, she is replaced by one of the deputy-Presidents.

The debate

Debates are held according to an established pattern. First, the floor is given to the spokespersons from the political groups in the House of Representatives. The minister or state secretary replies. This is called the first stage. In most cases, not all the questions will have been answered yet and the first stage is therefore followed by a second stage in which the MPs are given the floor again, and the member of the cabinet replies. If questions remain which have not been answered satisfactorily, a third stage may follow. During meetings, MPs enter into debate with ministers and state secretaries and if necessary with each other. However, they address the President of the House, not each other directly. Speakers may interrupt one another's speeches and pose thorny questions, the so-called interruptions. In the Plenary Hall MPs can use the interruption microphones opposite the

rostrum. Speaking time is limited beforehand, but does not include interruptions and answers to interruptions. This means that a debate can continue for a long time.

Voting

The House of Representatives takes decisions by voting. There are three methods of voting, namely by show of hands (by political group), by roll call or by secret ballot. In the case of voting by show of hands, the President of the House presumes that MPs are voting on behalf of their political group. Because every vote matters, it is important that as many MPs as possible attend the plenary sitting for voting. That is why the President of the House rings a bell that can be heard throughout the building before the voting begins. The items to be voted on are tabled on the voting list, which is published in advance.

Transparency

The meetings of the House of Representatives are almost always public. All public meetings are recorded. The public can attend meetings in the public gallery or follow them live at www.tweedekamer.nl.



Rights and duties

The House of Representatives has two main duties: co-legislation and scrutinising the work of the Government. The Constitution attributes a set of specific rights to MPs, so as to enable them to execute their tasks properly.

The right to approve or reject the Government's budget

Government budgets are laid down by Act of Parliament. The House of Representatives has the right to adopt, amend or reject budget bills, and authorizes the cabinet to spend money, to assume obligations and to raise revenues. The House also monitors the implementation of the Government's budget and calls ministers to account.

The right to amend bills

Bills are normally introduced to the House of Representatives by the Government. They need parliament's approval. The members of the House of Representatives have the right to propose changes to a proposal for a new law. This is called the right of amendment. If an amendment is adopted by the House it becomes part of the bill.

The right to propose bills

MPs may request the Government to draft a bill, but sometimes the Government is not willing to do so. In such cases one or more MPs can take the initiative to draft a bill. This is called an initiative bill. Assistance in drafting the bill is provided by the Legislation Office of the House of Representatives or by officials from the Government Department in question.

The right to question the cabinet

Ministers and state secretaries are obliged to provide the House of Representatives with the necessary information, so as to enable them to scrutinise the work of the Government properly. MPs have the right to ask parliamentary questions (written questions or oral questions during question time), which have to be answered by the Government.

The right to propose motions

By motion MPs can ask the government to take action on a certain issue, or they can give their opinion on the policies of the Government. Parliament can withdraw its confidence in a minister, a state secretary or the whole cabinet, by adopting a motion of no-confidence.

The right of inquiry

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate have the right to carry out a parliamentary enquiry, although the Senate rarely makes use of this right. When the House of Representatives decides to carry out a parliamentary inquiry, a temporary committee is set up. The enquiry committee holds hearings, in which witnesses can be questioned under oath. After the hearings the committee draws up a report, which is discussed in a plenary debate in the House.

The right to carry out one's mandate

MPs have an absolute right to carry out their mandate. They cannot be discharged from their function on the grounds of their way of acting, neither by the voters, nor by their political party, the Government, or the House of Representatives. They are independent and immune, which means that they are not accountable to anyone. They may not be prosecuted or otherwise held liable in law for anything they say during the

sittings of the States General or of its committees or for anything they submit to them in writing. However, in case of malfeasance they can be prosecuted and put on trial before the Supreme Court of the Netherlands. If they cause disturbances, e.g. by their language or their statements, disciplinary measures may follow, such as a warning, the order to yield the floor or even exclusion from attending the meeting.



How a bill becomes law

Sometimes new laws are needed to ensure that society and the economy keep running smoothly. It is one of the major duties of parliament to make new laws, in cooperation with the Government.

European directives

The European Union makes rules, too. These are laid down in so-called directives. The Dutch Government is held to incorporate European directives in Dutch legislation. The Government and the House of Representatives can exercise little influence on the content of laws of this kind, because all the EU member states have to comply with the European directives.

