

# WRR

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

## **THE DUTCH THIRD SECTOR AND THE EUROPEAN UNION**

### **CONNECTING CITIZENS TO THE EU?**

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Research into the European Union (EU) has so far focused mostly on governments and especially the interaction between the European and the national level. However, this is changing, which reflects both developments within the EU itself and the broadening scope of European research. The ambition to strengthen democratic legitimacy has led the European Commission to make greater efforts to involve non-governmental partners, here referred to as the 'third sector', by creating infrastructures for their participation and supporting their umbrella networks. The interesting question we are faced with is what we can realistically expect from these organisations.

Political rhetoric has invariably described them as a gateway to democracy, through which citizens participate in the public sphere. It is for this reason that politicians and governments have often been so eager to associate themselves with the third sector: its democratic image will supposedly rub off on them. This paper will analyse how third sector organisations are engaged by the European Union, how they engage it, and how this could possibly affect the legitimacy of the European Union within the national context by connecting citizens to Brussels. We will use empirical evidence collected by the SCP and Tilburg University in recent years. Our final conclusion is sceptical, but not entirely devoid of hope.

In the next paragraph, we will discuss the third sector and its evolution at the European level. Paragraph three will clarify the conceptualisation, operationalisation and methodology applied in our analysis. It will also clarify our use of the term legitimacy. The fourth paragraph comes to the heart of the matter and analyses how Dutch organisations have engaged with Europe and whether they function as intermediaries between their constituencies and the European Union. Paragraph five will briefly compare these experiences to those from other countries and discuss to what extent the Dutch third sector is distinctive. In paragraph six, we finally reach the question how and to what extent the Europeanisation of the third sector contributes or can potentially contribute to the legitimacy of the European Union within this country.



## **2 THE THIRD SECTOR IN EUROPE**

### **2.1 Conceptualising the third sector**

The third sector is notoriously difficult to define. It describes a rich diversity of organisations and groups that includes co-operatives, associations, foundations, and various informal social groups (Dekker & Burger 2001). Quoting Henry James, Kendall & Knapp have characterized the sector as a 'loose and baggy monster' (Kendall and Knapp 1995). There have been many attempts to capture the monster in definitions and taxonomies, with varying levels of success. Whichever criteria are chosen, they never seem to be sufficiently comprehensive. Another problem with many current descriptions is that they are based on negatives (not for profit, non-governmental), indicating that the sector is not part of the market, nor of the state. What it refers to in a positive sense remains contested. Finally, recent cross-overs of competition and bureaucracy into the third sector have made it less distinguishable than ever (Brandsen et al. 2005).

Van de Donk has attempted to overcome the conceptual difficulties by analytically reconstructing the sector in terms of three dimensions: its organisations are private (i.e. not belonging to the state), non-profit (without distributing profits to economic owners) and formal (in contrast to more informal networks of families and communities, although the former may originate in the latter). Within such a conceptualisation, the third sector is a hybrid domain amidst the three idealtypical or 'pure' domains of society (Van de Donk 2001). Recent research has been grappling with this notion of a hybrid third sector (e.g. Brandsen et al. 2005). For the purposes of this background report, we cannot go beyond a very rough and practical acknowledgement of these complexities. We will use the term 'third sector', which will here be used to refer to private, non-profit and formalised organisations.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.2 The third sector in Europe**

An attempt to pin down the third sector's position within the European Union is perhaps foolhardy, given the Union's complexity and the sector's diversity. Before we can even start out with our analysis, we must make a major qualification, which is that there is a large gap between what we can see and what is actually going on. Any student of the European Union (or, indeed, of public policy generally) will stress the significance of the informal decision-making mechanisms that are at work, and it is no different where the third sector is concerned. There are indications that much of its involvement is through personal contacts and unminuted meetings, through internal memoranda, and no doubt through whispered conversations in corridors. We are not naive in this respect: what we can see is only a fraction of what actually goes on. Furthermore, the third sector's diversity (inherent in its container

definition) means that, whatever we conclude at the end of the paper, it will prove entirely inappropriate for at least some types of third sector organisations.

Our modest aim is therefore to give an impression of the *dynamics* of how the third sector reaches out to the European Union, and vice versa. We must abstain from weighing the significance of the third sector as a political actor within the overall system, and certainly from any judgement on the ultimate impact of their efforts on policymaking. Our evidence is still scattered and incomplete. We are trekking into one of the dark areas of Europeanisation. Nevertheless, what we have is sufficient for an initial assessment of the third sector's role in relation to Europe. To set the context, we will begin with a description of how its position has evolved at the Brussels level.

The third sector is broad and an assessment of its involvement on the European scene necessarily changes, depending on where one looks. The involvement of trade unions in European decision-making dates back to the days of the EEC, and the lobbying activities of large non-governmental organisations certainly date back long before any form of institutionalisation took place. However, it was only by the late 1980s that its role started to receive systematic consideration, both as a means of strengthening the Union's democratic legitimacy and of finding partners in the fight against social exclusion. In describing these developments, it is necessary to make a distinction between the so-called 'social dialogue' and 'civil dialogue', which is artificial but important (cf. Bleijenbergh & Brandsen 2006). As has happened at the national level in most countries, the associations representing employees (trade unions) and employers have had privileged access to political decision-making, which at the European level is often referred to as the 'social dialogue'. The term 'civil dialogue' was coined much later and basically refers to dealings between Commission and all organisations other than social partners (although, confusingly, trade unions are often included as well).

The social dialogue started fairly early in the history of the Union (although the term is of more recent origin) and by the 1990s reached the point where, albeit in a limited range of policies, social partners have acquired an institutionalised role in policy formulation (Bleijenbergh 2004). Following in from discussions in the 1980s, the Social Protocol appended to the Treaty of Maastricht (1991) allowed social partners the right to self-regulation in the field of social policy (Falkner, 1998). If the Commission intends to take action within a certain area, employers and trade unions are allowed nine months to reach a prior agreement. If they do, it is adopted and converted to a binding directive by the Council. In this arrangement, employers are represented through the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) and the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP), while the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) speaks

on behalf of employees. This resulted in directives on parental leave and part-time work, which led the Council to incorporate the procedure in the Treaty of Amsterdam (Bleijenbergh et al. 2004).

The civil dialogue is far less established and only acquired some kind of institutional form in the course of the 1990s (for a better and more complete description of the process, see Kendall 2007b). Policy documents and events that symbolically marked this development were the Communication 'The Role of Associations and Foundations in Europe' (1997), the White Paper on Governance (2001) and the Dialogue meetings organised at the time of the European Convention. There have been a number of different initiatives to strengthen the third sector's position within national and European policymaking processes. To begin with, it has resulted in the creation of formal platforms that unite representatives of the third sector and provide a point of access to the Commission. An example is the Civil Society Contact Group, which brings together organisations from the areas of human rights, development and social policy, with members meeting several times a year. Another important development has been the financial support that third sector umbrellas have increasingly been receiving, especially in the fields of environmental issues, human development and social policy. Equally significant was the initial recognition of the specific nature of the services that the third sector provides, although it remains to be seen what institutional form this recognition will ultimately take. Finally, a significant step was the inclusion of participatory mechanisms in new methods of policymaking such as the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC). This collection of procedural instruments included the requirement to encourage the participation of actors beyond national state bodies. Taken together, these developments have offered third sector organisations and networks potential access to decision-making procedures.

It must be noted immediately, though, that the results of these initiatives have been mixed. Efforts to promote the third sector have surged and sunk with the political tide and with reorganisations within the Commission. The Commissions Delors and Prodi have been favourable to the third sector, but it has fared less well under liberal Commissions such as the one headed by Barroso. The fora established for third sector consultation have usually been incidental and often fragile. The Civil Society Contact Group was established in 1998, but went into a sleepy phase until it was reinvigorated in the context of the European Convention. Also, while the third sector is now habitually referred to in official documents, it is not always clear what this means. Terms used in European documents are often ill-defined, with the result that they have taken on a variety of meanings at the national level. For instance, the term 'civil society' has often been taken to include all non-state actors, including commercial businesses, which is a major departure from the conventional academic use of



the term. Available empirical evidence questions whether the participatory procedures contained within the OMC can break through established patterns of policymaking. For instance, an analysis of the mobilisation of the third sector in the process of setting up National Actions Plans on Social Inclusion showed that the new procedures had little impact on traditional methods of participation and only led to significant change in those countries where there were no traditional methods (Brandsen et al. 2007b).

