

RMO recommendation 27  
The Netherlands Council for Social Development

Caring for Europe  
The Role of the Dutch Government

Caring for Europe  
The Role of the Dutch Government

Recommendation 27

The Hague, November 2003

The Netherlands Council for Social Development (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling: RMO) is an independent strategic advisory body. The Council advises the government on policy issues affecting participation and social stability. The RMO consists of nine independent crown members: Mr prof. dr. H.P.M. Adriaansens (chairman), Mrs Y. Koster-Dreese (vice-chairman), Mrs Ir. Z.S. Arda, Mrs. prof. dr. J. van Doorne-Huiskes, Mrs mr. D.A.T. van der Heem-Wagemakers, Mr drs. H.J. Kaiser, Mr prof. dr. W. van Voorden and Mr prof. dr. M. de Winter.

Mr dr. K.W.H. van Beek is the General Secretary of the Council

Parnassusplein 5  
Postbus 16139  
2500 BC Den Haag  
Tel. 070 340 52 94  
Fax 070 340 54 46  
rmo@adviesorgaan-rmo.nl  
[www.adviesorgaan-rmo.nl](http://www.adviesorgaan-rmo.nl)

All Rights reserved

© Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, Den Haag 2003

© SDU Uitgevers, Den Haag 2003

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

## Preface

The government of the Netherlands has asked the Netherlands Council for Social Development (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, RMO) to issue a report on the theme of 'tailoring European social policy' (see Appendix 1). In doing so the RMO has focused on the perspective of European citizenship, working from the principle that strengthening European citizenship - the active support and involvement of citizens in the European project - is a necessary condition for the further development of the European Union. The imminent enlargement of the EU increases the urgency of this goal.

The RMO will publish two reports on this issue. The main purpose of the present report is to set out the perspective taken by the RMO and to provide the government with a number of recommendations on how to involve the Dutch in the European Union. In this respect, the report reflects the intention expressed by the present government in its coalition agreement (Hoofdlijnenakkoord) to use the upcoming Dutch presidency of the EU to strengthen the sense of involvement in Europe of the Dutch citizen.

The second report, due for publication in the first half of 2004, will present the RMO's perspective in greater detail. The RMO will consider the prospects for a European social policy. Thereby, it will take into account the European Convention's proposal for a European constitution for the Union and the Intergovernmental Conference to be held on this subject.

In the course of producing this report we are pleased to acknowledge the contributions provided by external experts. The international Centre of the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn, NIZW) has carried out a quick scan of the efforts undertaken by the European Union and its Member States to involve citizens in the EU (see Appendix 2). By way of illustration, this study presents activities developed in six EU Member States and in the EU itself in recent years to get citizens more involved in Europe. Where possible, the effects achieved by these efforts are also described. In addition, a meeting was held at the end of June 2003 in which the report under development was discussed with a panel of experts. The list of experts consulted in the preparation of this report is included in Appendix 3 of the Dutch version.

The committee which prepared the report consists of:

Mr drs. H.J. Kaiser (council member)

Ms ir. Z.S. Arda (council member)

Ms mr. D.A.T. van der Heem-Wagemakers (council member)

Mr drs. F. Vos (external committee member)

Mr drs. J.Y.J. van Bemmelen (secretariat)

Mr drs. T. Schillemans (secretariat)

Responsibility for the report lies with the Council.

Mr prof. dr. H.P.M. Adriaansens

Mr dr. K.W.H. van Beek

Chairman Secretary

General Secretary

## Contents

Preface

1 Introduction and research question: Europe, familiar and indifferent

2 Urgency: the future of the welfare state and the democratic deficit

3 Point of departure: no citizenship without Europe, no Europe without citizenship

4 A closer look at involvement

5 Causes of the lack of involvement

6 Vision of the future: a relevant and concrete community of values

7 Proposals

8 In conclusion

List of published reports



## 1 Introduction and research question: Europe, familiar and indifferent

In 2001, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) likened Europe to a bicycle; unstable unless in motion (WRR 2001). This quote illustrates that the development of the EU, and support for it, can no longer be taken for granted. Generally speaking, Dutch citizens are aware of European matters and tend to be positive about Europe, at least when the warmth of their support is compared with that in other EU Member States (Eurostat 2003; SCP 2002). However, the ongoing progress in integration and institutional innovation of the Union mean nothing to most people. The enlargement of the Union is taking place in an atmosphere of permissive indifference. This lack of emotional involvement shows that Dutch citizens do not experience the EU as a collective symbol of identity (Schnabel 2002). Dutch citizens accept the EU, and appreciate the achievements associated with it (such as greater freedom of movement). But, their opinion of the Union does not really extend beyond this level. Generally, people do not have a clear idea of what they want the EU to be, or which issues deserve more or less priority (Dekker et al. 2002). The EU can be compared to going to the dentist: necessary and important, but not something to look forward to or feel happy about.

To an increasing extent, Dutch citizens and government have been turning their backs on Europe. For example, the issue of the European Convention has come and gone without leaving a lasting impression. Nor was Europe a fully fledged topic of discussion during the many election debates which took place in 2002 and 2003. Europe was only mentioned as an example of wastefulness, 'bureaucracy gone mad', or as a potential source of expenditure. In short, there has been little discussion regarding usefulness, importance and desirability of the Union.