Bills

When a minister or a state secretary would like to lay down rules in legislation, they have their

department officials draft a bill. Subsequently, the bill is discussed in the Council of Ministers and then submitted for advice to the Council of State. MPs may request the Government to draft a bill, but if the Government is not willing to do so, one or more MPs can take the initiative to draft a bill. This is called an initiative bill.

Advice from the Council of State

If the ministers agree on the draft bill, it is submitted for advice to the Council of State, the major advisory body to the Government. The Council of State checks the draft bill against contravention of other laws or treaties and examines its impact on the citizens. The drafter of a bill does not need to follow the advice of the Council of State, but will do so in many cases and amend the text. The Council of State also advises on initiative bills presented by MPs. A draft bill is confidential as long as it is under consideration by the Council of State.

Royal Message

The government bill, together with the advice from the Council of State, is submitted to the House of Representatives by Her Majesty the Queen, accompanied by the so-called Royal Message. The bill is then made public.

Standing Committee: preparatory examination

The bill and the accompanying advice from the Council of State are first examined by a standing committee of the House of Representatives. All political groups can propose changes to the bill, make remarks and pose questions.

A standing committee may ask experts and stakeholders from society to comment on controversial plans.

Plenary debate: amending and adopting

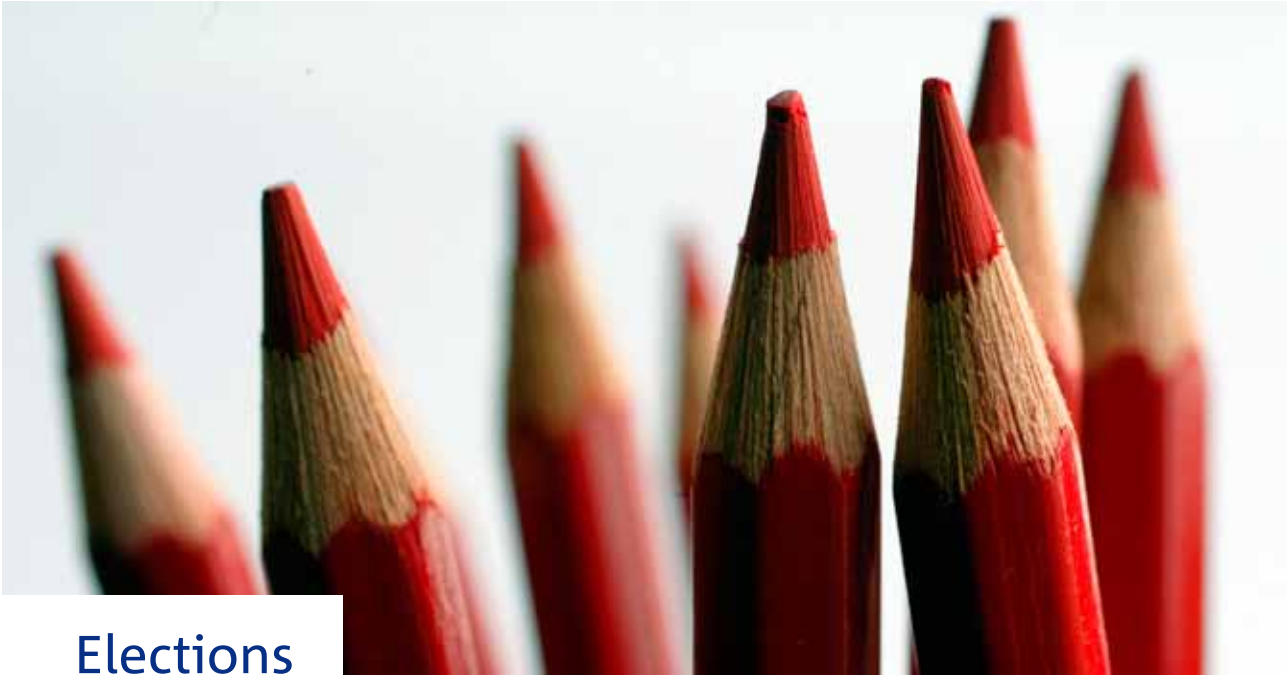
After consideration by a standing committee the bill is defended in a plenary meeting of the House by those who proposed it: usually the Member(s) of the cabinet in charge, but sometimes one or more MPs (initiative bill). In the debate about the bill, the various parties try to convince one another of their respective views. If MPs only partly agree with a bill, they can propose changes to it, which are called amendments. After consideration of the bill in the plenary meeting, MPs will vote on the amendments and the bill itself.