On the whole, one must conclude that the involvement of the third sector at the European level is more than rhetoric, but that it has not been institutionalised consistently and systematically, even if its position has been boosted by efforts to strengthen the Commission's democratic legitimacy and by the budding developments of European social policy. Trade unions stand out, in that they have acquired a formal role in decision-making procedures, even if it only concerns a minor part of their area of expertise. The role of other third sector organisations in European policymaking largely retains its informal and ad hoc nature. However, we must stress again that this does not imply any judgement of its actual influence, which is certainly far greater than it seems on paper.

### **2.3 Normative approaches**

All in all, the third sector does not appear to have made much headway within European institutions. There are different assessments of whether this is a bad thing. In third sector research, there has been a long debate on whether the third sector should co-operate with the state, e.g. in the provision of services or in the formulation of policies. Some regard this as a means towards a significant rise in resources and greater influence; others see it as a step towards bureaucratisation and the loss of independence and distinctiveness. The latter position appears to be out of place in the Continental European tradition, where the involvement of the third sector in corporatist structures has been an essential ingredient of welfare state construction since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, the discussion again becomes relevant at the European level, where the third sector's position is still far from set.

The formal initiatives described in the previous section have been interpreted quite differently, depending on the choice of normative perspective. On the one hand, formal initiatives imply a formal recognition that the third sector is a legitimate partner in European decision-making. On the other hand, not everyone believes that they are relevant or even steps in the right direction. As noted before, they necessarily represent only a part (and probably only a small one) of the interaction between the third sector and public officials. There are many in the third sector who are suspicious of attempts to institutionalise their role, for various reasons. They fear they may be co-opted and lose their critical role in relation to policymaking; they fear that efforts to channel the input of various organisations

will lead to weak compromise and/or the dominance of a handful; they believe that their influence is greater when it is not pinned down in a formal arrangement; and/or they believe that participation in formal procedures will come at the loss of internal democracy (an issue we will come back to in the following paragraphs).

Illustrative in this respect is the role of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), an advisory body dating back to the early days of the EEC and traditionally composed of trade unions and employers.<sup>2</sup> Van Schendelen succinctly described its position as one of 'influence without power' (Schendelen 2002). At the time of the European Convention, EESC organised a number of Dialogue sessions with third sector representatives, and has since been trying to position itself as 'the gateway to civil society'. But other than through some members from consumer organisations, the social partners continue to dominate, and many in the third sector question whether the committee can adequately represent them as long as this is the case. Some fear that their positions would be filtered if they allowed themselves to be represented, although others argue that it simply provides an additional point of access. At the moment, it seems unlikely that EESC will achieve its gateway role.

What is important to note for the remainder of the paper is that there is no single and undisputed way in which third sector organisations can 'connect' to Europe, which leaves room for diverse interpretations of how the interests of the organisations and the public are best served.



### **3 CONCEPTUALISATION AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Conceptualising European connections**

There is hardly any literature on the specific subject of the third sector in Europe (although some interesting studies will be forthcoming over the next year).<sup>3</sup> However, there is by now a wide body of literature on the general topic of how the different “levels” of the European Union connect. So far, such research focused mainly on institution-building and policy development at the European level, and the input of Member States in this process (‘bottom-up’ perspective of the integration). More recently, research efforts have started to pay more attention to the influence of European integration on national policymaking. In the literature, the term ‘Europeanisation’ is often used to denominate this ‘top-down’ process (see, for instance, Green Cowles *et al.* 2001, Ladrech 1994, Knill and Lehmkuhl 2002). Unsurprisingly, it is now becoming common to regard Europeanisation as two-way traffic. From this perspective, European integration influences policy processes in Member States and vice versa (Börzel 2001, 2003, Van Schendelen 2002). At present, much of the Europeanisation literature is in a formative stage and remains theoretically underdeveloped, grappling with what is one of the most complex and opaque phenomena of our time. Here, we will not do justice even to the budding insights of the Europeanisation literature in this short paper. Our aim in this paper is to sketch the results of some of the first research into the Europeanisation of Dutch NGOs. We will not attempt theoretical strides forward, nor engage in counterfactual reasoning; the facts are hard enough.

For our present purpose, we therefore judge it sufficient to adopt the simple notion of Europeanisation as two-way traffic. This view will inform our analysis of the intermediary role of Dutch third sector organisations between their individual members and the European Union (paragraph four). Incorporating both top-down (adjustment to European interventions) and bottom-up influences (interventions by Dutch representatives at the European level), Van Schendelen (2002: 32-34) distinguishes several ‘vectors of Europeanisation’:

From the European to the national level:

- (1) The vector from European public institutions to Dutch public institutions. For instance, European directives have to be implemented by the national government.
- (2) The vector from European institutions to Dutch third sector organisations. For instance, the Dutch third sector needs to adjust to European regulation.
- (3) The vector from European third sector organisations, such as European federations of national organisations (EuroFeds) to Dutch third sector organisations. For instance, Dutch organisations associated with European federations, must (to some extent) conform to views, information and commitments passed down from the EuroFeds.

- (4) The vector from the European third sector to the national public sector. For instance, EuroFeds try to have an impact on the agenda of the national government chairing the European Union.

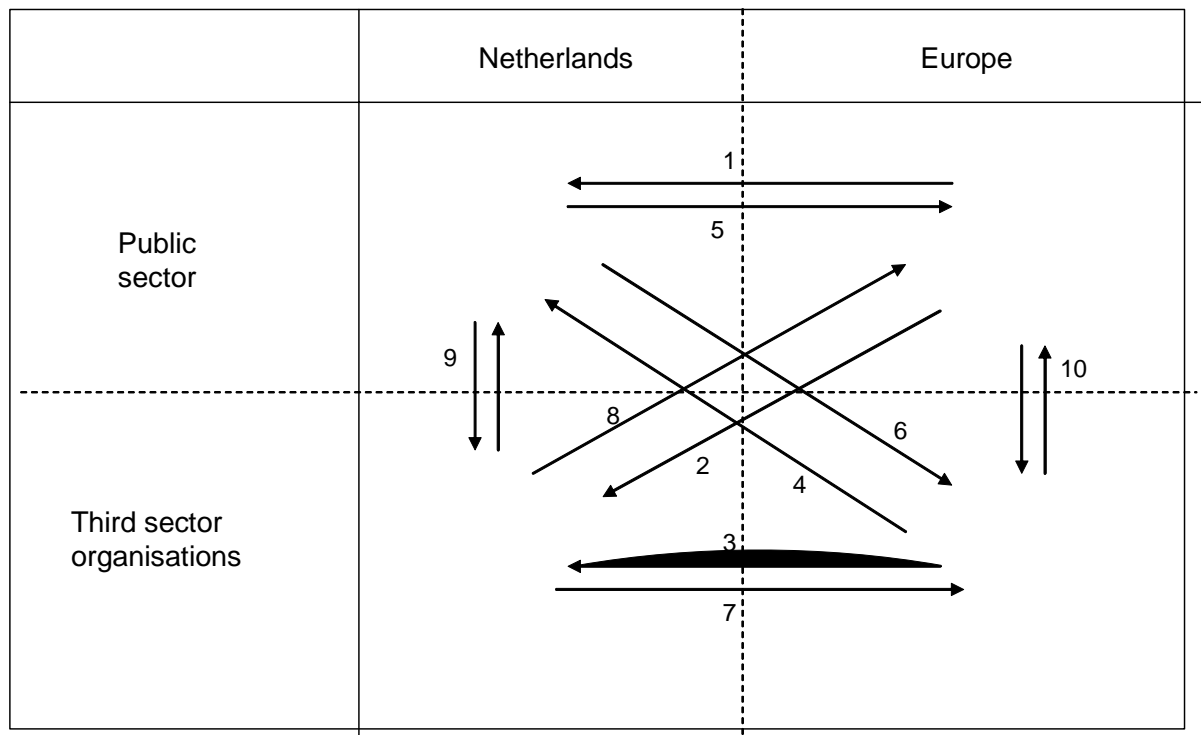
From the national to the European level:

- (5) The vector from the Dutch public sector to the European institutions. An obvious example is the participation of Dutch government officials in the Council of Ministers.
- (6) The vector from the Dutch public sector to the European third sector. The Dutch government may approach EuroFeds if they believe them to be potentially powerful allies on a certain issue.
- (7) The vector from the Dutch third sector to EuroFeds. For instance, national participants do not disregard their national interest while cooperating in EuroFeds. For this reason, they may try to have an influence on the agenda of the European federation.
- (8) Finally, a vector is acknowledged between the national third sector and European institutions. For instance, Dutch third sector organisations directly seek access to members of the European Parliament or the Commission.

