

Summary presentation Dave van Ooijen at the JP Thijssse College, Castricum, 22 april 2015
International study group JP Thijssse College and Quabbin Regional Highschool Massachusetts

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Dave van Ooijen. I am a member of the city council of Castricum for the Labour Party. The question of René Wellen asked me, was to tell you this morning something of my work as an local politician and to explain the differences between the Dutch (European) and the American political system. For what kind of political functions the citizens of Castricum vote? What kind of political parties do we have in the Netherlands? Why so many political parties, compared to the United States of America? What is their job? What are the subjects discussed on local level?

I studied sociology and political science at the University of Amsterdam and worked twenty years in the city hall from the city of Amsterdam. At the moment I am director of 'Van Ooijen - Office for Public Values' and advise local governments. Why a Office for Public Values? Because public values, as justice, solidarity, fairness, freedom, democracy, equality and sustainability, are important to our society. Without them the rule of the strongest and most powerful is deciding what people should do. Discussion and debate on public values is crucial for the humanity of mankind and the level of democracy.

There are two different political (democratic) systems: 1) a democracy where the winner takes all, and 2) a democracy where the diversity of opinions forms the bases of the democratic system. The first do we see in the USA and, more or less, in the UK. In the USA we have the republicans and the democrats. In the UK we have primarily labour and the conservative who are winning the elections and forming the government. And since several years a third party (the liberals) are knocking on the door of parliament and want to play a huge role in forming a government. The Dutch political system, and the political system in continental Europe, is organized according to the second political system.

The Dutch and European political system cannot be understood without knowing what the main political tendency's within the political (democratic) system are. The main political tendency's in the Netherlands are of course the first three: 1) egalitarian- liberal (labour), 2) individual-market (conservative-liberal), and 3) communitarianism (christian-democrats). In Europe, as I will shown, the christian-democrats and labour are the two main political tendency's.

The last decades new political tendency's came up in the Netherlands. For instance: 1) meritocratic (D66, individual development by schooling are very important for this party, also known as progressive-liberal), 2) populism (PVV, Wilders, against islam, immigrants, strongly nationalist), 3) environmental and sustainability (GL), 4) animal rights. And we also have some parties (CU, GPV) on the basis of a christian religion.

During the elections in 2012 we see a shift in the importance and popularity of the three main political tendency's, D66, PVV and SP took over a part of the voters of the first three main political tendency's: PvdA, VVD and CDA.

The Dutch (and European) political system cannot be understood without knowing the history of the Netherlands (and Europe). In the 16th and the 17th Century, the territory from what is now called the Netherlands and Belgium, was under de direct political and military influence of Spain. The originally from Germany coming house of Orange (from the city of Dillenburg) supported the population of this

territory to throw out Spain. As a result the house of Orange became the royal house of the Netherlands and delivered the first kings of the Netherlands by birth (Willem I, Willem II and Willem III). Since that time the house of Orange is delivering the kings and queens of the Netherlands. But several conflicts between the kings and the people arise. The political system changed. From 1919 on we have a fully parliamentary democracy. Since then the royal house has primarily an symbolic role.

The budget of the municipality Castricum is 61 million euro's a year. The main domains this amount of money is used for are the domains one, three and five. Domain 1: civil participation, neighborhoods and quarters, security and enforcement. Domain 3: youth, sport, health, elderly, welfare, education, arts, culture, jobs and income. Domain 5: environment, ecology and sustainability, dunes, sea-side and country side

There are two developments that lays a new bases on the future of our municipality. First: in the next month we will decide to merge the administrations of 4 regional municipality's (Bergen, Uitgeest, Castricum and Heiloo). Besides that Castricum is already working together, on voluntary bases, with 7 other municipality's in the region. Local policy's from the municipality's are coordinated or tuned on each other. For instance on collecting garbage or dividing the limited amount of houses that are build by housing cooperatives for people who have not enough money to buy a house.

There is already (for many years) a discussion on removing the provinces the Netherlands has (12) and to minimize the amount of municipality's. In 1900 the Netherlands had 1120 municipality's, in 1988, as a result of fusion of municipality's, the Netherlands had already 714 municipality's. In 2010: 430 municipality. At this moment there are 390 municipality's. Expected is that in the next decades we will go to proximally 50 municipality's.

The Netherlands has 12 provinces. The province is a level in between the municipality's and the parliament on national level. Mainly focusing on infrastructure, planning of housing production and the development of the countryside. They have also a controlling role on municipality's. The members of the political boards of the 12 provinces chose the 75 members of the First Chamber of Parliament.

The Netherlands, but also other European countries, there is a tradition to give voices to different sectors of society. That is why we have more political parties. The notion of democracy has a much bigger reach than only politics. In a democratic society the rights and human rights are respected, is the majority not suppressed the minority and are all citizens involved on all levels of decision making. The Netherlands has, the same as other European countries and the United States of America, a multicameral legislatures. Two chambers: Higher House and Lower House, First Chamber and Second Chamber.

The Second Chamber in the Netherlands is the main chamber. The members are directly chosen by citizens. The political majority in this chamber is responsible for creating a government. The first chamber is chosen by the members of the 12 provinces. The mainly task of this chamber is to control, to double check the accepted laws in the second chamber on its constitutional basis. Normally the First Chamber does not has a strict political role.

When you look to the second Chamber you see that the conservative-liberals and the social-democrats (egalitarian-liberals) have a slight majority of 76 seats of the 150. Christian-democrats,

pupulist and socialist parties developed during the last election to an equal size: 12, 13 and 15 members.

In the first chamber the government does not have a majority. So, sometimes, it will give political stress to pass laws in the first chamber.

When you look to the European Parliament, the christen-democrats (CDA) en social-democrats (PvdA) are de biggest groups. They have 409 from the 751 seats. That is proximally 55% of the votes. The conservative-liberals (VVD) and the progressive-liberals (D66) have 68 members in the European Parliament. That is proximally 9% of the votes.

Not citizens but the electors (kiesmannen) choose the president in the United States. The winner in a state takes all electors in an state. That's why Bush won the elections instead of Al Gore in 2000. Al Gore had more citizen votes than Bush on the whole of the USA. But Bush had more electors than Al Gore. That Bush had more collectors was a result of the struggle in de state of Florida. Bush won and got all the collectors of the state Florida. Bush had 2.912.790 votes, Al Gore had 2.912.253 votes. A difference of only 537 votes. In more states the difference was small and in advantage of Bush.

The Unites States of America knows a much greater total of functions than the Netherland where citizens are voting for: mayors, chief of police, chief of fire brigade. In the Netherlands till 2012 mayors were appointed by the Crown (king and ministers). The mayors were divided on national level on the extend of political parties. Since 2012 mayors are appointed by the Crown on a proposal of the city council. In the USA mayors are chosen (directly or indirectly) by citizens. Also on the issue of referendum, police and fire brigades there are great differences between the Netherlands (Europe) and the United States of America.

Alexis de Tocqueville was an French political philosopher, lawyer, historian and statesman. In 1835 he wrote an important and influential book 'The democracy of the United States of America'. He saw the American democratic system as a model for the post-revolutionary France and Europe. It still is an influential book to understand the American political system. After the revolution of 1848 he had a lot of influence on the new French constitution. In 1849 he was minister of Foreign Affairs. There is no better book on democracy than this book of Alexis de Tocqueville. It is a must for everybody who want to know what the essence of democracy is. Also in the Netherlands it had a lot of influence. For instance on the division of state and church. Tocqueville is an promoter of the civil society. We still can learn a lot of him.