Senate: yes or no?

After a bill has been adopted by the House of Representatives it is submitted to the Senate. The Senate examines and discusses the bill in great detail and may only adopt or reject it. The Senate does not have the right to propose amendments.

The new law comes into force

Once a bill has also been adopted by the Senate, the Queen will sign it and the minister in charge will countersign it. The bill has now become an Act of Parliament. It is not the Queen, but the minister who is responsible for its contents. Finally, the Minister of Security and Justice signs the new law and publishes it in the Bulletin of Acts and Decrees, the official Government Gazette. The new Act of Parliament has now come into force.



Elections

General elections for the House of Representatives are held at least every four years.

Universal suffrage was introduced in the Netherlands in 1919. Every Dutch national aged 18 or over now has the right to vote, as well as the right to stand for election as a member of the House of Representatives.

The Constitution grants every Dutch citizen these rights.

Political parties

Most people who want to become MPs will join one of the existing political parties. A political party is a group of people who have roughly the same ideas about how to rule the country, for instance ideas about what is best for the environment or for education.

Campaigning

Shortly before the elections, political parties will unveil their plans in their party manifestos. Politicians take to the streets to discuss their goals with citizens. Throughout the election campaign they seek publicity for their party. They explain what their party wants and how they intend to achieve their goals. Political leaders enter into debate with each other in the media.

Voting

On polling day, all Dutch nationals aged 18 or over may cast their vote for a candidate on the candidate list. By casting their vote, people make known which party they want to gain seats in parliament and perhaps also in the cabinet. Polling stations open at 7.30 am and close at 9 pm.

Election results

After the closure of the polling stations at 9 pm the votes are counted. The Central Electoral Office in The Hague gathers all the local polling results, adds them up and determines the overall result of the election. Subsequently, the number of seats to be awarded to each party is determined. Candidates who have obtained a number of so-called preference votes exceeding 25% of the electoral quota are elected in the order of the number of votes cast for them. In actual practice, most votes are cast in favour of the person heading the list of candidates, with only a limited number of candidates obtaining the required number of preference votes. Most MPs owe their seats to their position on the candidate list.

New members of the House of Representatives

After the elections, the chairperson of the Central Electoral Office officially notifies the newly elected members of the House of Representatives of their appointment. Subsequently, they must make known if they accept their appointment and send in their credentials. The committee on the Examination of the Credentials of the House of Representatives, composed of “sitting” members of the House, examines every appointee’s credentials. On the basis of the reports issued by the polling stations, the committee also examines whether the elections were conducted properly.

The swearing in of Members of the House of Representatives

The chairperson of the committee on the Examination of the Credentials reports on the examination of the credentials of the newly elected MPs in the last sitting of the “old” House. In the next sitting all the newly elected MPs are sworn in by the President of the House. MPs who are

appointed in the course of a parliamentary session must also send in their credentials. They are sworn in at the beginning of the next sitting of the House.

The oath or affirmation

At the swearing-in ceremony in the House of Representatives every MP has to take the oath or the affirmation:

“I swear (declare) that in order to be appointed member of the States-General, I have not promised or given, directly or indirectly, any gifts or presents to any person under any name or pretext whatsoever.

I swear (declare and affirm) that in order to do or refrain from doing anything whatsoever in this office, I have not accepted and will not accept, directly or indirectly, any promises or presents from anyone whomsoever.

I swear (affirm) allegiance to the King, to the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands and to the Constitution.

I swear (affirm) that I will faithfully perform all the duties which the office lays upon me.

So help me, Almighty God!
(This I declare and affirm!)”



Cabinet formation

The cabinet comprises the ministers and state secretaries. After the elections a new cabinet has to be formed. Never in Dutch parliamentary history has a single party obtained more than half of the votes. Consequently, parties must cooperate and form a coalition cabinet with a workable majority in parliament.