Two possible (two-way-) vectors have not been mentioned yet. They are not included in Van Schendelen's definition<sup>4</sup>, but they are addressed in this paper:

- (9) The vector from the Dutch third sector to the Dutch public sector and vice versa. These vectors include for instance attempts of Dutch third sector organisations to influence the position of the Dutch government with regard to a European issue; alternatively, Dutch government officials may contact Dutch third sector organisations.
- (10) The vector from the European third sector to the European public sector and vice versa. These include attempts of EuroFeds to influence European institutions, as well as communications from the latter to the EuroFeds.

**Vectors of Europeanisation**  
 Derived from: Van Schendelen 2002: 32-34



This encompasses more or less everything; cross-border and national interaction between public and third sector organisations regarding European issues. Although none of the vectors is irrelevant to our enquiry, we will specifically focus on (3), (7), (8), (9) and (10). In particular, we will elaborate on one aspect of the role of third sector organisations: the extent to which they realise the objectives and interests of their constituencies through the European Union.

### **3.2 Operationalisation**

The present paper aims to determine how and to what extent the Europeanisation of the third sector contributes or can potentially contribute to the legitimacy of the European Union in the Netherlands. A common clarification of the term legitimacy is to read it as a certain degree of support for a political system (see for instance David Easton's explanation, as referred to by Van Staden (2003: 9)). However, in this paper we do not translate legitimacy with support in the meaning of people to be proponents of each and every European policy or to fully endorse the current course of the European integration. Rather, we see it as a situation in which people are involved in European politics, which means that they are informed about European issues, develop opinions about the European Union, and participate in European affairs. In other words, people have to acknowledge the European

Union as a relevant factor in political discussions about European issues, and have informed opinions about it (Castenmiller 2001: 45-50).

In paragraph four, we will present evidence on the Europeanisation of Dutch third sector organisations. We will focus on two aspects of Europeanisation. The first is how third sector organisations represent the interests of their constituencies in the European domain; the second is how they involve those constituencies in discussions with a European angle. For each aspect, several indicators have been defined (for a more comprehensive discussion of the choice of indicators, see Van den Berg, 2006).

A. Interest representation at the European level

1. Europe in the internal organisation
2. Access to the European policy process
  - (a) European third sector alliances
  - (b) Direct access to European institutions
  - (c) Relationships with the Dutch government

B. The involvement of constituencies in European affairs:

1. Informing the members
2. Propagating opinions about the European integration
3. Providing opportunities for participation
  - (a) Participation in meetings, discussions, campaigns and courses
  - (b) Internal democracy
  - (c) Contacts with like-minded people abroad

It must be emphasized that these indicators only express Europeanisation as reflected in formal, organisational characteristics and connections. This does not tell us much about the actual influence of the third sector on policy processes, nor about the informal effects of their efforts on the perceptions and views of their constituents. That would require a more detailed analysis of specific cases, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Nonetheless, the evidence presented in this paper provides a stepping-stone in assessing the validity of the assumption, endorsed by the European Commission, that third sector organisations are important vehicles in advancing the legitimacy of the European Union in the member states.

### **3.3 Methodology**

We have drawn on a variety of documented sources, to which we will refer in the course of this report. However, we can also draw on original research that has been conducted over the past few years by ourselves or by members of research projects of which we have been part.

Research on the Europeanisation of the Dutch third sector, conducted by the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands (SCP), focused on the European performance of the following organisations in the third sector:

- i. Political parties: the Christian-Democratic Party (Christen-Democratisch Appèl, CDA), the Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA), the Liberal Party (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD), the Green Party (GroenLinks, GL) and the Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij, SP);
- ii. Trade unions: the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, FNV) and the National Federation of Christian Trade Unions in the Netherlands (Christelijk Nederlands Vakverbond, CNV);
- iii. Organisations in the field of international assistance and human rights: Novib Oxfam and the Dutch section of Amnesty International;
- iv. Organisations in the field of nature conservation and environmental protection: Nature Monuments (Natuurmonumenten) and the Dutch section of Greenpeace;
- v. The Consumers' Association (Consumentenbond)
- vi. ANBO for over 50's (ANBO voor 50-plussers);
- vii. Scouting Netherlands.

This limited sample does not provide a representative picture of the entire Dutch third sector, but does include case studies of the European orientation of some important sections of the Dutch third sector. The evidence presented in paragraph four is based on relevant documentation (publications and websites) from the selected organisations, and on interviews with representatives dealing with European affairs in the respective organisations. (Van den Berg, 2006).

It must be noted that position of political parties is a special one, which has led the Dutch Scientific Council on Government Policy to commission an additional paper on this topic. However, at the express request of the Council, we have retained political parties in our overview of the third sector, so that they may be compared on a different basis. It reflects the dual nature of these organisations, which are both an inseparable part of the Dutch political system and – in their role as third sector organisations – outside it.

Our empirical data on developments at the European level and in other countries draw on the findings of the Third Sector European Policy network, which was funded under the 5<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme of the European Union, and brought together representatives from



nine European countries, under the coordination of the London School of Economics. The research, conducted during the period 2002-2005, focused on the position and constitution of the third sector at the European and national levels, with particular attention for the interaction between those levels. Several hundred interviews and extensive documentation analysis were conducted by the country teams, the results of which will be published in a forthcoming volume (see Kendall 2007b). We will here draw on the material that has been made publicly available so far, and on the evidence collected specifically on The Netherlands (Brandsen & Van de Donk 2007a).<sup>5</sup>

## **4 THE DUTCH THIRD SECTOR IN EUROPE<sup>6</sup>**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In its aim to strengthen democratic legitimacy of the European Union, the European Commission regards third sector organisations as important intermediaries for the exchange of information and discussion between governments and citizens. The issue addressed in this paragraph is to examine whether third sector organisations in the Netherlands function as intermediaries between their constituencies and the European Union. We will specifically focus on the European activities of political parties, trade unions, organisations in the field of international assistance and human rights, nature conservation and environmental protection, consumers' interests and youth and recreational organisations (see paragraph 3.3). For these type of organisations, we examine (1) to what extent they advocate the interests of their constituencies at the European level (4.2), and (2) to what extent they try to involve their constituencies in European affairs (4.3). We do not have sufficient data to assess the efficacy of such attempts, so our conclusions only apply to the activities of the organisations in themselves.

### **4.2 Advocacy at the European level**

#### 4.2.1 Introduction

One of the merits ascribed to third sector organisations is their objective of advocating the interests of their constituencies. The aim of this paragraph is to examine the extent to which Dutch third sector organisations pursue these interests within the European domain. More specifically, two aspects of the intermediary role will be addressed: the way in which organisations integrate European affairs within their internal organisation, and how they seek access to the European policy process.

#### 4.2.2 Europe within the organisation

We have investigated whether the organisations have employed 'Europe-specialists', and to what extent the rest of the staff is involved in European affairs. Both findings are indicative of the way in which third sector organisations have adapted to Europe.

To start with political parties, apart from their representatives and staff in the European Parliament, they have one or more spokespersons in Dutch parliament for European Affairs. The spokespersons have more issues in their portfolio than simply European affairs. Especially the representatives of smaller parties have many additional issues to deal with. The selected parties have employed policy staff for European issues to facilitate the parliamentary work. Apart from the European spokespersons, also parliamentarians with a specific, originally domestic portfolio, have to deal with the European dimension of their

expertise. However, various commentators have reported in recent years that the average Dutch member of parliament has little attention for the European aspects of his or her specialisation. For instance, little activity has been reported in reaction to legislative proposals of the European Commission (State Council 2005, Reports of the Second Chamber in Parliament 2002-2003, 28 632 Nr. 1).