According to Dekker, one side effect of this lack of discussion is that existing negative stereotypes like 'the powerless European parliament', 'Brussels' bureaucracy' and 'wasteful and fraud-sensitive regulation' cannot be corrected or toned down by experience. What is more, such stereotypes are difficult to proof wrong either through discussions or by sending the public unsolicited information (Dekker et al. 2002). The especially low electoral turnout in the Netherlands for the European Parliament speaks volumes about the public interest in European politics. Although the Dutch turnout can be described as average when compared to other member states, it is striking that the turnout in the Netherlands is falling at a faster rate than in any other member state.

In this report, the RMO wants to show how this decline in the Dutch citizens' sense of involvement in the EU can be countered, and how active engagement can be encouraged. To begin with, we will explain why citizen involvement in Europe is so important. In addition, we will also clarify our definition of involvement. Next, the main causes for the lack of citizen involvement will be examined; why is it that citizens identify so little with Europe? Finally, we will outline a vision of the future and make a number of practical proposals aimed at increasing citizens' involvement.



## 2 Urgency: future of the welfare state and the democratic deficit

In the coming years, the European Union faces daunting challenges. Firstly, the EU is having trouble determining its position in international politics. This problem rooted in the fact that a joint foreign policy is lacking. The scale of enlargement poses a second challenge to the EU. This enlargement of the Union, including ten more members states in 2004, and two more set to join in 2007, together with the prospect of yet another new member after that. The process of enlargement will have significant consequences for the internal structure and workings of the Union. The European constitution, which has recently been prepared by the Convention, represents an important contribution towards the creation of a workable Union. A third challenge is posed by the timing of enlargement. At this moment, Member States are finding it necessary to implement measures to save their welfare systems. The sustainability of these social systems is at stake. The populations of most EU member states are ageing and state pension systems have not been designed to cope with such a dramatic shift. These problems place economic growth and the EMU budget norm under pressure. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that any adopted, far-reaching measures are accepted by the citizens. Without popular support, the EU cannot act with the necessary decisiveness.

Taking the above into consideration, the key issues in the coming years are social stability, sustainability of solutions, legitimacy and the effectiveness with which the EU acts towards its Member States and the global community. Decisive political steps are needed to tackle these tasks successfully. The RMO believes that such steps can only be taken if Europe's citizens are more involved in the European integration process. Besides developing the EU for its citizens; it also needs to be developed with its citizens. This involvement should not only be limited to the subject matter of policy themes. It should also incorporate political decision-making processes.

### 3 Point of departure: no citizenship without Europe, no Europe without citizenship

The European Commission has stated that the EU should develop into a 'Europe of the citizens'. However, to accomplish this, the RMO shares as a point of departure that Europe needs the active involvement of its citizens. Without the active contribution and support of the citizens of Europe, fruitful European cooperation will be impossible.

The RMO has identified three main reasons why citizens should be more closely involved in the EU.

The first is pragmatic in nature. The European Union is a reality, and, given the fact that no political movement in the Netherlands advocates leaving the Union, it makes sense to view membership as an opportunity. The EU influences our lives in all kinds of ways and offers us a range of opportunities, both on an individual and a collective level. A sense of involvement and a positive basic attitude on the part of governments and citizens are conditions for utilizing the opportunities on offer in areas like work, education and social contacts.

The second reason is democratic in nature. Many decisions are taken at EU level. Therefore, from a democratic point of view, an active role in the decision-making process is essential. To this end, the draft of the European Convention rightly refers to the principle of participatory democracy. However, this principle does not depend entirely on the available institutional framework. An active sense of involvement and a feeling of significance are important if citizens are to make use of their democratic rights. If they do not, then there looms the threat of the participation paradox. In that case, opening more channels for political participation does not increase political participation, but instead encourages the same people to participate more often, by means of more channels. Under such circumstances broader citizen participation is not achieved (Hartman 2000, Bovens 2003).

The third reason concerns social cohesion within an expanded European arena. For many citizens, Europe is a living reality. They pay with European money and cross European borders without any problems in order to work, study or go on holiday. More inter-European contact is occurring, while after enlargement of the Union there will be more different kinds of Europeans. As a result of the latter, the differences between European citizens will increase dramatically, in terms of their history, social-economic position and cultural mores. In addition, one should not forget that Member States are home to large groups of citizens whose origins lie outside the Union itself. These factors can cause friction between groups to rise to the surface more quickly than would otherwise be the case. Such potential sources of tension are best defused if citizens have a positive and active focal point.

The government also considers the lack of legitimacy of the EU to be a real shortcoming. This is especially the case now that the Union is increasingly playing a more deep-seated role in important aspects of society (Kabinetsnota 2003). In the framework of the Dutch presidency of the Union, which may well be the last, the government coalition agreement expresses the desire to organize and encourage activities aimed at

increasing Dutch citizens' involvement in the European Union (Hoofdlijnenakkoord).  
The RMO hopes to contribute to the achievement of this ambition.

## 4 A closer look at involvement

So far, this report has treated the word 'involvement' as a self-evident and non-problematic concept. However, involvement can be interpreted in different ways and broken down into different aspects. The various opinions as to what 'involvement' means lead to different solutions. To clarify the concept, we will now define involvement.