The role of the Queen in the formation process

The day after the elections the Queen takes the initiative in the formation of a new cabinet. She seeks advice from the Presidents of the House of Representatives and the Senate, and from the Vice-President of the Council of State. Next, she receives the leaders of the political groups of the House of Representatives one by one, starting with the leader of the largest political group.

They discuss who can best form a cabinet with whom. The Queen then identifies what coalition is preferred by the majority of the House. In most cases she will first appoint a so-called informateur.

Political “rules of the game” with regard to the formation of a cabinet

The Constitution contains no rules on the formation of a cabinet; the formation process is largely based on common law and political rules of the game. The Constitution only contains regulations with regard to the beginning and the end of the formation process, namely the resignation of the old cabinet and the appointment of the new cabinet. There is no written constitutional law pertaining to the intervening period and the role of the Queen.

The formation process

It is the informateur’s task to explore the various options for a new cabinet. He examines which

parties are able and ready to form a new cabinet and any obstacles which have to be overcome. The informateur presents a report to the Queen on the formation of a cabinet that is likely to be successful. The House of Representatives may ask the informateur to explain aspects of his report in a debate in the House.

Coalition Agreement

The informateur negotiates with the coalition parties about the common goals and the key policy themes of the future cabinet. The coalition parties set out the arrangements in a so-called Coalition Agreement. The new cabinet has to implement concrete policy measures over the coming years, on the basis of the agreements set out in the Coalition Agreement.

The formateur

After the informateur has recommended a coalition and the key themes of the shared policies have been set out in the Coalition Agreement, the Queen appoints a cabinet formateur, who in most cases is the intended Prime Minister. He concludes the formation talks. The ministerial posts or “portfolios” are divided among the coalition parties on the basis of the number of seats they have in parliament. As a rule, the largest party provides the Prime Minister and the largest number of ministers.

The new cabinet

At the inauguration ceremony of a new cabinet the Queen first appoints and swears in the ministers. This is followed by the traditional photograph of the Queen and the ministers on the steps of Huis ten Bosch Palace. The Queen then immediately swears in the State Secretaries. The cabinet formation is now complete.

The Government’s Policy Statement

The new cabinet first draws up the Govern-

ment’s Policy Statement, stating the key themes of the Coalition Agreement. The Prime Minister delivers the Government’s Policy Statement in the House of Representatives. The same day, or in the next sitting, the House of Representatives holds a debate about the content of the Government’s Policy Statement.

The “confidence rule”

All ministers and the cabinet as a whole must have parliament’s confidence. Consequently, a minister, or the entire cabinet, must resign if a majority in parliament no longer has confidence in them. The House of Representatives can withdraw confidence, for example, by adopting a motion of no-confidence. In the event of an internal conflict, the cabinet will tender its resignation to the Queen, which is often followed by snap elections and the formation of a new cabinet.



Prince's day

The third Tuesday in September is “Prince’s Day” (Prinsjesdag) in the Netherlands.

On that day, in her capacity as Head of State, Queen Beatrix delivers the so-called “Queen’s Speech” (Troonrede) in the Hall of Knights in the Binnenhof in The Hague.

Subsequently, the Minister of Finance presents his famous “Third-Tuesday-of-September”-briefcase to the President of the House of Representatives. This briefcase contains the Budget Memorandum and the National Budget.

Prince’s Day is an important day in Dutch politics, as it marks the start of the parliamentary year. Her Majesty The Queen delivers her speech

before a joint meeting of both chambers of parliament in the Hall of Knights. The members of the cabinet and the Council of State, as well as a number of invited guests are in attendance. The President of the Senate chairs the joint meeting and opens proceedings with the phrase: “The joint meeting of the States General, as referred to in article 65 of the Constitution, is hereby opened”.

The Queen’s Speech

As Head of State, Her Majesty Queen Beatrix delivers her speech on behalf of the Dutch government. She presents a review of the state of affairs in the Netherlands and the government’s plans for the coming year. Queen Beatrix delivers the speech before the joint meeting of the States General, but she does not write it herself; the ministers do. Every minister makes a contribution in his or her field of policy and these are then compiled to form the speech. In the past, the Prime Minister himself did this, but

nowadays communication experts advise him to render the Queen's Speech more comprehensible to the public in the Netherlands.

