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Annual Rule of Law Report - stakeholder consultation

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Introduction

In the Political Guidelines, President von der Leyen announced that the Commission will set up a comprehensive European rule of law mechanism covering all Member States, with objective annual reporting by the European Commission[1]. In July 2019, the Commission adopted its Communication on Strengthening the rule of law within the Union - a blueprint for action, setting out some of the features of such a mechanism[2]. The first annual Rule of Law Report is one of the major initiatives of the Commission' s Work Programme for 2020. The new European rule of law mechanism will act as a preventive tool, deepening dialogue and joint awareness of rule of law issues.

In the preparation of the annual Rule of Law Report, the Commission will rely on a diversity of relevant sources, including input to be received from Member States, country visits, and stakeholders' contributions. In order to facilitate the appropriate involvement of stakeholders, the Commission is inviting stakeholders to provide written contributions to the Report through this targeted consultation. The objective is to feed the assessment of the Commission with factual information on developments on the ground in the Member States.

The input should consist of a short summary, preferably in English, of information in the areas referred to in the template. You are invited to focus on the areas that relate to the scope of work of your organisation. The contribution should highlight significant developments, primarily since January 2019. Existing reports, statements, legislation or other documents may be referenced with a link (no need to provide the full text). Stakeholders are encouraged to make reference to any contribution already provided in a different context or to Reports and documents already published.

Contributions should focus on significant developments both as regards the legal framework and its implementation in practice.

Please provide your contribution by 4 May 2020. In case of requests for clarifications, you could contact the Commission at the following email address: rule-of-law-network@ec.europa.eu.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission en.pdf

[2] COM(2019) 343 final

Type of information

The topics are structured according to four pillars: I. Justice system; II. Anti-corruption framework; III. Media pluralism; and IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances. The replies could include aspects set out below under each pillar as regards the following types of developments in particular. This can include challenges, current workstreams, positive developments and best practices:

Information prepared and collected by your organisation

- any reports, statements or other documents relating to relevant developments in a Member State published by your organisation
- other direct information on the situation on the ground

Legislative developments

- legislation in force
- legislative drafts currently discussed in Parliament
- legislative plans envisaged by the government

Policy developments

- implementation of legislation
- evaluations, impact assessments, surveys
- white papers/strategies/action plans/consultation processes
- follow-up to reports/recommendations of Council of Europe bodies or other international organisations
- important decisions/opinions from independent bodies/authorities

Developments related to the judiciary / independent authorities

- important case law by national courts
- important decisions/opinions from independent bodies/authorities

Any other relevant developments

- stakeholders are free to add any further information they deem relevant; however, this should be short and to the point.

You are invited to provide concrete information on what you see as significant developments either horizontally at European level (concerning several or all EU Member States), and/or at Member State level, focusing primarily on developments since January 2019. If you intend to, you will be able to provide input separately per Member State.

Please feel free to provide a link to and reference relevant legislation/documents. Significant developments can include challenges, positive developments and best practices, covering both legislative developments or implementation and practices (as outlined under “type of information”).

If there are developments you consider relevant under each of the four pillars that are not mentioned in the sub-topics, please add them under the section "other - please specify". Only significant developments should be covered.

About you

* I am giving my contribution as

Civil society organisation/NGO

* Organisation name

250 character(s) maximum

Netherlands Helsinki Committee and Nederlands Juristen Comite voor de Mensenrechten

* Main Areas of Work

- [x] Justice System
- [x] Anti-corruption
- [ ] Media Pluralism
- [ ] Other

* Please insert an URL towards your organisation's main online presence or describe your organisation briefly:

500 character(s) maximum

nhc.nl; njcm.nl

Transparency register number

Check if your organisation is in the transparency register. It's a voluntary database for organisations seeking to influence EU decision-making

731172627999-25 (NHC); 916826735 (NJCM)

* Country of origin

Please add the country of origin of your organisation

Netherlands

* First Name

Joeri

* Surname

Buhrer Tavanier

* Email Adress of the organisation (this information will not be published)

office@nhc.nl

* Publication of your contribution and privacy settings

You can choose whether you wish for your contribution to be published and whether you wish your details to be made public or to remain anonymous.

- ○ Anonymous - Only your type of respondent, country of origin and contribution will be published. All other personal details (name, organisation name, transparency register number) will not be published.
- ◉ Public - Your personal details (name, organisation name, transparency register number, country of origin will be published with your contribution.
- ○ No publication - Your contribution will not be published. Elements of your contribution may be referred to anonymously in documents produced by the Commission based on this consultation.

☑ I agree with the personal data protection provisions.

Questions on horizontal developments

In this section, you are invited to provide information on general horizontal developments or trends, both positive and negative, covering all or several Member States. In particular, you could mention issues that are common to several Member States, as well as best practices identified in one Member State that could be replicated. Moreover, you could refer to your activities in the area of the four pillars and sub-topics (an overview of all sub-topics can be found below), and, if you represent a Network of national organisations, to the support you might have provided to one of your national members.