Usually, formal political participation is the central notion in discussion about citizens' involvement. This includes participation in elections and membership of political parties. In the present context, we should broaden our view to include support for European factions as well as participation in, and expressing one's views at, political meetings. Political involvement can also take the form of participation in virtual discussions on websites concerning the European Union.

Active political participation is usually preceded by an information phase. At this point, citizens read newspapers and magazines, visit websites, and watch television programmes (few and far between though they may be) in which the EU is featured. They do so based on a realization (either justified or not) that this information is relevant to them. This relevance can be either general or citizen specific.

Empirical evidence shows a current lack of citizens' involvement in either sense. Citizens do not have a clear idea of what the EU does and show little sign of committed political involvement. Amongst others, this is expressed in the low turnout at European Parliamentary elections. Therefore, it makes sense that most activities organized by national governments and European institutions aimed at increasing involvement, focus primarily on this type of involvement. To this end, information is distributed, websites are set up and discussion meetings are organized. Moreover, there is a panoply of information booklets and bulletins (see Appendix 2 in the Dutch version of this report). All these activities aim to further inform citizens in order to increase participation.

However, formal political participation is not the only way in which involvement in Europe can come about. Social organizations are another means of achieving the same goal. Although the political culture in Brussels operates at a considerable distance from its citizens, they still have a clear say in the political and administrative European processes through lobby groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Larsson 2003, Van Schendelen 2002). The role played by companies and social organizations in determining the European agenda is considerable, and this same channel can also enhance public involvement. However, it should be noted that many NGOs create the impression that their main function is to act as a testing ground for Eurocrats. They often adopt positions far removed from the world of many citizens' experience and operate mainly as a functional network for interests, which are already organized at national level.

In addition to the above, there is also a more implicit and symbolic aspect of involvement. By this we mean feelings of solidarity and identification with people, organizations or ideas. In this sense, the orientation towards Europe differs according to place and time. Often these feelings are only latent and undetectable in day-to-day life.

They are primarily seen and experienced in opposition to contrasting values or ideas. In this regard, it is important to keep in mind that people possess a multifarious combination of supplementary identities rather than one exclusive identity (RMO 1999). Involvement and identification are not elements in a 'zero-sum game'. People can have a strong national identity, and still have a clear additional association with Europe. What is more, the European aspect can also form part of national identification (Risse 2001).

In this report, the RMO is arguing for more attention to be paid to the symbolic and more implicit aspects of involvement. In order to achieve this, it is above all necessary to ensure that the EU becomes more visible and more concrete. This argument will be worked out in practical terms in the proposals put forward in the final section.

At this point, however, it is worth pointing out that making the EU more visible and concrete will not necessarily engender a more favourable impression of the EU among its citizens. What is more, there is a risk that conscious efforts to involve citizens in the European Union may result in an institutionally biased view. This gives pride of place to the interests of European institutions while losing sight of the interests of the citizens. It is vital, however, to keep in touch with what citizens themselves regard as important, and to discover what genuinely concerns them. What are the real needs, interests and motivations of the citizens that the European Union can build on? And, what part can the Dutch government play in this process? How can it be that people find it so easy to disassociate themselves from the EU? How can it be that people hardly seem to have an opinion about the EU in these most opinionated of times? The European Union's relationship with its citizens can make substantial gains if it comes to have a basis in their real interests.

## 5 Causes of the lack of involvement

Many reasons can be given for citizens' lack of involvement. First of all, it probably has to do with the complex and non-transparent way in which decisions are made within the European Union and the relatively abstract nature of many of the issues. In addition, it also has to do with the fact that Europe's positive contributions to the lives of its citizens remain relatively invisible, while a great deal of coverage is given to the negative effects. One of the reasons for this is that national governments are quick to claim European successes as their own and keen to lay failures at the door of the Union, which is never around to defend itself at such moments. Lack of involvement is also related to the domination of politics and the media by national organizations and institutions.

This list of reasons can be extended, but continuing at greater length serves little purpose within the present context. However, at this point it is worth elaborating on two interesting dilemmas relevant to this issue. The first of these is contained in the question: is it possible to sell Europe as a product? Don't most of the objections to the EU contain an element of truth? Couldn't it be argued that the citizens who cannot be bothered to turn up for elections to the European Parliament are actually demonstrating a keen understanding of the limited powers of their European representatives? In the last decade, the focus of development within the EU has shifted from the European Commission to the European Council of Ministers (Michalski 2002, Schout 2002). The joint community body has therefore lost ground in relation to the intergovernmental battle between national interests. The Netherlands traditionally supports the strengthening of Europe's collective institutions. The present Dutch government's coalition agreement also sees this as the way to ensure further European development: ...' the government is committed to strengthening the European Union and to intensifying the community method, by reinforcing the role of the European Commission and the European Parliament' (Hoofdlijnenakkoord 2003).