The presentation of the National Budget and the Budget Memorandum

After the Queen's Speech and the traditional cheering of the monarch "Long live the Queen, hurray, hurray, hurray", Her Majesty the Queen leaves the Hall of Knights. The Members of the House of Representatives then make their way to the Plenary Hall of the House, where the minister of Finance presents his famous "Third-Tuesday-of-September"-briefcase, which contains the National Budget and the Budget Memorandum.

The National Budget consists of a number of proposals of law (bills), one for each ministry, with regard to national expenditure, obligations and national revenue for the coming year. The National Budget and the annual reports enable MPs to check whether the cabinet has put the taxpayers' money to good use. The budget bills relate to the budgetary year, which is concurrent with the calendar year and runs from January 1st to December 31st.

The Budget Memorandum is a policy document in which the government looks back over the last ten years and forward to the four years to come. This enables MPs to make a good assessment of the government's proposals. The Budget Memorandum is the financial translation of the Queen's Speech. It describes the current economic and financial situation of the Netherlands and the prospective developments in the Netherlands, in Europe and worldwide. It also describes the State's financial situation, the "public treasury". Budget Memorandum, therefore, is another term for Memorandum on the State's finances.



The National Budget

Government budgets are laid down by Act of Parliament. The House of Representatives has the right to adopt, amend or reject budget bills.

Parliament authorizes the cabinet to spend money, to assume obligations and to raise revenues. A general budget as well as specific budgets for each field of policy, such as health care, security and education, are laid down by Act of Parliament. A minister may spend less money, but is not allowed to overspend the budget. An additional bill must be passed by parliament to overspend a budget. The draft budgets of the respective government departments are presented in the form of budget bills. In autumn, both the House of Representatives and the Senate discuss these bills. They require parliament's approval, whether amended or

not. Some proposals are amended and adapted, others are rejected whilst some are adopted immediately without any modifications. Only the House of Representative has the right of amendment and can make changes to budget bills. The Senate does not have the right of amendment.

General debate

Before the cabinet can carry out its proposals, Parliament has to consider and approve them. That is why, after Prince's Day, the House of Representatives will set out to consider the National Budget and the Budget Memorandum and hold a debate about the impact of the proposals on Dutch society. This debate is called the general political debate.

All the ministers and state secretaries as well as all MPs are present when the general political debate is held. The Prime Minister speaks on behalf of the government and the leaders of each political group speak on behalf of their political

group. By means of a motion, MPs can make it clear that they do not agree with parts of the proposals, or add some elements.

The debate generally goes on for two days. It is thought of as a very important debate, because it pertains to what the government is going to do next year. The debate attracts a lot of media attention and is televised live during the daytime.

General financial debate

In October the House of Representatives holds a general financial debate, in which the financial experts of the various political groups represented in parliament discuss the National Budget with the Minister of Finance. In the next two months, each cabinet minister will defend his or her own budget bill in parliament. MPs have until the first of January to discuss the proposals. In general, the government and parliament will not fully agree with each other. That is why there are meetings and debates on the plans throughout the rest of the year.

The budget year

On January 1st the budget year begins, during which the government departments will implement their budgets. The House of Representatives monitors if the government is keeping its promises. Ministers and state secretaries must regularly come to the House to answer questions from MPs about their budget. In spring and autumn the Minister of Finance reports to the House on the progress made in government expenditure and revenue. The budget cycle spans three calendar years. Budgets must be prepared, implemented, balanced and accounted for. In one calendar year three budget cycles intermingle. Budget documents submitted to the House can relate to the past, current or next

year. The budget cycle is the most complicated in spring. In spring, for instance, the cabinet discuss the headlines of the National Budget for the following year. Meanwhile, the House of Representatives discusses the current budget (Spring Memorandum), as well as annual reports over the past year. The budget year expires on December 31st. Early in the following year the Government draws up an annual report, to be discussed by the House on Accountability Day in May.



Accountability day

On the third Wednesday of May, the Minister of Finance presents the central government's annual financial report to the House of Representatives - in a special briefcase, just like the National Budget and the Budget Memorandum are presented on Prince's Day. The annual report states what the government has achieved in the past year, what has been done and how much it has cost.

Accountability Day is the counterpart of Prince's Day. It is an important moment for parliament's scrutiny of the work of the Government. Accountability Day marks the end of the budget cycle, which started on Prince's Day 18 months earlier. Apart from the central government's overall financial report, the counterpart of the

Budget Memorandum, annual reports of each ministry are presented to the House. These reports state the achievements of the ministries, how these achievements fit in with the Government's policy and how much money has been spent on the activities. The Netherlands Court of Audit scrutinises the annual reports.