Besides party representatives in the European and national parliament, political parties have staff employed in their party bureaucracies that deal with European affairs. Many parties have a so-called 'International Secretary', an international relations manager who handles European affairs. These officials often act as a liaison between politicians and party officials, and maintain relations with like-minded parties abroad. GroenLinks is unique in the Netherlands in having a 'European Secretary', next to an International Secretary. In the GroenLinks and the VVD, these are part-time and voluntary positions. In the others (PvdA, CDA, SP) it is a paid position. Some parties also have an expert group on International Affairs (CDA) or European Affairs (VVD), and several parties have one or more working groups on Europe run by active members (CDA, VVD, PvdA, GroenLinks).

The Dutch trade union federations FNV and CNV both employ staff to deal with European affairs. Apart from some Europe specialists at its home office in Amsterdam, the FNV also maintains a small permanent office in Brussels. The smaller CNV lacks a permanent representation in Brussels and has to do 'Europe' with people that travel between the Netherlands and Brussels. They lobby both the Dutch and the European institutions. Also within the individual unions associated with the federations FNV and CNV staff is engaged in European affairs. The degree of European orientation varies for the various unions. Staff of the federations and representatives of the individual unions meet periodically to exchange information and discuss European issues. Especially in the case of broad issues that are relevant for each and every individual union, the European experts of the federations play a leading role. The federations often move ahead of the individual unions and need to persuade the latter to adopt a particular European strategy.

Within the Dutch branches of Greenpeace, Oxfam Novib, Amnesty International and within the Dutch Consumers' Association, both staff assigned to specific dossiers and lobbyists deal with European issues. As a rule, they take care of both the Dutch lobby in The Hague and the European lobby in Brussels. Nature Monuments employs two paid staff members for European affairs, one dealing with European projects and subsidies, the other with European interest mediation, lobbying, and representation of the Dutch organisation in European networks. The association for elderly people ANBO has recently assigned three paid staff members with the task of keeping track of relevant European developments. However,

European affairs do not constitute the main part of their work package. Voluntary experts and board members are active in a national working group on international affairs, and in expert groups and the board of the network AGE at the European level. Whereas the former employ paid staff for European affairs, the Dutch branch of Scouting International - with a modest professional staff - mainly uses volunteers and board members.

Of all the third sector organisations studied, only the trade union federation FNV has an independent permanent representation in Brussels. Since 1999, the FNV has employed three staff members in the European capital to maintain direct contacts with European institutions and networks. Not long ago, Nature Monuments also had a small permanent representation in Brussels. A part-time lobbyist took care of contacts with the European Parliament and the Commission. This representation was terminated in 2005. Organisations with a permanent office in Brussels have the reputation of being professional. However, it is not a guarantee for effective European lobbying (Van Schendelen 2002: 48).

In addition to having Europe-specialists available, some organisations have the ambition to 'mainstream' Europe into the organisation, by integrating Europe in everyday work. The results do not provide a precise assessment of the degree of European orientation of each section of the selected organisations in practice. Analysing and assessing the European portion of the workload and output of the entire staff, fell beyond the scope of the study. Nevertheless, some findings about the ambitions of Dutch organisations can be reported. The FNV, for instance, has decided that Europe is a domestic issue, and that people assigned with 'domestic' tasks do also have to deal with the European aspects of their portfolio. The same is true for political parties. Ideally, both the national and the European dimension of fields such as environmental policy, agricultural policy, justice affairs etc. are to be handled by the respective spokespersons of the parties. Staff of the Dutch Consumers' Association also have to follow both the Dutch and European policy agenda. Europe is included in the job responsibilities of staff working on policy issues and public affairs. As a rule, new staff of the Dutch Consumers' Association that have to settle into the job, start with a work placement at the European Consumers' Organisation (BEUC) in Brussels, in order to get acquainted with the European scene. The agenda of the lobbyists of Oxfam Novib, and the Dutch sections of Greenpeace and Amnesty International contain both national and European issues.

All these organisations have the ambition to mainstream Europe, and have made some provisions for it. However, the ambition to mainstream Europe in the entire organisation has proved difficult to achieve. The limited European orientation of Dutch members of parliament was mentioned earlier. Observers have noted the same lack of engagement in the trade union federations, where staff seem absorbed by domestic dossiers about labour

conditions. The European experts of political parties, trade union federations and Nature Monuments themselves acknowledge that it takes a lot of effort to mobilise the rest of the organisation to join the European course, and that there is still considerable ground to gain in their respective organisations.

#### 4.2.3 Access to the European policy process

How do Dutch third sector organisations seek access to the European policy process? Three aspects are dealt with in this section: (1) the role of European alliances with like-minded partners, (2) access to the European institutions, and (3) the relationship with the national government.

European non-governmental networks play a very important role. All the selected organisations are associated with either a European (con)federation (political parties, trade union federations, Nature Monuments, Consumers' Association, and ANBO), or the European branch of an international organisation (Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Oxfam Novib and Scouting). Each of these international organisations and European networks has a formal decision-making structure that includes an executive, a board, and a council in which national members are represented.

Political parties have come together in European party federations. CDA, PvdA, VVD and GroenLinks are members of the European People's Party, the Party of European Socialists, the European Liberal Democratic Party and the European Green Party respectively. The SP has refrained from associating with a European party federation. The European federations have not taken over important powers of national parties regarding their functioning in the domestic domain, and left the national sovereignty of Dutch parties largely intact. For instance, elections programmes drawn up for the European elections in the party federations, are not adopted uncritically by the Dutch parties, which tend to define a programme of their own, tailored to the situation in the Netherlands. In securing the objectives in the European domain, the European federations play a minor role as compared to the role of the allied groups in the European Parliament. The latter form the organisational centre of European party life (Bardi 1994: 360).

Besides their representation in the European Parliament, Dutch political parties seek access to the European policy process through the national parliament. However, official Dutch advisory bodies and commentators in the parliament itself have recurrently acknowledged that parliamentary control on European policy is imperfect. The monitoring of European policy is taken up at a rather late stage, only by a selected group of representatives. Furthermore, the alignment of national and European political positions and the exchange of

information both have scope for improvement. As a result, the ability of political parties to exert influence on European decision-making remains limited.

Whereas for political parties, the groups in the European Parliament are of principal importance for access to the European realm, other third sector organisations rely on their association with non-governmental networks of likeminded partners, frequently referred to as EuroFeds. The Dutch trade union federations and individual unions are associated with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Nature Monuments is associated with the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), the Dutch Consumers' Association is part of the European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), and the association for elderly people ANBO indirectly associated with the European Older People's Platform AGE. The Dutch section of Amnesty International is part of the EU Association of Amnesty International, the Dutch branch of Greenpeace is part of the European network of Greenpeace International, Oxfam Novib is part of the European network of Oxfam International, and Scouting Netherlands participates in the European branches of the International Scouting organisations, the European Scout Region and the European Region WAGGGS.

For independent national organisations associated with a European (con)federation as well as Dutch sections of international organisations, membership of a European federation provides valuable information and expertise. The federations have permanent EU offices in Brussels that function at the centre of European lobbying. The staff of these offices follow the European agenda for their portfolio, and maintain contacts with key people in the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council. In general, the Brussels offices of the European networks take the lead in European lobbying and campaigns. They are often better informed about what actually happens on the European level, than representatives of the national organisations who work more remote from Brussels. For instance, the Brussels office of the European Older People's Platform AGE habitually take the initiative in defining strategies at the European level, on which Dutch members such as ANBO comment afterwards. In this respect, the contribution of the Dutch members is mainly reactive. Also the Dutch Consumers' Association acknowledges that it relies for an important part on BEUC for information about developments in Europe. The same is true for Nature Monuments, which receives much of its knowledge about European developments from the EEB. The CNV leaves many issues to ETUC, as due to limited manpower, it can only handle few issues itself.