Overview topics for contribution

Stakeholder_consultation_-_topics.pdf

Please provide any relevant information on horizontal developments here

The fundamental rules and principles of EU cooperation are embedded in Article 2 of the TEU. Respect of these rules and principles reflect the minimum requirements for membership of the EU: see the reference in Article 49 of the TEU. In the treaties the most important legal instruments are the ordinary infringement procedure of Article 258 TFEU and the, specific, Article 7 TEU procedure. Also, the preliminary rulings procedure of Article 267 TFEU can render good services in this respect.
Political debates were held in the European Parliament (EP) about (supposed) violations of the rule of law in one or more Member States (MS). More in particular the application of the –essentially 'political'- procedure of Article 7 TEU has not been fruitful. This is not a surprise given the severe decision-making requirements embedded in the provision. In that respect the Article 7 procedure, referred to as the 'nuclear' option, is more a 'dead end' street.
On the other hand, the available judicial mechanisms have often been used. Furthermore, the Commission and the EP have started initiatives in the framework of the Article 7 TEU procedure.
When assessing the results of those initiatives, the most effective instrument so far appears to be the infringement procedure. The Court of Justice has demonstrated in a series of cases to be an effective instance, being able to deal with urgent fundamental matters in a relatively short period.
It is striking that legal procedures have been initiated exclusively by EU institutions (the Commission and in one case the EP). On the contrary, no particular initiatives were undertaken by MS themselves, not in the framework of the special infringement procedure of Article 259 TFEU, nor in the framework of the aforementioned Article 7 TEU. Nor did any MS undertake action in the framework of the Council of Europe infrastructure.
There is case law of the CJEU regarding Article 19, para. 1, TEU, which enshrines the principle of effective judicial protection before national courts and requires the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems. This provision makes the enforcement of rule of law standards vis-à-vis the MS more straightforward as compared to the enforcement of Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. (CJEU 27 February 2018, Case C-64/16 Associação Sindical dos Juízes Portugueses). Article 19, para.

1, TEU could be enforced by means of infringement proceedings under Art. 268 TFEU to counteract the undermining of judicial independence at the national level.
In cases wherein the respect of the rule of law is at stake, the political debate should be the primary instrument to discuss and if needed address the problems concerned. As the results of political debates at the EU ministerial level are only modest, this needs a further impetus.
A new impulse is needed regarding the accession of the EU to the ECHR. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the accession has become a legally binding obligation for the EU and its MS (Article 6(2) TEU) So far, this objective has not been achieved.
Having said that, since all MS are party to the ECHR themselves, even without a formal EU accession having taken place, they are able to undertake action within the legal framework of the Council of Europe. The inter-State application procedure is an example of the instruments that are available.
The contribution to the debate made by the Court of Justice should be applauded. However, it would be a negative signal if taking action at the EU level were left to the judiciary. In the first instance this problem is the responsibility of politicians. Apart from that, with regard to legal proceedings before the Court, still more use can be made of fast track procedures. Serious problems can best be dealt with in a (fair but) timely manner.
By way of conclusion: the NHC and NJCM welcome the final adoption of the Commission proposal from May 2018 and still under discussion in the Council, enabling the Commission to propose the Council to sanction MS in case of 'general deficiencies' regarding the rule of law. The Commission's proposal is useful, since the simple threat that sanctions can be imposed on MS may certainly have an effect to prevent violations happening in the first place. In case, however, such violations do occur, financial sanctions can be effective tools to incite the MS concerned to remedy the deficiencies concerned.
We believe that an effective debate about the relevance of the rule of law principle and violations thereof, is highly necessary and must be stimulated, notably within the framework of the institutions wherein the MS are represented at ministerial level, thus the European Council and the Council.
Annual Rule of Law Reports may provide an incentive for such debates to take place. The use made of existing legal instruments available to monitor and, where necessary, combat violations of the rule of law, can still be intensified.

Questions on developments in Member States

The following four pillars are sub-divided into topics and sub-topics. You are invited to provide concrete information on significant developments, focusing primarily on developments since January 2019, for each of the sub-topics which are relevant for your work. Please feel free to provide a link to and reference relevant legislation/documents. Significant developments can include challenges, positive developments and best practices, covering both legislative developments or implementation and practices (as outlined under "type of information").
If there are developments you consider relevant under each of the four pillars that are not mentioned in the sub-topics, please add them under the section "other - please specify". Only significant developments should be covered.

Member States covered in contribution [several choices possible]

Please select all Member States for which you wish to contribute information. For each Member State, a separate template for providing information will open.

- ☐ Austria
- ☐ Belgium
- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Croatia

- [ ] Cyprus
- [ ] Czechia
- [ ] Denmark
- [ ] Estonia
- [ ] Finland
- [ ] France
- [ ] Germany
- [ ] Greece
- [ ] Hungary
- [ ] Ireland
- [ ] Italy
- [ ] Latvia
- [ ] Lithuania
- [ ] Luxembourg
- [ ] Malta
- [x] Netherlands
- [ ] Poland
- [ ] Portugal
- [ ] Romania
- [ ] Slovak Republic
- [ ] Slovenia
- [ ] Spain
- [ ] Sweden

Justice System - Netherlands

Independence

Appointment and selection of judges and prosecutors

3000 character(s) maximum

The appointment and selection of judges and public prosecutors is regulated in the Dutch Constitution and by the Judicial Officers (Legal Status) Act (Dutch: Wet rechtspositie rechterlijke ambtenaren) and the Judiciary (Organisation) Act (Dutch: Wet op de rechterlijke organisatie). Members of the Supreme Court (Dutch: Hoge Raad) are selected from a list of three candidates put forward by the House of Representatives. In codified practice a shortlist of six candidates is provided by the Supreme Court itself, and the House of Representatives forwards the first half of the list to the government, which appoints the first person on the list. Judges and justices (including substitutes) are appointed for life by Royal Decree on the recommendation of the minister of Justice and Security (hereinafter: the minister). High-level public prosecutors are appointed by Royal Decree on the recommendation of the minister, whereas lower level public prosecutors are appointed by the minister (source: Section 117 and 118 of the Constitution).
Substitute judges and justices are appointed for life, but are only assigned to a court for a maximum period of three years, which can be renewed after a pause of six months. Substitute judges and justices can conduct activities for the court when required. Substitutes must have six to ten years of legal experience depending on the specific court (source: Werken bij de Rechtspraak).
In a report on backlogs in the judiciary (source: Eindrapport 'Doorlooptijden in beweging, October 2019: p. 52), a commission appointed by the Council for the Judiciary recommends to introduce a more flexible arrangement to assign substitute judges for a limited period to reduce the backlogs. The report mentions no minimum of legal experience for the appointment of these substitute judges (See also under 16).

Irremovability of judges, including transfers of judges and dismissal

3000 character(s) maximum

Judges are appointed in a specific court. Judges can, at the same time, also be appointed as substitute judge in another court with full judicial competence. However this does not entail that a judge can be transferred to another court, if he/she does not want that. It could be questioned whether a transfer would impair the independence of the judge. A dismissal is only possible in case of grave misconduct, as mentioned in the law, unfitness, or incompetence. It is the Supreme Court that assesses whether this is the case. This rarely happens.

