



The Dutch consultation economy: ups & downs in times of crisis

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Dutch consultation economy



Long and strong tradition of social dialogue

Consultation and dialogue at three levels:

- **Company level:** work councils

- **Sector/company level:** 500 collective labour agreements

- **National level:** Social and Economic Council (SER)
 - Established in 1950
 - Advisory body to government and parliament
 - Three groups: employers, unions, independent experts
 - Often: involvement of other relevant groups
 - Broad agenda, but always with socio-economic angle
 - Divers 'products'
 - SER can foster (political) stability by 'creating common ground'

Consensus in times of crisis?



Grim circumstances

- Netherlands also hit hard by economic & financial crisis
- Austerity measures in several rounds, in total ca. 60 billion
- Towards a 'participation society' = not 'the end of welfare state'!
Continuous reform, step by step (as done many times before...)

Social dialogue in recent years

- Ups and downs ...
- ... but social dialogue never ceased



The roller coaster (1)

- ***Autumn 2008 – Spring 2009: immediate reaction to start of crisis***
 - Social pact

- ***Autumn 2009 – Spring 2010: failure, but no complete standstill***
 - No agreement in SER on state pension age (Sept 2009): big fight
 - Still social dialogue continues, SER concludes reports
 - Feb 2010: Fall of cabinet over course of action and austerity measures

- ***Summer 2010 – Spring 2012: recovery, but also internal struggle***
 - Pension Accord (June 2010), outline of reform pension system
 - Start new cabinet: right wing, minority in parliament (October 2010)
 - Further detailed Pension Accord (June 2011), schism within union
 - April 2012: additional austerity measures leads to fall of Cabinet

The roller coaster continued (2)

- **Summer 2012 – up to now: influential**
 - New cabinet, seeking cooperation with social partners (October 2012)

 - Social Accord (April 2013), agreement with cabinet on:
 - Reform of unemployment insurance
 - (Intersectoral) job-to-job facilities
 - Jobs for those with limitations
 - Reform dismissal law and flexible employment
 - Reform of pension system
 - On all these issues: close cooperation with social partners working out details. Still ongoing.

 - Energy Accord (September 2013)
 - 'Energiewende' in NL, with > 40 stakeholders, including government
 - SER facilitated the intensive negotiation process
 - SER now in monitoring role

Meanwhile at the social partners

- 2007-2014: internal clash biggest union (FNV) and repositioning
 - Fight for direction: activist vs moderate/consensus seeking
 - Contested mandate within confederation for national policies
 - 2010-12: Process of complete reform FNV, almost splitting up
 - Chairwoman had to resign; new chairman in 2012
- 2007-2014: employers gaining momentum
 - 2010-12 Easy access to right wing cabinet
 - Very reserved in taking up new issues/themes; employers wonder if their counterparts can deliver
 - But explicit choice to continue social dialogue (labour rest!)

Conclusion: conditions for success?

Strong social partners, with an ability to deliver
...wanting to work together, belief in the value of social dialogue ...
... political will to listen and seek advice ...
... and social acceptance / legitimacy

More process/culture than structure!

- respect for each others' position
- long-term orientation
(not just one-off deals)
- create an environment of mutual trust
- Invest in (personal) relations
- stick to agreements, commitment to longer-term agreements with other parties



The Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER)

As an advisory and consultative body of employers' representatives, union representatives and independent experts, the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) aims to help create social consensus on national and international socio-economic issues.



Go directly to:

- SER's responsibilities
- Members of the SER
- Working methods
- Mission statement
- Statutory trade organisation
- Corporate Body
- Councils worldwide
- Who is who
- Speeches SER President

Recent publications

- Make it in the Netherlands!
- Social and Economic Council: The Netherlands must do more to persuade foreign students to remain after graduating
- ICSR progress report (second half of 2012 and work programme 2013)
- Staff diversity
- Occupational health and safety system
- Acceptance speech by the president of the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands
- Social and Economic Council installs new president
- The shifting balance of economic power
- Alternative consumer dispute resolution in the EU
- Working on training: advisory report on the post-initial training market
- International Corporate Social Responsibility: Final Evaluation
- Provisional nano reference values for engineered nanomaterials

Other publications

- Work programme for 2013
- SER in a nutshell (PDF, 1245 kB)
- Annual Report 2012 (Abstract) (PDF, 285 kB)

ICSR: How can companies tackle due diligence



SER Knowledge Café with international students: Foreign talent is encountering obstacles