The EU offices of European networks in Brussels also coordinate lobbying strategies. Especially in the European networks of international organisations, lobbying is synchronised by deciding on a division of labour between the national branches and the EU office. Whereas representatives of the Dutch branches lobby with Dutch officials and Dutch members of the

European Parliament, staff of the Brussels offices take care of contacts within the European Parliament and the Commission. In this way, European networks with a modest budget and staff are able to mobilise manpower to lobby at the various levels of the European Union.

Although for many organisations the efforts of the Brussels offices are more important for securing their interests at the European level than their individual efforts, they all engage in individual lobbying at the European level. The latter tends to focus on Dutch members of the European Parliament. Some of the groups, including the FNV, CNV, Novib Oxfam and the Consumer Association also have contacts with representatives of less easily accessible European institutions, such as the Commission. In addition, trade union federations and the Consumer Association have representation in het EESC. This provides them with privileged access to European institutions.

In spite of their participation in European non-governmental networks (EuroFeds) and individual attempts to gain access to European institutions, none of the organisations disregard the national government or national politicians in their attempt to secure interests with a European dimension. Claims are often forwarded to both European and Dutch officials, depending on the policy phase and the issue. The more professional groups work only selectively via The Hague, as they are aware that Dutch officials are not always the most adequate trustee of their interests (Van Schendelen 2003: 271-272).

### **4.3 Involving constituencies in European affairs**

#### **4.3.1 Introduction**

Dutch third sector organisations vary in the possibilities they offer their constituency to become involved in European affairs. We will discuss three potential methods of encouraging involvement, (1) informing members about European issues, (2) advocating opinions about European integration, and (3) affording the opportunity to participate in activities with a European dimension. Each of these may contribute to their members' level of knowledge about Europe and lead to 'affective attachment' to the European political system, participation in European politics or a sense of European citizenship. In short, they might strengthen the legitimacy of the European Union in the eyes of the membership. As we have noted before, we can only speculate on whether they actually do.

#### **4.3.2 Informing members**

Informing the membership about European issues means reporting developments concerning the European institutions, as well as covering developments in other European

countries. The most frequently used means to inform members about Europe are printed periodicals, (electronic) newsletters and Internet sites.

Each of the selected political parties publish periodic magazines which are circulated to all members. Nearly each edition of the periodicals entails reports about European affairs, including news, background articles, or interviews with political representatives and experts. GroenLinks and the CDA have decided to allocate a fixed number of pages in each edition for European reports. The political parties also publish weekly electronic newsletters, which include European reports, and Europe-specific newsletters. The trade union federations FNV and CNV circulate electronic newsletters available to all members, which include European reports. The Brussels office of the FNV disseminates an electronic newsletter focused on European affairs. The individual trade unions publish printed magazines. For the more inactive members, this is the most important communication media to become updated about trade union developments, including European events. Some of these printed magazines have a vested section on Europe.

The magazine of the Dutch section of Amnesty International (*Wordt Vervolgd*) is published 10 times a year and each includes several references to Europe. The same holds for the three-monthly paper for supporters of Greenpeace. The three-monthly paper for supporters of Novib Oxfam Europe refers to Europe in nearly each issue, as many of its campaigns are linked to trade policy, which is formulated at the European level. Editions of the printed quarterly for leading members of Dutch Scouting groups habitually include reports about European activities and calls for upcoming international and European events. The printed magazine of Nature Monuments includes fewer references to European affairs. However, Europe is nearly monthly dealt with in their less widespread journal for interested members (*Van Nature*). The relatively voluminous editions of the monthly magazine of the Dutch Consumers' Association (*de Consumentengids*) include a European item. This usually consists of a brief report concerning European regulations. Finally, in the printed magazine of the organisation for elderly people ANBO, references to Europe have been virtually absent. In all the printed publications mentioned above, European reports are only a small part of the information offered. European specialists in various third sector organisations have to make some effort to get their reports published. Such reports have to compete with other issues, which are often considered more attractive for the audience.

In addition to providing European information in periodicals, third sector organisations publish informative one-off brochures about specific European issues. For instance, the CDA made booklets about the enlargement of the EU available to its members, the trade unions disseminate brochures to individual members who wish to learn about aspects of the single



market relevant for Dutch employees, and the Netherlands Platform Older People and Europe (NPOE) regularly produces informative brochures for the members of Dutch organisations for the elderly. Finally, information is made available through the websites of third sector organisations.

#### 4.3.3 Opinions on European integration

The assumption at the basis of this paragraph is that if third sector organisations advocate opinions on European integration, members may develop some 'affective involvement' with Europe ('affective' in the neutral sense of recognition of the European political system).

Considering their formal position in the political system, political parties are one of the most obvious types of third sector organisations to adopt and express positions about the merits and shortcomings of the European integration. The political parties included in the sample endorse European cooperation in general, but their attitude towards the course of the European integration varies from critical pro-European (GroenLinks) to critical pessimistic (SP) (Raap en Koole 2005: 119-122). Commentators of Dutch politics have reported a certain restraint by Dutch politicians to speak out on Europe positively. Especially after the electoral victory of the populist movement in 2002, politicians were fearful of losing the support of an electorate that grew more critical about the enlargement and deepening of European cooperation. Earlier, the VVD had commented more critically on the European integration (De Boer 2005: 141 e.v.). The PvdA changed its course from 'Euro-loving' to 'Euro-realism'. And the Christian democratic CDA, maintaining its pro-federal aspirations, nevertheless put more emphasis on the Dutch identity in Europe (Voerman 2005: 60). GroenLinks, on the other hand, grew towards a more pro-European course in recent years (Raap en Koole 2005: 120).

One of the most logical means for political parties to vent positions about the European integration are election programmes. De Beus and Pennings (2005: 193-215) investigated the share of European references in election programmes of some political parties (GroenLinks, CDA, VVD, PvdA, D66) in recent decades. They did not only determine the share of European references in the entire programmes, but also established the portion of Europe in paragraphs on specific policy domains. The authors concluded that Dutch political parties do not pay much attention to Europe in their election programmes. PvdA and CDA are acknowledged as the most Europeanised of the parties, as they both have an evenly distributed and slightly increased attention for Europe. On the basis of their research, De Beus and Pennings (2005: 208) concluded that the attention paid to Europe in the election programmes, is less than may be expected, considering the actual influence of Europe. 'Europe's significance grows, thereby reducing the power of national parties. This happens with support of the largest party groups in Europe, without national party programmes

articulating this increased power of Europe and the political support for it prominently to the voters' (own translation).

Besides political parties, some of the other third sector organisations in the study express themselves explicitly about the desirability of the European integration. The trade union federations adhere to European unification. In its policy paper '*Koersbepaling Europa*', the FNV chooses a 'constructive' approach towards the European integration (FNV 2004). Furthermore, some third sector organisations, as a member of the European Movement of the Netherlands (EBN), implicitly show their adherence to the general idea of the European integration. The EBN seeks to make a contribution to the public debate and aspires to comment on the integration process in a 'critical and constructive' way (EBN 2005). The following organisations are a member of the EBN: PvdA, CDA, VVD, GroenLinks, FNV, CNV, the Consumers' Association and the NPOE. The remaining organisations do not contest the European integration as such, but rather accept it as a given situation. They are not inspired by European idealism, but are guided by pragmatism. They are active at the European level because it is necessary to secure the interests of their constituency and their organisation. Thereby, they limit their engagement and opinions strictly to their specific policy domain.

#### 4.3.4 Providing opportunities for participation

Third sector organisations provide their individual members with opportunities to engage in European affairs. The following forms of active participation are addressed: (1) participation in meetings, discussions, campaigns and courses on Europe, (2) participation in the formulation of European positions and decision-making via representative bodies, briefly addressed as 'internal democracy', and (3) having contact with like-minded people abroad.

Authors in the field of political participation, often distinguish between forms of participation for which people are easily mobilised, and activities that people are less inclined to do. For instance, voting is considered as a relatively undemanding form of political participation, whereas people decide less easily to participate in public street demonstrations. In this paragraph, no ranking is provided for the various types of participation that third sector organisations offer. The various forms of participation are simply inventoried. Thereafter, it can be determined which organisations provide more, and which provide less opportunities for participation.