Promotion of judges and prosecutors

3000 character(s) maximum

A new system of job profiles and salary scales have been introduced within the judiciary. This system is used for all national government bodies (source: Functiegebouw Rijk).

Allocation of cases in courts

3000 character(s) maximum

Code for assigning court cases
On 27 January 2020, the Council for the Judiciary and the Presidents of the Courts agreed upon a Code for assigning court cases (source: Code zaakstoedeling). This Code aims to ensure that cases are assigned to judges on the basis of objective criteria. The boards of the Courts lay down further rules in their own internal regulations. The principles laid down in the Code form the basis for the allocation of cases. These regulations will be published as soon as they are available.
This Code incorporates the ECHR rulings regarding clarity, transparency, judicial independence and impartiality of assigning court cases. It is important to note that the Code is a principle-based instrument, and does not constitute legislation.
Flexibilisation of hearing capacity
On 22 January 2020, the Minister for Legal Protection submitted a bill to Parliament to amend the Judiciary (Organisation) Act. The aim of the bill is to remove obstacles for courts in providing mutual assistance in the event of a lack of sufficient hearing capacity. In the bill, the Minister for Legal Protection has the competence to assign one or more categories of cases to another court due to lack of sufficient hearing capacity (source: Wijziging van de Wet op rechterlijke organisatie in verband met het wegnemen van belemmeringen voor gerechten bij het verlenen van onderlinge bijstand in geval van gebrek aan voldoende zittingscapaciteit).

Independence (including composition and nomination of its members), and powers of the body tasked with safeguarding the independence of the judiciary (e.g. Council for the Judiciary)

3000 character(s) maximum

The members of the Council for the Judiciary (hereafter: Council) are nominated by the Minister for Legal Protection and appointed by Royal Decree. Prior to the nomination, the Minister shall, in agreement with the Council, draw up a list of a maximum of six candidates who appear to be eligible for the vacancy that has arisen. The judges or the (boards of the) Courts are not involved in the process of nominating the members of the Council.
Each Court has a board that consists of three members. They are appointed by Royal Decree on the recommendation of the Minister for Legal Protection for a period of six years. They may be reappointed as members of the board of the same court once for a period of three years. The Council for the Judiciary draws up a recommendation for the appointment of a board member. Before formulating a recommendation, the Council hears the Work Council. The judges or the (boards of the) Courts are not involved in the appointment of the board members of the Courts.
The Minister for Legal Protection assigns the budget to the Council and the courts together. The budget of the courts requires the approval of the Council. The budget is determined by the number of cases handled by the judiciary (Judiciary (Organisation) Act).
In recent years, judges have expressed their dissatisfaction (through letters, action groups and reports) about the management of the Council for the Judiciary. They stated that the Council is focused too much on efficiency gains and on lowering the costs of the judiciary and that it would run the judiciary too much like a business instead of putting the core values of the judiciary first. They feel they are not involved enough in policy-making within the judiciary. Large budget deficits in the judiciary, due to, in part, the failed implementation of an IT system, have only fueled this dissatisfaction. Judges are opposed to the proposal to provide more powers to the Council at the expense of the independence of the judiciary (Rapport visitatie gerechten 2018 / NRC). Some judges consider their independence as a personal independence instead of a professional autonomy and independence of the judiciary as an institution.

In the beginning of 2020, an Executive Appointments Working Group drafted a new proposal for the appointment of board members of the Courts. The Dutch Association for the Judiciary (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Rechtspraak) withdrew itself from the Working Group in March 2020 because insufficient progress was made in the proposal. The Association states that the proposed appointment procedure of board members of the Courts does not sufficiently meet the European standard of board members to be "elected by their peers". The Association deems it essential that judges themselves play an important role in these appointments. This is also in line with the recommendations of the recent Visitation Committee (Rapport visitatie gerechten 2018). The Association has drafted a new proposal (NVVR).

Accountability of judges and prosecutors, including disciplinary regime and ethical rules.

3000 character(s) maximum

Judges can not be held accountable for their rulings. There is a system of appeal and reversal by the Supreme Court. The mere fact that judges can not be held accountable for their rulings, results from the principle of judicial independence. There is a system of complaints procedure concerning complaints of treatment, primarily at the court where the judge is appointed (https://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie-en-contact/Organisatie/Hoge-Raad-der-Nederlanden/Over-de-Hoge-Raad/Bijzondere-taken-HR-en-PG/Paginas/Klachtbehandeling-volgens-de-Wet-op-de-Rechterlijke-Organisatie.aspx). A system to file a complaint with the Solicitor General is provided for as well.

Remuneration/bonuses for judges and prosecutors

3000 character(s) maximum

A new system of job profiles and salary scales have been introduced within the judiciary. This system is used for all the national government bodies (source: Functiegebouw Rijk). There is no bonus system for judges.

Independence/autonomy of the prosecution service

3000 character(s) maximum

The prosecution service is led by the Board of Procurators General (Dutch: College van procureurs-generaal). The Board consists of at least three and at most five members. Members are appointed by Royal Decree on the recommendation of the Minister (source: Section 130 of the Judiciary (Organisation) Act).

Independence of the Bar (chamber/association of lawyers)

3000 character(s) maximum

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Significant developments capable of affecting the perception that the general public has of the independence of the judiciary

3000 character(s) maximum

Several political parties, including their Parliamentary groups, have criticised the judiciary in recent years for its alleged activism and interference with the political process. After several rulings from the Supreme Court, Council of State and the district courts on e.g. climate and environmental issues, and social security, the critical voices have become louder. To date, there is an ongoing debate about the role of the judiciary and about its boundaries. The debate is not limited to Parliamentary discussions but also takes place in op-ed articles in various newspapers and in legal journals.