By adopting this position, the Netherlands is swimming against the tide. The dominant development is in the opposite direction, partly due to the accession of ten new members in 2004. Even the European Convention appears to confirm this trend (AIV 2003, Van Grinsven and Rood 2003, Pijpers 2003). The Europe to emerge from the Convention is primarily a free trade zone between nation states. Put bluntly, it might even be called the British model for the EU. There is real tension between this dominant development and the goal of strengthening the citizens' sense of involvement when it comes to Europe. After all, involvement comes about by emphasizing that which is jointly European. It is hard to identify with a free trade zone. Unless the collective element is clearly visible, we cannot expect citizens to have a strong focus on the EU. The latter could be achieved by highlighting more clearly all that its members have built together.

The second dilemma arises as an extension of the first. Europe is a union which has little in the way of a collective past. The history of nation states shows that the development of a collective framework of identification does not happen all by itself. Community is formed through the development of a shared language, history and experience (Lepsius 1999, Kielmansegg 1996). However, in Europe this is far from being the case. No shared language exists. Indeed Brussels often feels like the modern

incarnation of the Tower of Babel. The collective memory of the European Union goes no further than the memory of a process towards an ever closer union. In addition to this, the differences in historical experience are vast. What does the average Dutchman or Czech think of when he remembers 1968? Were the crusaders conquerors or liberators? Were the 1990s a decade of economic growth, prosperity and security or characterized by economic malaise, bankruptcy and uncertainty? Citizens' views on such matters vary from Member State to (prospective) Member State.

It is important to recognize that the identity of the EU can never be modelled on the example of a nation state. The EU is more likely to be characterized as a network (Leonard 2003) connected by laws, directives, agreements and a number of shared interests. The whole is bound together by a handful of relatively small hubs, primarily in Strasbourg and Brussels. The power of attraction emanating from this European network has been great in recent years, as evidenced by the upcoming accession of ten new members and the fact that even more candidates have applied to join. The European network can primarily be regarded as a joint project, in which the European countries arrive at an ever closer union. This joint project provides the building blocks for the development of a collective European experience. It is a project of freedom, economic growth and human rights. These are central values, shared within Europe and promoted by Europe. The key is finding a way to bring this collective project to life. Education can play an important role in this respect. It can help to establish a European identity and boost the acceptance of, and involvement in, the European Union (Schnabel 2002).

The development of a collective experience stands within the context of learning to deal with differences. For the Union it is important to build a stronger collective base amid a wide diversity. After all, it is evident that there are major differences between Europeans, both across and within national borders. The pursuit of common ground and symbolic cohesion, therefore, has to do with a limited form of mutual recognition. Citizens will have to learn to deal with diversity on a day-to-day basis.

## 6 Vision for the future: a relevant and concrete community of values

"What is lacking is not information as such. All the information is already available to the interested citizen (one visit to the bookshop or Internet will satisfy the most curious among us). The challenge is to enhance the citizen's interest in the EU." (Dehaene 2003)

When the EU talks about 'involving' it often means 'informing' citizens or 'bringing them together'. This approach has produced definite results and should be applauded in cases where it leads to the voice of the citizens being better heard in policy processes. Yet, it would appear that this agenda for involving citizens, although useful in its own right, is beginning to come up against its own limitations. As Dehaene states in the above quotation, there is no shortage of publicly available information about Europe's institutions. Indeed, the problem sometimes seems to be one of information overload. Through the range of measures currently available to them, the European institutions and national governments are able to reach a section of the population. However, a significant section of the Dutch people cannot be properly reached in this way. There are large groups of citizens who disassociate themselves from government communication and who see no place for themselves in debates and interactive decision-making processes (Motivaction 2001). A strategy other than debating and informing is needed to show these people that the EU and its policies are having more and more influence on their daily lives. The important thing is to deal with readily identifiable issues, which these members of the population regard as relevant to them.

The RMO is considering three strategies for increasing citizens' involvement in Europe. The first strategy assumes that the EU has to be a community of values in order to generate involvement among its citizens. At present, citizens primarily associate the EU with freedom of movement and economic progress. They appreciate these developments, and attribute their economic prosperity and territorial freedom of movement to the European project (Dekker et al. 2002). These same values have prompted the majority of the citizens of Eastern Europe to desire entry to the Union. In the Netherlands, however, this agenda of economic growth and mobility is seen as more or less completed. The absence of famine and war in Europe is taken for granted. Although, when seen in the context of European history, it should be seen as something of a miracle. For this reason, other values are needed to stimulate the involvement and enthusiasm of the citizens.

Europe as a 'product' could promote itself more on its historical uniqueness, and the values upon which this is based. For example, the Union could demonstrate more emphatically which values of freedom and human rights are constitutive for its existence. This may serve to counter the criticism levelled at aspects of the EU. For example, when examined closely it is a bit strange to have trains full of archive material running between Strasbourg and Brussels every month. However, this is vastly preferable to the examples from history in which military forces were being shuttled back and forth in this way. Making its purpose and values explicit also provides the EU with a recognizable geopolitical task. The EU represents a force of good, for example by contributing to a more peaceful and less dangerous world. This constitutes an emphatic role on the world stage. If this makes it clearer what the EU is, and what it stands for, then citizens will be able to identify with the Union more readily.