##### *Participation in meetings, discussions, campaigns and courses*

First of all, political parties organise meetings on European issues, including public debates, lectures of members of the European parliament, or informative meetings. In the run-up to European elections or other important events such as an enlargement of the EU, or the Dutch

referendum on the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, these meetings become more frequent. Members participate in these meetings, or they initiate and organise such meetings themselves. Especially during the campaigns for the European elections, members are frequently invited to lend a hand. In addition, members are asked to actively support initiatives beyond election campaigns. For instance, in 2004, GroenLinks started to mobilise its members to disperse a petition to limit the time permitted for the transportation of livestock in Europe, in advance of the proposed instrument of the citizens' initiative in the European Constitution. By the summer of 2005, GroenLinks had collected approximately 40,000 signatures of proponents of the initiative. Furthermore, SP, GroenLinks, and PvdA, jointly with FNV and other third sector organisations distributed a petition against the proposal for the Services Directive (the 'Bolkestein Directive'). In recent years, several European public street demonstrations were organised in Brussels against the Services Directive, in which thousands of Dutch members of SP and FNV participated.

Apart from political parties, also trade union federations and individual unions organise meetings and discussions for members and disperse petitions on European issues. In various campaigns of other third sector organisations, such as Amnesty International, Novib Oxfam or Greenpeace, a European dimension is included which is to a varying extent communicated to the membership. Sympathisers are provided the opportunity to visit campaign meetings, stands at festivals, and support petitions directed at European institutions. There is also the possibility to become voluntary staff helping the execution of campaigns. For instance, in 2004, the Dutch section of Amnesty International organised a campaign to influence the agenda of the Dutch government as chair of the European Union. In the autumn of 2004, 40,000 signatures were collected with the help of active members of local groups. Another example was the 'Global Campaign for Education', in the Netherlands organised by Novib Oxfam, Plan Nederland and the general trade union on education. In 2004, tens of thousands of children in the Netherlands participated in the lobby to promote the right to education. The campaign was partly aimed at members of the European Parliament. In the Netherlands, the campaign efforts accumulated 66,475 signatures. A final example mentioned here is Greenpeace, the Consumer Union, the FNV and others collected 75,000 signatures supporting a strict European policy on chemicals.

Especially political parties and trade unions organise courses and educational programmes on Europe for their members. This is in line with findings of De Hart (2005) who found that trade unions and political parties in particular highly value offering their members education and developing politically relevant skills. Of the selected political parties, CDA, PvdA, VVD and SP have a educational unit. Also the party bureau of GroenLinks is committed to provide education to its active members. Europe is included in the general schooling programmes of

the parties. Some parties, including CDA and VVD have specific courses on Europe. Furthermore, political parties arrange excursions. It is estimated that on a yearly basis, hundreds of Dutch people visit the European Parliament via political parties. The trade union federations organise both general broad courses on Europe for active members of all unions, as well as specific courses for members of particular unions. In addition, people are educated for participation in European Works Councils of European companies, and information is available for active members on international trade union cooperation in border regions. Finally, also members of trade unions are offered the possibility to participate in excursions to Brussels.

### *Internal democracy*

The internal democracy of third sector organisations determines to what extent members are granted a role in the formulation of European positions and decision-making via representative bodies. In particular since the beginning of this century, political parties and trade unions have implemented democratic reform. For political parties, institutional reform is often initiated after 'existential events', such as major electoral losses. CDA started democratic reform after its electoral defeat in 1994. PvdA and VVD initiated party reform after the elections of 2002. The reform process in the three parties led to increased member participation in party decision-making. GroenLinks had already introduced direct influence for its members in 1995. From the early history of the party, members of D66 have direct influence in party decision-making (Voerman 2005: 217-219).

Several parties have introduced the instrument of direct consultation of members. In the new statutes of CDA (2003), members can cast a vote on paper for the election of the chair of the party executive. Also PvdA has introduced (2003) the instrument of direct consultation. Members can elect the person heading the list of candidates in the Dutch parliament and the European Parliament, and the chair of the party executive. In October 2003, members of the PvdA elected the person heading the list of candidates for the European Parliament. In June 2003, the general assembly of the VVD introduced direct consultation of the members for the election of head of the parliamentary groups in The Hague and Brussels. The general assembly of GroenLinks, containing all members, can decide on organising a referendum. The SP has not introduced direct consultation of the members, but sees itself as a party which traditionally puts much weight on knowing the opinion of members.

The highest forum in the decision-making structure of CDA, PvdA, VVD and GroenLinks is the general assembly (or *congres*). In the SP, the highest decision-making body is the party council, comprising the chairs of local branches and the party executive. In the CDA, VVD and GroenLinks, each individual party member has a vote in the general assembly. In the

PvdA and SP, the vote is assigned to representatives of party members and the executive. In the general assembly of both CDA and GroenLinks, the programmes for national and European elections are decided on, as well as the persons who will head the lists of candidates in both parliaments. This means that individual members of both parties can cast a vote on the European elections programme and the person who will lead the group in the European Parliament.

One remark has to be made to put the importance of formal arrangements for direct member consultation in perspective. The instruments of member consultation and the right to vote in general party meetings are a fair estimate of the level of involvement granted to members in political parties. However, these instruments alone, are not the entire solution to member participation in European affairs. A consultation where a policy programme or the election of only a single candidate can be approved or disapproved, is less valuable if members are not involved in earlier discussions on the contents of European policy.

The tendency of democratic reform is also found in trade union federations, where members are consulted on important agreements and decisions. Since 2003, members of the FNV have been consulted three times about the results of negotiations with the government. In 2005, the FNV introduced the instrument of the referendum on important broad issues. Members are also consulted by individual sectoral unions, for instance on the results of negotiations with employers. The CNV organises 'qualitative consultations', in the form of telephone- or website enquiries among members, or meetings where members can present their opinion on certain agreements or important issues, such as the European Services Directive.

Some of the remaining organisations in the sample have a representative body, where members are granted a say in policy making. Amnesty International has a general assembly where both representatives and individual members participate and have a right to vote. During the general meetings, members can also participate in working groups, where specific issues are discussed. In 2004, a working group on the European Union and human rights was held. The Dutch Consumers' Association has an assembly of representatives of members, who can decide on the strategy and budget and act as a sounding board of the Association. Infrequently, European issues are discussed in this representative body. However, in June 2005, the representatives took the initiative to discuss European consumer themes, including the European Constitution, food and European policy on chemicals. Nature Monuments has a representative body, too. In 2005 the regional representatives discussed the policy lines for the future were discussed, which included Europe. In 2006, the revised policy plan for European affairs of Nature Monuments will be discussed by the representatives. Finally, the

organisation for elderly people ANBO sometimes allocates time to European issues in a national meeting of representatives.

#### *Contacts with like-minded people abroad*

The final form of participation addressed in this paragraph, are the possibilities granted by third sector organisations to have contacts with like minded people abroad. This type of participation, which may lay the basis for feelings of solidarity among Europeans, is especially encouraged by Scouting and to a lesser degree by political parties and trade unions.

The promotion of international solidarity among members is an explicit aim of Scouting Netherlands. These international and European aspirations are implemented by organising European camps and events, in which both youth members, youth leaders and voluntary experts participate. Participation in international events is encouraged in Scouting's periodicals, and participants are expected to interact with the people of the host country. European Scouting endorses the advancement of 'active European citizenship' as a joint policy objective (European Guide and Scout Conference 2004). To advance this aim, specific European programmes are implemented, such as 'Europe for you!', offering members from various ages the opportunity to gain international experience in Europe. Examples are so-called EuroSteps, activities open to participation of scouts across Europe. In these activities, often on camp sites abroad, members from various nationalities meet and communicate, and are offered the possibility to understand the domestic culture of the host country.

Within political parties, members take the opportunity to get in contact with like-minded party members in other European countries. For instance, some local groups of CDA, PvdA, and GroenLinks maintain relations with local groups of the same party family abroad. Furthermore, Dutch members - as a member of the delegation of their party - visit party meetings of like-minded parties in Europe, and vice versa, foreign party members visit Dutch meetings. In addition, active trade union members can participate in European Works Councils and exchange information with foreign trade union members in the border regions. However, the international contacts of party- and trade union members are far less frequent than those of members of Scouting.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

On the basis of our empirical investigation of Dutch third sector organisations, we are forced to conclude that Dutch third sector organisations do engage with 'Europe', but only to a limited degree. Although some organisations attempt to integrate a European dimension within their mainstream activities, activities with a European focus largely remain restricted to a couple of specialists. Their European federations are often vital sources of information as

well as initiators of common strategies. In the end, it means that the European dimension of third sector activities is realised within fairly small circles.