Other - please specify

3000 character(s) maximum

Protocols and guidelines
The judiciary has several internal codes and guidelines, such as the guidelines on impartiality and ancillary positions (source: Leidraad onpartijdigheid en nevenfuncties) and the right of substitution (source: www.rechtspraak.nl).

Quality of justice

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined under "type of information".)

Accessibility of courts (e.g. court fees, legal aid)

3000 character(s) maximum

Fees (www.rechtspraak.nl)
The guidelines for exemption from court feeds are based on article 6 ECHR and article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental rights (CRvB 13 februari 2015, Ecli 2015:282). Yet, the lack of a low cost procedure for small (monetary) claims does incidentally form an obstacle for small and medium sized businesses. Also, the rule that the court fees of winning parties must be reimbursed by the losing party, may pose a significant burden for people with problematic debt.

Legal aid
The Netherlands has a long standing and strong system of legal aid, which is overseen by the Legal Aid Board (Raad voor de Rechtsbijstand). People in need of legal aid, but whose annual income is below €27.900 for singles and €39.400,-- for couples, (source: https://tinyurl.com/y8nuq5an), are entitled to legal representation by independent lawyers (in certain fields of law). The independent lawyers are under strict duty to conform to quality standards (e.g. training, a limitation to a certain field of law, carrying out a minimum number of cases per year).
The annual costs for legal aid have risen between 2002 and 2013. Since then the costs have stabilised and even slightly decreased. A striking fact is that 60% of the overall cases are against the Dutch government or entities thereof. This accounts for a substantial part of the increase in cases and is congruent with policies to aggressively police social security benefits.
Current reform plans aim at a complete change of the system, whereby the number of cases in which individuals are represented by independent lawyers is decreased. Instead the plans entail a system of triage by means of a government official, who will decide whether an individual is entitled to representation by a lawyer. It is unclear whether the official would be sufficiently trained to assess the merits of each case or whether these officials would be independent.
The plans also entail the use of insurance companies to cover the costs of legal aid. Bulks of cases would then be tendered by the Dutch government. It is unclear whether there would be sufficient safeguards in place to guarantee the independence of legal aid from conflicts of interest (e.g. arising from financial interests of the insurer).
The Dutch Parliament, the Netherlands bar association and others have voiced concerns about the reform plans, as they may jeopardise access to justice. In addition, the workload and quality requirements for lawyers have steadily been increased leading to effective hourly rates that are completely unsustainable which has brought the well-developed Dutch system of legal aid to the verge of collapse.
It would be welcomed if the current system of highly professional and independent legal aid is strengthened and any reform fully safeguards access to justice, as well as professionality and independence. Furthermore, we recommend that any reform is first tested in small and implemented thereafter under full control of parliament.

Resources of the judiciary (human/financial)

3000 character(s) maximum

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Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems for case management, court statistics, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)

3000 character(s) maximum

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Other - please specify

3000 character(s) maximum

Experimentenwet rechtspleging
On 11 February 2020 the “Tijdelijke experimentenwet rechtspleging” (Temporary law concerning experiments in the justice system) was adopted. This law regulates innovations and pilot projects that deviate from the regular laws regulating judicial procedures. The law specifically allows for these innovations and pilots to be based on Orders of Council that remain, for a large part, outside the regular control of parliament.

While a uniform procedure for small scale pilots and innovations in the justice system is to be welcomed, the legislative proposal was criticised by the Council of State (Raad van State) as being too vague about the scope and time frame of a pilot, as well as the number of laws, that can possibly (temporarily) be changed by an order. In this respect, many organisations voiced their concern, as the minister of justice announced to introduce the change of the entire legal aid system by order of council, which would in effect bring about the irreversible change of the system and does not constitute a small scale pilot or experiment.

The law, that was finally adopted, has been amended with a number of additional safeguards. However, it remains to be seen whether the use of the law will be restricted to small scale pilots that precede changes to the legal system, or whether irreversible changes in the legal system will be effectively brought about by orders of council under this law without full parliamentary control. The latter would be highly problematic from a rule of law perspective.

Efficiency of the justice system

(Under this topic, you are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined under "type of information".)

Length of proceedings

3000 character(s) maximum

Over the past 5 years, the lead times remained stable. Courts reported a lead time of 12 weeks in 2019 (compared to 13 weeks in 2015). Higher courts report a lead time of 41 weeks in 2019 (compared to 36 weeks in 2015). Both the government and the judiciary acknowledged that there was, and still is, room for improvement and a Commission was established to conduct research and to provide both initiating parties (government and judiciary) with their recommendations. Apart from their recommendations vis-a-vis lead times, the Commission will delve into the enormous backlog as to date courts are confronted with a backlog of approximately 100.000 cases.

In October 2019, the commission published its final report on lead times and backlogs (source: Eindrapport 'Doorlooptijden in beweging'). In the spirit of this report, both the judiciary and the government consider important steps to reduce lead times. Nevertheless, reducing the backlog is their first priority. Plans entail, among others, the establishment of a so-called “flex pool” of jurists and improved collaboration between the courts in order to exchange innovative working procedures.

The enormous backlog and the necessity to reduce lead times captured the attention of the Minister of Justice as well. The latter announced (September 2019) to invest € 95 M in the judiciary. An important part thereof will be reserved to shorten lead times and reduce the enormous backlog. Apart from the actions outlined above, the Minister intends to facilitate the exchange of cases between lower courts and to streamlethe workproces. (Source: Government to invest 95 million euros in judiciary | News item).
In addition, it is important to note that in accordance with settled case law of the highest Administrative Court (Raad van State), administrative procedures should be settled within four years. Otherwise it would result in an undue delay and, hence, constitute a violation of Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights (for example: ECLI:NL:RVS:2016:750). A violation of Article 6 ECHR leads, in administrative matters, to a compensation of € 500 per 6 months.
The reasonable period in criminal matters commences, when an act has been carried out on the part of the State against the person concerned, from which he can reasonably derive the expectation that prosecution will be brought against him in respect of a certain criminal offense he committed. Several factors, among which the complexity of the case, are of utmost importance as to whether or not a reasonable period in accordance with Article 6 ECHR has been exceeded. A violation thereof leads to a reduction of the fine or penalty (see for example:ECLI:NL:HR:2018:558)

Different from criminal and administrative matters, there is no case law on exceeding a reasonable period in civil matters.