The strategy outlined above is a long-term one, and more a task for Brussels than for The Hague. Next, the second strategy is aimed more at achieving results in the short term. Relevance is the key. The involvement of citizens does not materialize in a vacuum, but is rooted in relevance. If the EU is visibly engaged in activities which citizens regard as relevant, with issues on which they can take a clear position for or against, then they will also be more inclined to look to Europe with a greater sense of involvement. At present this is frequently difficult, for example, because a high profile political battle for the common good is nowhere to be seen. The Dutch government and Dutch politicians can also contribute to this strategy. They can be much clearer about what they do with regard to the EU and what they are aiming to achieve in their negotiations in Brussels. The government can also give a better picture of the ways in which the EU directly affects the lives of its citizens, for example, by means of its regulations or financial payments.

Another important factor is the way in which the media report on the EU. In general, the press and television give little coverage to European politics. The scant reporting available often focuses on unnecessary bureaucracy, corrupt civil servants and truanting europarlamentarians who abuse their expenses; in short, matters to which any upstanding individual can only object. Reporting on European Council meetings is dominated by news of negotiating positions and deals between Member States, portraying the EU as a battleground for national interests above all else. Both approaches ignore the aspect of political debate between competing visions of collective European interests. Yet, these are exactly the types of debates and visions which inspire involvement. What is more, citizens are more readily interested in matters which affect them directly, than in discussions on such issues as the weighting system applied to voting procedures.

The third strategy follows on from the first two, and can be summed up by the slogan 'Make Europe concrete for its citizens'. Citizens are not particularly interested in general analyses of the significance of Europe. Their involvement begins at the point where Europe actually touches their lives. This can be demonstrated by the fact that Dutch farmers and transporters are the best informed Europeans. This is not by virtue of the fact that these sectors are mainly populated by European idealists, but simply due to practical necessity. People in these sectors cannot do their work effectively without a solid European orientation. This shows that citizen involvement is brought about by real-life issues and bottom-up initiatives. In addition, the government would do well to build on initiatives taken by the business community with a strong emphasis on Europeanization.

## 7 Proposals

The above strategies give rise to a number of proposals aimed at increasing the involvement of citizens in the EU. In some cases these are proposals which have also been put forward in other contexts or which are already being carried out, but, in the eyes of the RMO, on too limited a scale. The element which links all of these proposals is the further development of citizenship. These proposals are aimed at offering as many opportunities for direct action as possible. In theory, the Dutch government could implement them tomorrow. However, some proposals point to long-term processes in which the role of the Dutch government is sometimes limited. The proposals associated with each strategy are listed below.

### Community of values

These proposals contribute towards the strategy of making Europe a community of values.

### Continually emphasizing what Europe stands for

Using channels of public information, the European Union, as well as the Dutch government, have to let citizens know how the Union contributes towards stability in the region, economic growth and freedom of movement for its citizens.

### European education programme

At present there is no joint European educational programme on the subject of Europe (Schnabel 2002). European schoolchildren learn different things about Europe, depending on the country they live in. The Netherlands could urge the European Union to take the necessary steps to develop a joint education programme about Europe. This could deal with subjects such as history, civics and cultural diversity as part of a collective history. Space would have to be found in school curricula to accommodate such an educational programme.

### Making political choices visible

The Dutch parliament could organize an annual debate with Dutch politicians at national and European level to discuss their behaviour regarding Europe. Research can be used to confront them with their own choices, and point out both consistencies and inconsistencies. Such a debate should aim to make nation states adopt a more European mindset and to raise the profile of decisions made in relation to Europe. A useful measuring instrument for this purpose is the EP monitor set up by the Dutch Centre for Political Participation (Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek, IPP), which already shows the voting behaviour of Europarliamentarians (see ep-monitor.nl).

### Key figures in the spotlight

A live television interview with the president of the European Commission should be broadcast monthly. Key debates in the European Parliament should also be broadcast live.

### Move Deputy Minister for European Affairs to Ministry of the Interior

To improve the connection between European and national policy, it would be better if the Deputy Minister for European Affairs were part of the Ministry of the Interior and

not the Foreign Ministry as is currently the case. Under such a set-up, Europe would no longer simply be fodder for the diplomats but would be at the heart of national policy coordination.

#### Relevance

The following proposals are geared towards making Europe more relevant to its citizens.

#### Referendum on the European constitution

The implementation of a constitutional treaty for the EU should be preceded by a referendum. An often-heard objection to a referendum is that it always centres on simple oppositions and that it is not appropriate for complex issues like a European constitution or electing the president of the European Union. This view can be countered by arguing that the advent of a referendum leads to much debate, at both simple and more complex levels. A referendum can spark broad public discussion.

#### Europeanizing institutions

The national institutions - government, public institutions and special interest groups - can work more emphatically to encourage contact across borders, for example by utilizing exchange programmes involving young people, the elderly, union representatives and civil servants. A student exchange programme between EU Member States already exists, but only a minority of schoolchildren actually takes part. Only two out of ten Dutch youngsters have been to another European country on exchange, to study, learn a language or to work (Dekker et al. 2002). What is more, such exchange visits are usually limited to neighbouring countries. The 'opening up' of Europe to the east offers even more interesting destinations with an educational character.

