



**The Social and Economic Council (SER)
of the Netherlands
CESALC, 19 – 21 February 2020
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Social Dialogue

20 February 2020, 13.50 - 14.20

Social and Economic Council (SER)



- Established 1950 by law, public institution
- Advisory body to government and parliament
- Three groups, 33 members:
 - employers
 - employees
 - independent experts
- Broad agenda
- SER can foster (political) stability by 'creating common ground'
- Financed by 'organised business', not government



What does the SER do?



- **Advisory task:** Advising government and parliament on the outlines of social and economic policy
- **Execution of specific laws:** Mainly where it directly relates to the social partners (e.g. work councils)
- **Self regulation:** Coordination and implementation of common issues (e.g. consumersrights; code of conduct in mergers)
- **Platform function:** Organise debates, involve social partners & wider groups in relevant policy issues, sharing of insights
- **Facilitating pacts and agreements:** Using 'convening power' and SER as 'neutral ground', often with many groups/ actors (e.g. Energy Pact)

Broad agenda

Some issues addressed in advisory projects:

- Macro-economic state of the Netherlands
- Social security arrangements
- Functioning of the labour market
- Labour conditions, health & safety issues
- Employee participation
- Health care system
- European policies
- Sustainable development/energy policies

..... Always from a socio-economic angle!

How does the SER work?

- Advice: on request or at its own initiative
- Preparation in committees
- Time & effort into analysis, to create common ground
- Involvement of other groups next to social partners (hearings, dialogue sessions, internet consultations, etc)
- Broad support, consultation with rank-and-file
- Council meetings are public, committee meetings not
- Advisory reports may be divided, but 90% is unanimous

Dutch consultation economy at three levels:



- **Company level:** works councils
 - Consultation: important economic and organisational issues
 - Approval: labour-related issues: working hours, health and safety
- **Sector/company level:** 500 collective labour agreements
 - Cover 80% of employees
 - 80% of employees at sectoral level;
20% of employees at company level
- **National level:**
 - Labour Foundation
 - Social and Economic Council

New methods in social dialogue

- Involvement of other relevant groups, e.g.
 - Participation in committees
 - Organize 'hearings' of relevant groups
 - Dialogue sessions (not a meeting!)
 - Focused consultations relevant groups (ICT tools)
 - Collection of best practices & sharing on internet
 - Case studies on problems in practice (with committee)
- Involvement also of broader public, citizens:
 - Large scale dialogue sessions
 - Open internet consultations (surveys), use of social media

→ Combination of online & offline

... and also

- New 'products' or outputs, next to advisory reports:
 - Pact / Accord
 - Explorations / signals
 - Fact sheets
 - Debates

All in all: adaption of social dialogue to modern times

→ Experiment with ways of working, within formal structure

→ Find balance: usual partners + new groups

Role SER: facilitating proces, convening power, 'neutral' ground where all sorts of groups can meet and find common solutions

Why does social dialogue work in the Netherlands?

- Consensus culture: the Dutch are used to work together and find compromises
- Comprehensive agenda: all matters can be discussed
- Acceptance and appreciation (but... getting more difficult)
- Mutual gains approach: make the pie bigger instead of only dividing the pie!
- Explicit procedures to consult
 - rank and file



What can social dialogue achieve?

- Shared analysis of problems and issues (important groundwork!)
- Shared views on policy goals and solutions to problems
- Create broad support for new policies
- Smoothen implementation
- Lower transaction costs
(eg low strike level in Netherlands)
- Inclusive growth



Platformfunction

- More than just social partners and crown-appointed members
- Broad support in specific areas
- In addition to facilitating formation, the SER also plays a role in implementing, monitoring and safeguarding
- Example: Energy Agreement for sustainable growth



Conditions for success?

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

More process /culture than structure!

- respect for each others' position
 - long-term orientation
(not just one-off deals)
 - create an environment of mutual trust
 - Invest in (personal) relations
 - stick to agreements, commitment to
longer-term agreements with other parties
- Hard work, not easy! Only as good as the last advice/project