Enforcement of judgements

3000 character(s) maximum

Different from criminal matters, the enforcement of judgements in civil matters is conceived as the parties' own responsibility. Enforcement in administrative matters falls under the responsibility of administrative bodies (often the college of Mayor and Alderperson (College van B&W)). Recently, the enforcements of judgements in criminal matters changed after the entering into force of a new law. This will be discussed below.

As regards legal and/or policy changes in the enforcement of judgments, attention has to be drawn to a major change in the enforcement of criminal cases: on 1 January 2020 a new law entered into force transferring the responsibility of the enforcement of criminal penalties from the public prosecutor to the Minister of Legal Protection (Source: 507 Staatsblad van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden). The rationale behind this new law is that the transfer will strengthen the position of victims and their relatives and improve the enforcement of these sanctions.

No legal or policy changes have been reported in administrative and civil matters.

Other - please specify

3000 character(s) maximum

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Anti-Corruption Framework - Netherlands

The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption (prevention and investigation / prosecution)

Authorities (e.g. national agencies, bodies) in charge of prevention detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption. Resources allocated to these (the human, financial, legal, and practical resources as relevant).

3000 character(s) maximum

The problem in the Netherlands with regards to government corruption is a lack of formal laws or policies regarding corruption for both chambers of the Netherlands parliament. This lack of enforceable written rules makes it difficult to hold politicians and bureaucrats accountable for (possible) corrupt practices.

Prevention

Integrity framework: asset disclosure rules, lobbying, revolving doors and general transparency of public decision-making (including public access to information).

3000 character(s) maximum

There are no specific provisions on trading in influence in the Netherlands legal framework. The legal framework does not make any specific mention that bans illicit enrichment.

For public officials, the Netherlands established a measure against revolving doors in 1999, when the government issued a circular letter against revolving doors in the public service. The letter solely states that a former public official who worked at a Ministry cannot be hired as a consultant by the same department until two years after resignation. This effectively means that there is no restriction on former public officials lobbying their former ministries.

As noted by GRECO in the Fifth Evaluation Round of the Netherlands, no further regulations are in place to address the revolving door for individuals holding top executive functions. The organisation criticises the lack of a general 'cooling off' period and a transparent mechanism to regulate the transfer of high government officials to the private sector.

Rules on preventing conflict of interests in the public sector.

3000 character(s) maximum

Different governmental sectors, such as the national government, municipalities and provinces, have drafted their own regulations regarding integrity and the disclosure of ancillary activities. Regulations for civil servants employed by the national government for example, state that anyone working for the state should disclose ancillary activities which interests could conflict with the interests of his/her public position. It does not specify, however, how regularly disclosures should be made. In order to converge regulations regarding integrity, the Civil Servants 2017 Act will replace all regulations of individual government sectors as of January 2020.

The regulations regarding integrity for members of the House of Representatives determine that MPs should, at the latest, disclose their ancillary activities and income of the previous year on the 1st of April. Nevertheless, the regulations state that MPs will not be sanctioned for refusing to disclose relevant information.

The Senate needs to adhere to a code of conduct regarding Integrity. The code provides clarity about conflicts of interests, indicating that senators should be aware of the additional interests they have due to the other positions they hold. Moreover, senators should abstain from activities that have the appearance of a conflict of interest. It is important to note that this conflict of interest only relates to a conflict of interest with regard to a specific self-interest, usually as a result of holding other functions. Senators are required to share the additional functions they hold besides being a member of the Senate as well. This consists of a short description of the function, the company/organisation for which the function is performed and whether the function is paid or not. Moreover, all interests that can reasonably considered to be relevant but cannot be regarded as an official function need to be made publicly available.

Measures in place to ensure Whistle-blower protection and encourage reporting of corruption.

3000 character(s) maximum

The Netherlands has implemented a whistleblowers protection framework that prescribes companies with more than 50 employees to implement a policy to protect whistleblowers from retaliation. However, it does not establish adequate standards for these arrangements. A 2017 study conducted by the Whistleblowers' Authority found that half the Dutch companies studied were not compliant with the legal requirement of an internal whistleblowing policy. This is confirmed by an assessment by Transparency International Netherlands concerning the quality of policies of 27 Dutch publicly listed companies.

Sectors with high-risks of corruption in a Member State and relevant measures taken/envisaged for preventing corruption in these sectors. (e.g. public procurement, healthcare, other).

3000 character(s) maximum

Various cases involving penetration of organised crime into the police have been highlighted in the past few years. Especially organised crime involved in the drug trade has been able to gain a foothold in the (military) police force. Other than being directly involved in drug smuggling, organised crime has been able to penetrate into the police force by bribing officers for information.

Equally worrying, criminal organizations have made attempts to influence local government officials as well. In order to do so, they predominantly adopt the tactic of threatening with violence. In addition, criminals have attempted to bribe local government officials as well but to a much lesser extent. The (attempted) bribes cannot be considered especially substantial either. Finally, criminal organizations have attempted to infiltrate in local governments as well.

Any other relevant measures to prevent corruption in public and private sector.

3000 character(s) maximum

Despite the fact that the Netherlands is generally perceived to be one of the countries least affected by corruption, no comprehensive and cohesive national anti-corruption action plan is in place. According to an evaluation performed by Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) in 2019, the integrity of Dutch politicians and bureaucrats is largely built on political accountability,trust and consensus. Because of this emphasis on trust, the country lacks a clear anti-corruption strategy and responsibility to prevent corruption is placed in the hands of the politicians themselves.

Repressive measures

Criminalisation of corruption and related offences.

3000 character(s) maximum

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Application of sanctions (criminal and non-criminal) for corruption offences (including for legal persons).