#### 'Brussels Today'

It is high time for a news programme about the EU. The feasibility of such a project has been proven by Poland, where an EU news programme is broadcast daily (see Appendix 2 of the Dutch version). In the Netherlands, it would fall to the public broadcasting system to produce such a programme (although there is no reason why it should not be undertaken by a commercial station). Ideally, the initiative should be taken by the Dutch Broadcasting Association NOS or one of the other broadcasters. If this does not prove workable, support from the Press Fund (Bedrijfsfonds voor de Pers) could be called in to finance the programme. Another possibility would be the introduction and broadcasting of a European version of question time in the Lower House of Parliament.

#### Concreteness

Finally, the RMO presents a number of proposals aimed at making the EU more concrete and visible to its citizens.

#### We can't make it more fun, but we can make it more visible

In order to make the financial weight of the EU more visible to the citizen, the Dutch tax authorities (de Belastingdienst) can specify on the income tax return form for 2003 how much is paid to Brussels and how much we receive back, as well as the average amount each household pays to Brussels.

#### Introduce English as the lingua franca

The European Union should opt for a lingua franca. English is the obvious choice. A common language of this type will make it easier for EU citizens to communicate with one another and to establish contact. What is more, it would improve the content of the debates which take place at European level, such as those in the European Parliament. An additional advantage is that in the long term it will lead to substantial savings in translation costs. The Netherlands should take the initiative at European level to introduce English as the lingua franca. In anticipation of this, the Netherlands should introduce English as a second language from primary school onwards.

#### Collective symbols

The European Union should encourage the development of collective symbols of unity, like the already European football championship, song contest, flag, anthem, European passport with dual nationality. A European-wide holiday peace day, the 9th of May (commemorating the day in 1950 when the go-ahead for the present-day EU was given), should also be implemented. All Europeans should be given a holiday on that day.

#### Border regions as experimental zones

It is especially important that bridges are built between local authorities and the EU, as well as between Europe and the world in which its citizens actually live. An interesting method for achieving this already exists in border regions where pragmatic solutions are found to problems which transcend national borders. This results, for example, in citizens being allowed to make use of public facilities across the border. This model could eventually be used to solve other bottlenecks in legislation and regulation within the EU.

#### European polls

Prior to elections for the European Parliament, polls should also be held to reflect the political make-up at European level. The European Parliament could commission such polls.

#### Virtual elections

Organize a way to allow citizens to take virtual part in the national elections of other EU Member States.

#### Far-reaching cooperation where possible

Expand the mandate of the EU to include issues which can be resolved more effectively by using a collective approach. There are many areas in which further European cooperation can prove useful. The present Dutch government's coalition agreement already states that issues like crime, migration and the environment lend themselves well to far-reaching cooperation within the European Union. Further European cooperation can also be applied to the more general aspects of safety, employee protection and foreign policy. The idea of a European defence force also fits in with such an approach. In all these areas, enhanced EU cooperation offers effective possibilities for problem solving. If the EU is to develop into a community of citizens, then it must engage in visible politics in these areas. Thereby, Europe's citizens should be given the chance to respond either positively or negatively.

## 8 In conclusion

The EU faces major challenges in the years to come. The key issues in the coming years will be social stability, sustainability of solutions, legitimacy and the efficient functioning of the EU, in the Member States as well as in the global community. Decisive political steps are needed to meet these challenges successfully. It is of vital importance that far-reaching measures are discussed among the citizens themselves. Without broad popular support, the EU will lack necessary decisiveness.

In this report the RMO has presented a number of proposals aimed at increasing the Dutch citizens' involvement in the European Union. These proposals include action to be taken in the relatively short term. A number can even be implemented in the course of the Netherlands' upcoming presidency of the European Union in 2004. Others, however, concern long-term processes.

This report is the first of two. The second will be published in the first half of 2004. It will focus on the issue of 'tailoring European social policy' from the perspective of strengthening European citizenship. This theme has been put to the RMO by the Dutch government (see Appendix 1 of the Dutch version of this report). One of the main focuses of that second report will be the effects of the European constitution, prepared by the European Convention and the Intergovernmental Conference, on citizenship.

## Literature

Adviesraad voor Internationale Vraagstukken (2003), *Vervolgadvies Een brug tussen burgers en Brussel: Naar meer legitimiteit en slagvaardigheid voor de Europese Unie. [Follow-up Report A bridge between citizens and Brussels: Towards more legitimacy and decisiveness for the European Union]* The Hague: AIV.

*Belevingsmonitor Rijksoverheid* (2003). The Hague: RVD.

Bovens, M. (2003), *De digitale republiek: Democratie en rechtsstaat in de informatiemaatschappij. [The digital republic: Democracy and rechtsstaat in the information society.]* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Checkel, J.T. (2001), The Europeanization of Citizenship? In: Cowles, M.G. et al., *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and domestic change*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Dehaene, J.L. (2003), *Understanding Europe: the Citizen's right to know: Lecture at the Conference of the same name by Friends of Europe on 3 April 2003*. Brussels.

Dekker, P. et al. (2002), *Leeft Europa wel? Een verkenning van de Europese Unie in de publieke opinie en het onderwijs: Bijlage bij de staat van de Europese Unie 2003. [Is Europe really alive and well? An exploration of the European Union in public opinion and education: Appendix to the state of the European Union 2003]* The Hague: SCP.

European Commission (2002), *European governance: A White Paper*. Luxembourg.