In their communication with constituencies, third sector organisations generally make some room for European affairs, although there is little indication that this springs from love for the European ideal. But insofar as European affairs are relevant to ongoing business, there do appear to be opportunities for member participation and genuine efforts to involve them in current debates with a Brussels flavour. This applies especially to political parties, which have a direct strategic interest in addressing citizens by virtue of the European elections. On the whole, there is therefore some scope for the involvement of citizens in European issues through regular channels of communication and participation. The key seems to be to for European issues to access these channels, but as we have argued above, this is exactly where their progress halts. Failure to 'mainstream' Europe therefore appears to be at the heart of the problem.

## **5 ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 The missing link**

Why is it that the European level fails to connect with the mainstream affairs of Dutch third sector organisations? Although it would take more detailed case studies to pin the causes down firmly, we can give an impression of potential causes based on the available evidence at our disposal. In a nutshell, these are inadequate incentives, inadequate means and incoherence.

One reason for the failure to connect is the (perceived) gap between national and European policy issues. The third sector has been praised especially for its ability to engage with citizens and local communities. But to the extent that it does, this may actually discourage engagement with 'Europe', when there is no obvious connection between European and national/local issues, and consequently no incentive for the organisations to look beyond their traditional habitat. What is hotly debated at the European level may have little immediate relevance within national debates, in which case it is unlikely to penetrate the organisation beyond the specialists. Alternatively, the relevance of issues may remain unrecognised. This problem is strengthened by the use of different languages. Some European terms are simply unknown within Dutch debates, and translations tend to be subtly (or less subtly) different. An illustration is the European debate on Services of General Interest. Whereas it was of clear substantive relevance to contemporary Dutch discussions on governance and social entrepreneurship, and might have been of strategic advantage to third sector networks, none seem to have picked it up – presumably because they failed to see the connection (Brandsen et al. 2007c).

In addition, many third sector organisations suffer from inadequate financial and human resources. They simply do not have the means to keep track of European debates, especially when these are not of urgent and immediate interest. This is why the European federations often take the lead in formulating common policy positions and strategies. Another reason is that effective participation in the European policy process usually demands fairly quick action, especially at the agenda-setting phase. This is at odds with a lengthy internal consultation procedure. The EuroFeds differ strongly in how they deal with this: while some regard thorough internal democracy as the bedrock of their external legitimacy, others move ahead of their base in order to be more effective.

Even if European networks are willing to reach out to their national members, they often face severe difficulties in organising an effective interaction, because their constituencies display a wide diversity. For instance, members of the European consumer federation BEUC include



membership-based associations (Germany, Netherlands, Belgium), state agencies (Scandinavia), and activist organisations on a syndicalist or co-operative basis (Southern Europe). Such variety deepens the difficulty of reaching consensus on a common strategy. For instance, while some members would be in favour of further co-operation with the Commission, others are inclined to adopt a more adversarial role. It makes internal consultations slow.

All in all, while there may be formal links between national third sector organisations and networks at the European level, it has proven difficult to establish a deeper connection, in which national and European debates would be more intimately linked. Of course, given the third sector's diversity, one must qualify such a statement. The "issue gap" applies less to organisations dealing with issues that have a clear international angle (e.g. the environment, human rights). Some organisations do have sufficient funds and people to play an active role on the European scene. Some European branches of third sector organisations such as Oxfam or Amnesty International appear to have a fairly coherent internal structure with well-functioning lines of communication. On the whole, though, the three obstacles described above have stood in the way of a firmer connection between the national third sector and the European level.

## **5.2 The distinctiveness of the Dutch third sector**

An interesting question is to what extent the Dutch third sector differs from its counterparts in other countries, in terms of how it connects with the European Union. Although there has as yet been no systematic comparative research on how third sector organisations operate within the complex European system of governance, data have become available on the links between national and European third sector policy communities, which will be published in the course of next year (Kendall 2007).<sup>7</sup> This allows a brief, but well-informed assessment of the distinctness of the Dutch case.

Statistically speaking, the Dutch third sector is among the largest in the world. In the 1990s, a large research project coordinated by Johns Hopkins University set out to map the third sector on a global scale. In the overall findings, the Dutch third sector emerged as among the largest in the world.<sup>8</sup> In fact, in terms of non-agricultural employment, it was the largest with 12.9 %. The bulk of employment was in social welfare services - particularly health, education & research, social care and social housing. Voluntary work stood at 6.1 %, <sup>9</sup> which again made it proportionately the largest. Revenues in the four fields mentioned above were 66% from state sources, 33 % fees and other commercial income, and 1% from private giving; while overall, it is 59 % public, 38 % fees, 3 % charity. In terms of employment, it therefore makes a major contribution to the economy.

In addition, it has traditionally had a significant role in the policy process in various fields, both in policy formulation and implementation (Brandsen & Van de Donk 2007). In fact, the third sector controls key segments of the Dutch welfare state, in which it has become strongly intertwined with the state. This has meant that, more than in most other European countries, third sector organisations have started to identify with the policy field in which they are active, rather than with third sector organisations in other fields. For instance, a private non-profit school is more likely to identify itself with public schools than with a private non-profit hospital. It means that the notion of a third sector as such (or: '*het maatschappelijk middenveld*') is an abstraction without immediate relevance. Dekker once described it as 'a category, not an entity' (Dekker 2001: 62). In that respect, the Netherlands seem to have moved beyond the normative debate whether or not to co-operate with the state (see section 2.3). Their close connection with the state makes it less likely that organisations would take up positions in European debates that fundamentally differ from the position of the national government. Rather, differences tend to be smoothed over within national policy networks before they reach the European level.

In this respect, the third sector differs sharply across the EU. In France, which is characterised by a centralist tradition, the third sector has an uneasy relationship with a state that is historically suspicious of intermediary bodies (Fraisie 2007). In Central and Eastern European countries, the third sector is emerging against the backdrop of transition processes and is seeking to establish itself in a system where it has long had no place. In a Scandinavian country such as Sweden, the third sector is significantly present in society, but mostly in its 'voice' role, as a carrier of ideology (Olsson et al. 2007). Its role of service provider has only been seriously developing since the mid-1980s and remains relatively minor. In Germany, its position in relation to the state has always been more co-operative. The German third sector is dominated by six Free Welfare Associations, which have traditionally dominated the social welfare domain (Zimmer et al. 2007). They are closely aligned with the state, although their position has recently been under threat from market reforms.

All of this reflects on how organisations relate to the EU. For instance, French third sector networks have had a strong desire to achieve recognition through European law (e.g. through the adoption of European legal formats) which reflects the national emphasis on legal solutions. In the Netherlands, with its liberal legal provisions regarding associations and foundations, the third sector has seen little need to go European on this issue. This is not the place to dwell extensively on the relationship between national and European third sector policy communities, which is a deeply complex one. But what is important to note is that, regardless of the particular strategies that third sector organisations and their umbrella

networks pursue, activities with an EU orientation remain largely the domain of specialists. The lack of awareness of European developments appears to be fairly usual across the EU, and in that sense the Dutch are far from unique.

Still, it is possible to identify some particular characteristics of the Dutch third sector's position in relation to the EU. It is significantly larger and better-established than its counterparts in other countries, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe. Its role in propagating 'Europe' is therefore potentially much more significant than in countries where it is smaller and/or more fragmented. Indeed, there are some indications that if the relatively well-funded Dutch organisations do make an effort to engage in European affairs, they can make a significant international contribution by virtue of their resources. However, given that Dutch organisations traditionally have a strong focus on national policy fields, they are less likely to be engaged by concepts that transcend those fields, whether they be cross-cutting or international. It is possible that this is strengthened by the fact that many organisations have an associational basis, meaning that they are more likely to focus on the immediate concerns of their members and donors. Also, the fact that it is well-established at the national level means that it expects no immediate gain from involvement in European policy processes. Finally, as noted above, much of the third sector is closely connected to the Dutch state, and the latter has a predominantly national orientation.