Desired policy goals

On Accountability Day the president of the Netherlands Court of Audit, too, presents a report to the House of Representatives, scrutinising the Government's policy over the past year: have the desired policy goals been achieved and did the cabinet observe the law? The Netherlands Court of Audit also reports on the annual reports of each ministry.

Accounting

Mid-June the House of Representatives holds a debate on the financial reports and the reports

of the Netherlands Court of Audit. MPs discuss with the ministers the implementation of the various policy programmes, as well as the results and costs. After the debate in the House, the Senate also discusses the annual reports, so the ministers must account to both chambers of the States General. That is why the third Wednesday in May is called Accountability Day.

Adjustment or change

On Accountability Day the government does not account for its plans for the current year, but for the previous year. In 2010, for instance, the government had to account for its plans presented on Prince's Day 2008 and implemented in 2009. Because the implementation of the plans is immediately evaluated in the following year, the cabinet can incorporate the comments made by the House of Representatives in the draft budget bill for the next year, and thus adjust or change its policy, if necessary.



The people's opinion matters

People can influence politics by expressing their opinion. By casting their vote, the Dutch have a say in how and by whom their country is run. After the elections, however, there are also several possibilities to influence and criticize decisions made by the government and parliament.

Getting in touch with MPs

MPs are the political representatives of the people. Anyone wishing to meet an MP or to express their views has several possibilities to approach them.

Once every four years the Dutch elect the people who will represent them in the House of Representatives. MPs are there for the people they represent. MPs are active all over the country. For instance, they regularly attend party

meetings in the country and they pay working visits. At such occasions, people have the opportunity to meet their MPs, but they can also write them a letter, make a phone call or send an e-mail. MPs frequently receive people in the House of Representatives. People who would like to meet an MP should make an appointment in advance.

Lobbying

People can join social organisations or movements who try to influence politics. Politicians will especially take into account the opinions of organizations that are largely supported by the people, such as trade unions, the farming sector or the Royal Dutch Touring Club ANWB. Some of these organisations are represented in official advisory bodies, which the government or parliament consult before taking a decision on a matter. Examples of such bodies are the Social and Economic Council (SER) or the

Education Council of the Netherlands. Lobbying is about the promotion of interests. Influence on legislation or policymaking can be exercised through lobbying. Some organisations or local government bodies employ a fulltime lobbyist, who is permanently present in the House of Representatives. Others hire a lobbyist from a lobbying agency.

Demonstrating and campaigning

People who want a certain social issue to get wide scale attention can hold a demonstration or mount a campaign. Many idealistic organisations and pressure groups, such as the environmental movement and the women's rights movement make their opinions heard by campaigning and demonstrating. They play an important role in democracy. Due to the activities of such organisations society has changed drastically in the past century.

Petitioning parliament

People who disagree with the government can present a petition, i.e. a political request, criticising the government's policy. A petition is often presented on behalf of a group of people, following a national campaign. The petition must state the policy measure or rule that the petitioners do not agree with, the objective they want to achieve and the names of the organizers. People who want to present a petition have to submit a written request to the House of Representatives. In the first sitting of the House the presentation of the petition is put on the list of incoming correspondence.

Citizens' Initiative

Citizens who would like their proposals to improve society to be examined by the House of Representatives can submit a so-called Citizens' Initiative. Every week the House of Representa-

tives discusses a multitude of topics put forward by its members or by the government. By means of a citizens' initiative, however, everyone can put an item on the agenda of the House. A citizens' initiative is an elaborated proposal, for instance to improve the environment, the educational system or public transport, to simplify a rule or even to do away with it. It contains a request to the House or Representatives to examine a proposal and to take a stand on it. It is more than a complaint and it is not a protest against a stand on a specific issue taken by the House recently. Every Dutch national aged 18 or over can submit a citizen's initiative, on their own or together with others. The request must clearly state the objective of the proposal and why and how to achieve this objective. For a proposal to be accepted for consideration it needs to be supported by at least 40.000 Dutch nationals aged 18 or over. The proposal must relate to an item that has not come up on the agenda of the House of Representatives over the last two years.

Colofon

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