3000 character(s) maximum

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Potential obstacles to investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases(e.g. political immunity regulation).

3000 character(s) maximum

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Media Pluralism - Netherlands

Media regulatory authorities and bodies

(Cf. Article 30 of Directive 2018/1808)

Independence, enforcement powers and adequacy of resources of media authorities and bodies.

3000 character(s) maximum

The Dutch Media Act (Mediawet, Chapter 7) ascribes regulatory powers to the Dutch Media Authority (Commissariaat voor de Media).The Media Authority is an administrative body, established by law, to monitor compliance of media institutions with the Media Act (Mediawet) and with the Fixed Book Award Act (Wet op de vaste boekenprijs). It has a range of supervisory and enforcement instruments to ensure compliance with the Media Act. Appropriate measures are considered on a case-by-case basis (source: Commissariaat voor de Media).

The media institutions under the supervision of the Media Authority involve Dutch public television and radio broadcasters on national, regional and local levels, as well as Dutch commercial channels and online audiovisual video services on demand.
The Media authority is an independent body, that works independently from political and media institutions. It also takes its decisions independently from the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, by which its college of commissioners are appointed.

The Media Authority protects the independence, accessibility and plurality of the audiovisual media content in the Netherlands. The Media authority also works according to three core principles: legality, transparency and integrity. The legitimacy of the public system is strongly linked to public and political confidence in the way public resources are spent. This is why the Media Commission has the task of supervising the lawfulness of the expenditure of public media institutions. Furthermore, transparent accountability is an essential precondition for the supervision of the independence of the media supply and the lawful spending of media funds by public media institutions. This applies to both the accounting for expenditure and the origin of income. Moreover, supervisory boards of public media institutions are expected to behave with integrity (source: Commissariaat voor de Media). The Media Authority thereby supports the freedom of information. Namely, television, radio and online platforms play an important role in informing society. Legal protection of the freedom of information, through the Media Act (Mediawet) and the Media Decree (Media Besluit), is meant to ensure the independence, quality and plurality of this information provision. The Media Authority is in charge with the supervision of media institutions to ensure compliance with these regulations. One way to do that is by upholding fair relations between public and commercial media institutions and enabling transparent property relations in the media sector.

In January 2020, it was reported that the Media Authority had violated procurement rules for a number of years, by issuing assignments above €50,000 without asking for multiple offers (source: NRC Handelsblad).

Conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head / members of the collegiate body of media authorities and bodies

3000 character(s) maximum

The Media Authority is headed by a board of commissioners, appointed for a period of five years by Royal Decree, following the recommendation of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The board normally consists of three Commissioners: a chairman and two members. Currently, the board consists of Jan Buné, who has been a member since 2013, and Renate Litjens, who was appointed in November 2019 as interim chairman (source: Commissariaat voor de Media). The third commissioner post is vacant.

After the five year period, reappointment for the same period is possible. The commissioners are supported by a team of employees. Pursuant to the Media Act all members of the Board of Commissioners are responsible for all decisions, regardless of which portfolio the individual commissioners relate to.

It is indispensable for the commissioners to have a high degree of independence. In that line, the Media Act describes relations, memberships and functions which are incompatible with membership of the Media Authority. However, in recent years, several incidents have occurred.

One of the incidents related to commissioner Eric Eljon, who was suspended in April 2019, due to a breach of trust after the publication of his novel about the Dutch television world, exposing alleged cases of hatred and envy in the workplace and selfishness of TV presenters. Colleagues with the Media Authority publicly distanced themselves from the contents of the book, the publication of which caused the Media Authority to suspend Mr. Eljon (source: NOS).

Another incident came to light after a publication on the 16th of July 2019 in the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad, which reported internal disorder within the Dutch Media Authority. During his reappointment by Minister Arie Slob, Jan Buné had concealed that he had been reprimanded by a disciplinary judge in early 2018 for negligent and incompetent acting as an accountant. Furthermore, Buné carried out other functions that are at odds with his work as a commissioner. Buné was suspended pending the investigation (source: NRC Handelsblad).

Moreover, general manager Suzanne Teijgeler took a controversial step by accepting a new position at Discovery Benelux, while the Media Authority supervises that media company. Combining her new position at Discovery Benelux with her role as commissioner with the Media Authority amounts to a potential conflict of interest. (source: Broadcast Magazine).

Chair Madeleine de Cock Buning resigned in 2019 due to the completion of the maximum statutory appointment term. After her departure, it appeared she was still entitled to a total of EUR 650,000 in redundancy pay following from a regulation dating back from 2001. The generous arrangement has led to a great deal of unrest in the workplace (source: NRC Handelsblad). As of December 2019, De Cock Buning works as head of public policy at Netflix.

Transparency of media ownership and government interference

The transparent allocation of state advertising (including any rules regulating the matter)

3000 character(s) maximum

Although some media owners traditionally have political ties, there is no political control over the management or content provided by these media owners.

Where sponsorship of public service broadcasting is allowed, when it comes to content relating to culture, education, sports or events of idealistic nature, no such sponsorship is permitted with regard to news, current affairs or political information (Media Act, article 2.106).

The Media Authority allocates a number of hours per year on the general channels of the national public media service for government information and to political parties that have acquired one or more seats in the last election of the members of the House of Representatives (Media Act, Chapter 6).

Public information campaigns on rule of law issues (e.g. on judges and prosecutors, journalists, civil society)

3000 character(s) maximum

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Rules governing transparency of media ownership

3000 character(s) maximum

The Netherlands has a relatively large degree of transparency of media ownership. Dutch national law provides for rules regarding transparency and disclosure, obliging media firms to publicly disclose their ownership structures. More stringent rules apply to public service media firms (Media Act, Chapter 2).

When it comes to concentration of media ownership in the Netherlands, it has been reported that (horizontal) media ownership concentration is relatively high. One possible reason for this is the fact that no new media legislation has been passed since 2011 that specifically provides attention to thresholds or limitations on the basis of objective criteria such as licences, audience shares and revenue (source: Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom).