On the whole, the Dutch third sector's failure to connect with the European Union directly is not unique, but that it may stand out by virtue of unfulfilled potential. It may be able to do more, but is disposed to do less. What is perhaps reassuring is that the failure to connect with 'Europe' appears to be a general phenomenon. This is because the three obstacles outlined in the previous section are not specific to the Dutch context. There is, to our knowledge, no European country in which the third sector has integrated European affair into its mainstream activities on a wide basis.

## **6 CONCLUSION: THE THIRD SECTOR AND THE LEGITIMACY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The third sector has often been suggested as a means of strengthening the legitimacy of the European Union by connecting citizens to Europe. Could we support such a claim, based on our analysis of the Dutch situation? Our answer is predictably ambiguous. The third sector does offer some opportunities for strengthening the involvement of citizens in European affairs, but there are major obstacles that must be overcome for its full potential to be realised. It is doubtful that they can be overcome in the short run. The third sector is certainly no quick fix for the European Union's problems with democratic legitimacy.

The results presented in paragraph four show that third sector organisations do on occasion try to engage their constituencies in European affairs, through the dissemination of information, the organisation of meetings and foreign exchanges. They also have a potential to connect a broader audience to Europe, thereby - as we defined in paragraph 3.2 - enhancing Europe's legitimacy in the Netherlands. In particular political parties would be able to play a significant role, since in the face of European elections, they have an interest in gaining the popular vote for their European positions. Also national sections of international organisations do have a relatively high potential to involve a broader audience than their membership, as their lobbying is geared towards Europe, and their campaigns are often designed to mobilise broad public support in order to gain leverage in the influence process. Furthermore, their specific interests and positions are more easily communicated to the public than broad and complicated institutional concerns handled by political parties. On the other hand, Dutch branches of international organisations constitute a relatively minor part of the third sector. Finally, it is estimated that organisations with firm national roots do have less potential to involve the public in European affairs, due to their more limited orientation towards Europe.

Loose ties between citizens and third sector, though, limit the potential of the third sector to enhance Europe's legitimacy. In the Dutch 'audience democracy' (De Beus 2001), dominated by the mass-media, citizens determine their vote without a vested loyalty to political parties. Their support for party leaders is conditional. This means that also European positions taken by political parties are not taken for granted and automatically adopted by supporters. Similarly, other third sector organisations enjoy provisional support and identification by the members and will also experience difficulty convincing their constituency of European positions. This situation came to light during the referendum campaign in the Netherlands on the ratification of the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Whereas the leadership of some major political parties (a parliamentary majority) and third sector organisations

preferred ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, a substantial part of their supporters did not follow this point of view, and rejected ratification. In the end, supporters stayed on board, not withdrawing their membership altogether as a result of the referendum, which suggests that third sector organisations are granted leeway by their constituencies to represent their interests (Van den Berg 2006, forthcoming, see also the contribution of Ben Crum to this project).

Notwithstanding the potential of the third sector to boost EU-legitimacy, it still leaves the problem of engaging organisations with agendas geared primarily towards national or even local issues. While most have established a formal presence in Brussels, either through membership of European networks or through direct representation, 'Europe' remains a specialism within most organisations, not a dimension integrated into mainstream activities. Furthermore, the interaction between third sector organisations and their European representatives is often one-sided, sometimes no more than a channel of communication. In that respect, the Dutch case may have particular characteristics, but it is certainly not untypical as compared to its counterparts in other countries.

That leaves us with the challenge of sifting the temporary from the inherent obstacles. Can we hope for more, or is this just the way it is? Our impression, inspired by the empirical evidence, is that the latter is the wiser assessment. It is unrealistic to expect the gap between European and national issues to diminish significantly. It is hard enough for policymakers to connect their national debates to the concerns of ordinary citizens, and European issues are even further removed. By implication, organisations that are firmly rooted in national or local debates may be less interested in European policy than governments. It may to some point be inevitable that, even if European issues are relevant to citizens, they are simply lost in translation, or remain the territory of specialists.

It is important to note that this appears to be primarily an intra-organisational problem. Where EU policy touches specific sector issues or current debates, the third sector connects, and it in turn uses its resources to address citizens. As in national politics, stirring up political debate may push issues that might otherwise go unnoticed into the limelight. In that sense, the problems of Brussels are not fundamentally different from those of the Hague. The crucial difference is that the significance of the EU still needs to be brought home *within* third sector organisations. If one is looking for concrete methods to encourage European legitimacy, then the single most important guideline is to touch third sector organisations where they are sensitive. They have shown themselves to be pragmatists, with little regard for the European ideal, and they should be approached as such. What this means is that it is vital

to show how engaging in European discussions can be directly useful in terms of concrete effects. Europe as an abstraction is unlikely to strike a chord.

It may be far more helpful to support the specialists who encourage recognition of the EU within their organisations and who can demonstrate the relevance of seemingly obscure issues. The Commission's financial support for the EuroFeds has been crucial in setting up the third sector at the European level, and well-targeted support may be equally useful at the national level. What the EU desperately needs is good translators, not just of language, but of politics. If they can be effectively mobilised, the third sector may be able to make a significant contribution to the legitimacy of European institutions. At present, it does not.



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## **APPENDIX 1 LIST OF THIRD SECTOR ORGANISATIONS**

- AGE, European Older People's Platform
- Amnesty International, Dutch section
- *ANBO voor 50-plussers*, ANBO for over-50's
- BEUC, European Consumers' Organisation
- CDA, *Christen Democratisch Appèl*, Christian Democratic Appeal
- CNV, *Christelijk Nederlands Vakverbond*, National Federation of Christian Trade Unions in the Netherlands.
- *Consumentenbond*, Consumers' Association
- EBN, *Europese Beweging Nederland*, European Movement Netherlands
- EEB, European Environmental Bureau
- ETUC, European Trade Union Confederation
- FNV, *Federatie Nederlandse Vakvereniging*, Netherlands Trade Union Confederation
- *GroenLinks*, Green Party
- *Greenpeace Nederland*, Greenpeace Netherlands
- *Natuur Monumenten*, Nature Monuments
- Novib – *Oxfam Nederland*, Oxfam Netherlands
- NPOE, *Nederlands Platform Ouderen en Europa*, Netherlands Platform Older People and Europe
- PvdA, *Partij van de Arbeid*, Labour Party
- *Scouting Nederland*, Scouting Netherlands
- SER, *Sociaal Economische Raad*, Social and Economic Council
- SP, *Socialistische Partij*, Socialist Party
- VVD, *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, Liberal Party

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The main alternative, 'civil society', includes informal groups of citizens, which are dealt with in another report within this project. The term 'third sector' tends to refer more specifically to organised civil society. Also, being an academic term rarely used outside scientific research, it has none of the normative connotations that the main alternatives have. In Dutch, the correct term would be 'maatschappelijk middenveld'.
- <sup>2</sup> In a nutshell, the difference between EESC and the Dutch Social Economic Council (*Sociaal-Economische Raad*) is that the former only advises on questions of legislation, whereas the latter is also involved in negotiations, policy formulation and implementation.
- <sup>3</sup> Various publications are available about interest intermediation by interest groups on the European level, though. See for instance Van Schendelen 2002, Greenwood 1997, Greenwood and Aspinwall 1998, Mazey and Richardson 1993.
- <sup>4</sup> Van Schendelen defines Europeanisation as: 'the increase of cross-border public and private issue-formation in Europe' (Van Schendelen 2002: 31).
- <sup>5</sup> The Dutch team consisted of Taco Brandsen & Wim van de Donk, on behalf of Tilburg University. The overall coordinator of the project was Jeremy Kendall (Kent University, formerly London School of Economics). The other participating countries were the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK.
- <sup>6</sup> This paragraph is based on research conducted by the SCP (Van den Berg, 2006).
- <sup>7</sup> Our present analysis is based on material that has been previously brought into the public domain. Unfortunately, we cannot make use of the more extensive data to be published in the upcoming volume.
- <sup>8</sup> In the Netherlands, data were collected by the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau. See Hart, 1999; Burger and Dekker, 2001.