European Convention (2003), *Constitutional treaty*. Brussels.

Eurostat (2003), *Eurobarometer: Public opinion in the European Union*. Report no. 58. Brussels.

Grinsven, P.C.J. van and Rood, J.Q.Th. (2003), Verdwaald in Europa: Nederland en de Europese Conventie. [Lost in Europe. The Netherlands and the European Convention.] In: *Internationale spectator*, June 2003, LVII, no. 6, p. 273-274.

Hartman, I. (2000), *Democratie van de grote bekken. Of: leer je wat van het publieke debat? [Big-mouth democracy. Or: can anything be learned from the public debate?]* Amsterdam: Dutch Centre for Political Participation.

Kielmansegg, P.G. (1996): Integration und Demokratie. In: Jachtenfuchs, M. and Kohler-Koch, B. (Hg.), *Europäische Integration*. Opladen. p. 47-71.

Larsson, T. (2003), *Pre-cooking in the European Union: The world of expert groups*. Stockholm: ESO.

Leonard, M. (2003), De stille kracht van de Europese Unie. [The silent power of the European Union.] In: *NRC Handelsblad*, 8 July 2003. p. 7.

Lepsius, M.R. (1999), Die Europäische Union: Zwischen globaler Dynamik, Nationaler und regionaler Gegenbewegungen. In: Viehoff, R. and Segers, R.T., *Kultur, Identität, Europ: Über die Schwierigkeiten und Möglichkeiten einer Konstruktion*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

*Meedoen meer werk minder regels: Hoofdlijnenakkoord voor het kabinet [Taking part, more work, less rules: Government coalition agreement]* CDA, VVD, D66. 2003.

Michalski, A. (2002), *Governing Europe: The future role of the European Commission*. The Hague: Clingendael Institute.

Motivaction (2001), *Burgerschapstijlen en overheidscommunicatie. Bijlage bij: In dienst van de democratie: Eindrapport Commissie Toekomst Overheidscommunicatie. [Styles of citizenship and government communication. Appendix to: In the service of democracy: Final Report of the Committee on the Future of Government Communication.]* The Hague.

Pijpers, A. (2003), *De schone schijn van de Europese Conventie. Een tussenbalans. [The radiant facade of the European Convention. An interim balance.]* The Hague: Clingendael Institute.

Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (1999), *Nationale identiteit in Nederland. [National identity in the Netherlands.]* The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers.

Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (2000), *Aansprekend burgerschap. De relatie tussen de organisatie van het publieke domein en de verantwoordelijkheid van burgers. [Appealing citizenship. The relationship between the organization of the public domain and the responsibility of the citizens.]* The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers.

Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling (2002), *Bevrijdende kaders: sturen op verantwoordelijkheid. [Liberating frameworks: steering towards responsibility.]* The Hague: Sdu Uitgevers.

Risse, T. (2001), A European identity? Europeanization and the Evolution of Nation-State Identities. In: Cowles, M.G. et al., *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and domestic change*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Schendelen, R. van (2002), *Macchiavelli in Brussels: The Art of EU Lobbying*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Schnabel, P. (2002), Epiloog: de Europese Unie en de publieke opinie. [Epilogue: the European Union and public opinion.] In: Dekker, P. et al. (2002), *Leeft Europa wel? Een verkenning van de Europese Unie in de publieke opinie en het onderwijs. [Is Europe really alive and well? An exploration of the European Union in public opinion and education.] Appendix to: De staat van de Europese Unie 2003. [The state of the European Union 2003.]* The Hague: SCP.

Schout, J.A. (2002), Zoeken naar een Europees bestuursmodel: De Commissie en Europese Governance. [In search of a European government model: The Commission and European Governance.] In: *Bestuurswetenschappen* 2002 no. 5, p. 415-436.

Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (2002), *De kwaliteit van de publieke sector: Sociaal en Cultureel Rapport 2002*. [The quality of the public sector: Social and Cultural Report 2002.] The Hague: SCP.

Tweede Kamerstuk: *De toekomst van de Europese Unie: een nieuwe bijdrage aan het debat*. [The future of the European Union: a new contribution to the debate.] TK 2000-2001, 27 407 no. 9.

Tweede Kamerstuk: *Europa in de steigers: Kabinetsreactie op AIV-advies; 'Een brug tussen burgers en Brussel'*. [Europe under construction: Government response to AIV report 'A bridge between citizens and Brussels'] TK 2002-2003, 28 604 no.3.

Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (2001), *Naar een Europabrede Unie*. [Towards a Europe-wide Union.] The Hague, Sdu Uitgevers.

Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid (2003), *Slagvaardigheid in de Europabrede Unie*. [Decisiveness in the Europe-wide Union.] The Hague, Sdu Uitgevers.