It appears that joint audience shares of the four largest companies lie between 69% and 91%, when it comes to ownership of radio, television and newspaper markets, which is quite high. Rules on merger control, could prevent the occurrence of a high degree of (horizontal, vertical and/or cross-media) concentration. Within most media companies, self-regulatory instruments are in place providing protection to journalists from changes in ownership. Furthermore, editorial and commercial interest and responsibilities are strictly separated (source: Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom).

Framework for journalists' protection

Rules and practices guaranteeing journalist's independence and safety and protecting journalistic and other media activity from interference by state authorities

3000 character(s) maximum

The Dutch media remained, in general, stoutly independent and the government publicly stressed the importance of press freedom both within and beyond its borders several times. The past year marks both positive developments (i.e. initiating projects) as well as developments, to which attention has to be paid (legislative initiatives).
As regards negative developments attention has to be paid to the draft proposal “Criminalising stay in a terrorist territory” (“Wetsvoorstel “Strafbaarstelling verblijf in een door terroristische organisatie gecontroleerd gebied”) (Source:Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal). This draft proposal aims to change the Dutch Criminal Law by criminalising the stay of Dutch citizens – and those who have a permanent residence in the Netherlands – in an area which has been indicated as an area under the control of a terrorist organisation. Although exceptions apply to those, who are commissioned by an International Law Organization, or the State or those who received the prior consent of the Minister of Justice, both the WODC (Scientific Research and Documentation Center) (Source: 'FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS': STRAFBAARSTELLING VAN VERBLIJF OP EEN TERRORISTISCH GRONDGEBIED?) and journalists’ organizations have been very critical, as this proposal constitutes a threat to journalist independence. More specific, it limits their freedom to travel to and work in these areas. Moreover, it allows the Dutch government to detect journalists and may prevent them from speaking with and consulting important anonymous sources who might become at risk if their identity is known.
Last September (2019), the House of Representatives accepted the draft proposal. It is currently under

investigation in the Senate.
Apart from the draft proposal outlined above, 2019 marks also a year of positive developments and best practices. In this regard, we note efforts taken by both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The former, although celebrating the existence of strong and pluriform news outlets, acknowledged that investigative journalism is still an area of concern as it is rather weak. In order to strengthen this field of journalism, it announced to invest €5 million in the field of investigative journalism. Moreover a sum of €15 million has been provided to facilitate the collaboration between regional and national broadcasters (Source: Vaststelling begroting Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties 2020 - 35300 VII 88 BRIEF VAN DE MINISTER VAN BINNENLANDSE ZAKEN EN KONINKRIJKSRELATIES). The latter, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, became one of the main supporters of the “Justice and Safety Programme” – a project initiated by Free Press Unlimited (Source: Free Press Unlimited start Justice and Safety programma voor journalisten). This project aims to protect and support journalists as they will receive both training and legal aid. Insurance will be provided for as well.

Law enforcement capacity to ensure journalists' safety and to investigate attacks on journalists

3000 character(s) maximum

In terms of law enforcement to ensure journalists’ safety and to investigate attacks on journalists, it is important to note that, in general, the Netherlands has a low rate of reported crimes against journalists. In general, the latter experiences a burden to report an incident. In this connection, research shows that mostly female journalists experience violence and aggression, while conducting their work (50%) (Source:Een onveilig klimaat ‘Geen open sfeer om te praten over bedreigingen’. Hence, the government, in collaboration with journalists’ organisations, took some steps in order to lower this mental threshold. In addition, the Public Prosecutor announced important changes in its internal procedures as regards the punishment of aggression and violence against journalists.
The recently adopted project “PersVeilig” (April 2019) perfectly illustrates the efforts taken by the government, in collaboration with the police and two journalists’ organisations (VNJ and het Genootschap van Hoofdredacteuren) (Source: PersVeilig |). PersVeilig aims to strengthen the position of journalists in their fight against aggression and violence in public spaces, on the street, at online (social) media platforms, and /or judicial claims. The project has an online platform to report an incident. In this vein, it aims to lower the mental threshold, experienced by journalists to undertake action against an incident.
In order to ensure the safety of journalists, the Public Prosecutor took some important steps as well. In April 2019 it changed its internal regulations (directive) by doubling the punishment for aggression against journalists.

Access to information and public documents

3000 character(s) maximum

In order to get access to information and public documents, journalists have to follow the same procedure as any other citizen. This means that they have to request access to the relevant information and public documents, by following the so called “WOB-procedure” – journalists have to request access from the ministry, province, municipality or any other public. The rationale behind this procedure is to allow citizen’s participation in democracy and government decision making. It applies to everyone, thus not only to those who should be considered as “stakeholders”.- e.g. also those who do not have a Dutch nationality or do not have a stake in the matters concerned may profit from this procedure.
In general, a request should be submitted at the (government) organization/agency concerned. The request should be as precise as possible as regards the information requested. A four week period applies after the request has been submitted - this period might be extended with another four weeks if, for example, a lot of information has been requested or the case is quite complicated. If so, it should inform the requesting party thereof.

It is settled case law of the highest Administrative Court (Raad van State) that, in accordance with Article 10 ECHR, the publication of the requested documents in certain circumstances,may be refused (see:NL:RVS: 2017:2883, para 12.2 and ECLI:NL:RVS:2019:100, para. 13) (Source: Is het Nederlandse recht op toegang tot overheidsinformatie EVRM-proof? De houdbaarheid van de Wob en de Woo in het licht van artikel 10 EVRM).
Although no legal or policy changes took place over the past year, it is nevertheless important to shed some light on a specific request, which got a lot of media attention and which led to some challenges and parliamentary questions in the House of Representatives as well. This case has been referred to as the "Shell Papers".
Several media outlets investigated the collaboration between the Dutch State and Shell. In April 2019, they requested all the documents (including WhatsApp messages, Faxes, Emails, Videos, et cetera) from nine ministries, three provinces and five municipalities. Although the procedure is still ongoing, several aspects captured our attention: the many enormous delays with an average of 32.5 weeks; the rejection of many requests; the fact that this case led to parliamentary questions, as the Ministry of Economics and Climate requested the applicants to provide for a more concrete application, as their request appeared to be too comprehensive (See on this: Beantwoording kamervragen "Shell Papers") (update: in 2020 the request of the applicants was rejected by this ministry). The media outlets consider to take further judicial steps.