*Overzicht van uitgebrachte adviezen*



## *Overzicht van uitgebrachte adviezen*

Adviezen (genummerd)

2003

- Hart voor Europa. De rol van de Nederlandse overheid. Advies 27, September 2003 (ISBN 90-12-0998-b)
- Medialogica. Over het krachtenveld tussen burgers, media en politiek. Advies 26, januari 2003 (ISBN 90-12-09810-6)

2002

- De handicap van de samenleving. Over mogelijkheden en beperkingen van community care. Advies 25, november 2002 (ISBN 90-1209-758-4)
- Bevrijdende kaders. Sturen op verantwoordelijkheid. Advies 24, november 2002 (ISBN 90-1209-757-6)
- Geen woorden maar daden. Bijdrage aan het normen-en-waardendebat. Advies 23, november 2002 (ISBN90-1209-755-x)
- Werken aan balans. Remedies tegen burn-out. Advies 22, juli 2002 (ISBN 901209686-3)
- Educatief centrum voor ouder en kind, Advies over voor- en vroegschoolse educatie. Advies 21, juni 2002 (ISBN 9012095727)
- Levensloop als perspectief. Kanttekeningen bij de Verkenning Levensloop. Advies 20, mei 2002 (ISBN 9012095638)

2001

- Van uitzondering naar regel. Maatwerk in het grotestedenbeleid. Advies 19, september 2001 (ISBN 9012093465)
- Aansprekend opvoeden. Balanceren tussen steun en toezicht. Advies 18, juni 2001. (ISBN 9012093198)
- Instituties in lijn met het moderne individu. De sociale agenda 2002-2006. Advies 17, mei 2001. (ISBN 9012090660)
- Kwetsbaar in kwadraat. Krachtige steun aan kwetsbare mensen. Advies 16, maart 2001 (ISBN 9012090679)

2000

- Ver weg en dichtbij. Over hoe ICT de samenleving kan verbeteren. Advies 15, december 2000 (ISBN 9012090636)
- Van discriminatie naar diversiteit. Kanttekeningen bij de Meerjarennota Emancipatiebeleid Van vrouwenstrijd naar vanzelfsprekendheid. Advies 14, september 2000 (ISBN 9012090814)
- Wonen in de 21<sup>e</sup> eeuw. Advies 13, september 2000 (ISBN 9012090644)
- Alert op vrijwilligers. Advies 12, juni 2000 (ISBN 9012090733)

- Ongekende aanknopingspunten. Strategieën voor de aanpassing van de sociale infrastructuur. Advies 11, juni 2000 (ISBN 9012090628)
- Aansprekend burgerschap. De relatie tussen organisatie van het publieke domein en de verantwoordelijkheid van burgers. Advies 10, maart 2000 (ISBN 903991706X)

1999

- Nationale identiteit in Nederland. Advies 9, september 1999 (ISBN 9039916942)
- Arbeid en zorg. Reactie op de kabinetsnota 'Op weg naar een nieuw evenwicht tussen arbeid en zorg'. Advies 8, juni 1999 (ISBN 9039916292)

1998

- Integratie in perspectief. Advies over integratie van bijzondere groepen en van personen uit etnische groeperingen in het bijzonder. Advies 7, december 1998 (ISBN 9039915334) met afzonderlijke achtergrondstudie (ISBN 9039915342)
- Verantwoordelijkheid en perspectief. Geweld in relatie tot waarden en normen. Advies 6, december 1998 (ISBN 9039915326) met afzonderlijke achtergrondstudie (ISBN 9039915423)

1997

- Uitsluitend vrijwillig!? Maatschappelijk actief in het vrijwilligerswerk. Advies 5, december 1997 (ISBN 9039914605) met afzonderlijke achtergrondstudie (ISBN 9039914591).
- Kwaliteit in de buurt. Advies 4, november 1997 (ISBN 9039914567)
- Werkloos toezien? Activering van langdurig werklozen Advies 3, juni 1997 (ISBN 9039913021)
- Stedelijke vernieuwing. Advies 2, juni 1997 (ISBN 9039913579)
- Vereenzaming in de samenleving. Advies 1, maart 1997 (ISBN 9039912890)

*Adviezen (zonder nummer) uitgebracht in samenwerking met andere adviesraden*

2001

- Raad voor Openbaar Bestuur. Etniciteit, binding en burgerschap. Bijlage II: Eigenheid en diversiteit, april 2001
- Onderwijsraad. Samen naar de taalschool. Allochtone levende talen in perspectief. Bijlage 1: Onderwijs in allochtone levende talen, november 2001

2000

- Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Zorg. Gezond zonder zorg, augustus 2000 (ISBN 9057320622) met achtergrondstudies (ISBN 905732069X en 9057320630)

1999

- Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Zorg. Verslavingszorg herijkt. Advies over een besturingsmodel voor verslavingszorg en verslavingsbeleid, juli 1999 (ISBN 9039916292)

9057320460) met afzonderlijke achtergrondstudies (ISBN 9057320460, 9057320460, 9057320479).

- Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Zorg. Zorgarbeid in de toekomst. Advies over de gevolgen van demografische ontwikkeling van vraag en aanbod zorg(arbeid), april 1999 (ISBN 9039915350) met afzonderlijke achtergrondstudie (ISBN 9039915369).

1998

- Onderwijsraad. Voorschools en buitenschools. Dwarsverbanden, verantwoordelijkheden, juni 1998.

*Briefadviezen:*

Enkele aspecten van de ruimtelijke inrichting 2030, november 1997.

*Publicaties van de RMO zijn te bestellen bij:*

Sdu Servicecentrum Uitgevers

Tel.: 070-3789880

Fax: 070-3789783