Other - please specify

3000 character(s) maximum

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Other institutional issues related to checks and balances - Netherlands

The process for preparing and enacting laws

Stakeholders'/public consultations (particularly consultation of judiciary on judicial reforms), transparency of the legislative process, rules and use of fast-track procedures and emergency procedures (for example, the percentage of decisions adopted through emergency/urgent procedure compared to the total number of adopted decisions).

3000 character(s) maximum

The government organises stakeholder consultations in preparation of new laws, regulations or ministerial procedures. Consultations can either be public or behind closed doors.

The Dutch parliament has several instruments to involve stakeholders and hold public consultation on (draft) laws, regulations or public policies. The parliament can hold so-called "hearing sessions" with specialists and organize round tables. In practice, all sessions of parliament are public and can be followed on the webpage of the parliament. Videos and reports or minutes are also available online.

The "Coördinatiewet Uitzonderingstoestanden", (In English: Coordination law Exceptional Situations) regulates on the basis of Article 113 of the Constitution the procedures which the government can follow in exceptional situations. It regulates fast-track and emergency procedures.

The Temporary Act COVID-19 came into force on 24 April 2020. The Act is intended to allow the legislative process, the judiciary and public administration to function as well as possible under the restrictive corona-measures. The Act applies until 1 September 2020, but can be extended with two months each time if necessary. Some provisions apply retroactively from 16 March 2020.

The Temporary Act regulates, among other, that the judiciary can use electronic means of communication in more cases, so that lawyers and litigants do not have to be physically present in the courtroom and cases can still be handled as much as possible. For civil and administrative law cases, the Temporary Act provides - with retroactive effect from the 16th of March - for the oral hearing to take place via a video link or, if absolutely necessary, by telephone. The court will determine the method of treatment, where possible after consultation with the parties involved. Whoever is summoned to appear before the sub-district court (in Dutch: kantongerecht) does not have to appear before, but can indicate by letter, e-mail or telephone that he or she wishes to contest the summons. This is stated in a letter sent with the summons. It clearly explains how the defendant can contact the court. In criminal cases, the existing possibility of hearing, interrogating or questioning people via a video link is temporarily extended; (group) telephone calls can also be used for this purpose. In the case of decisions on deprivation of liberty, such as referral to the examining magistrate in connection with custody or a hearing on a claim for detention or imprisonment, the judge and the defendant must be able to see each other and only when absolutely necessary, parties may turn to the use of a telephone.

The Act also provides for a temporary provision to replace physical hearings in criminal proceedings with an oral hearing by telephone, but this does not apply to the substantive handling of the criminal case (due to the importance of publicity) or when detention or imprisonment is involved.

Regime for constitutional review of laws.

3000 character(s) maximum

The Netherlands does not have a constitutional court. This means that there is no highest judicial body responsible for the ultimate interpretation and enforcement of constitutional law.

Article 120 of the Constitution of the Netherlands prohibits the courts from reviewing the constitutionality of laws (Acts of Parliament) and treaties. Although the ban on constitutional review is laid down in the Constitution, this does not mean that legislation is at no point reviewed in the light of the Constitution.This is done during the preparatory stage by the bodies involved in enacting legislation: the Council of State in its advisory role, and the legislature, in other words, the government and both Houses of Parliament. It is first and foremost the responsibility of these bodies to ensure that no legislation is passed that is in conflict with the Constitution. This strong emphasis placed on “legislative supremacy” is seen as one of the main characteristics of the Dutch constitutional tradition.

The courts are however obliged to assess whether legislation is compatible with international treaties. On the basis of article 94 of the Constitution, courts review all forms of legislation for compatibility with provisions in treaties that are directly enforceable (i.e. sufficiently clear to have direct effect by its content). In practice this usually means that classical rights guaranteed in treaties are applied, and not socio-economic rights as the latter are usually judged to be not directly enforceable. This implies that self-executing provisions in treaties have a legal status, which is higher than the Constitution. When a Dutch court (whether the Supreme Court, the Council of State or a district court) finds that an Act of Parliament or even a provision of the Constitution is incompatible with a treaty provision that is self-executing, it may not apply the national provision. Therefore, Dutch courts may not review the constitutionality of Acts of Parliament, but they are required to review their treaty compatibility. This means that litigation in fundamental rights cases is not so much based on constitutional arguments, but rather on the self-executing provision of the ECHR (and it Protocols) and more recently the EU Charter. To conclude, the Netherlands has a partly monist system, based on articles 93 and 94 of the Constitution.

At the end of 2018, the State Committee on the Parliamentary System advised to establish a constitutional court, which would entail partially overturning the constitutional ban on the judicial review of legislation. In the

Committee's plan, Acts of Parliament can be challenged in a constitutional court, on the basis of alleged contravention of a number of fundamental rights. The State Committee follows the outline of an earlier bill on judicial review.

Independent authorities

Independence, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions, ombudsman institutions and equality bodies;

3000 character(s) maximum

To date, there is a great presence of human rights (related) organisations in the Netherlands who contribute on a national, regional and international level to the human rights framework such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights and our organisations, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and the Netherlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten. These organizations report to e.g. the United Nations on the basis of independent research. Moreover, the National Ombudsman is an independent and impartial institution that assesses complaints about all aspects of public administration, defends the interests of the citizen and monitors the quality of public services in the Netherlands. It also has the capacity to deal with human rights related issues.

The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights reported in June 2019 (Human Rights Report To the 126th session of the Human Rights Committee) that the government should be making more systematic changes in ensuring that local authorities adhere to their responsibilities with regards to the human rights of citizens. 'Given its own ICCPR obligations and responsibilities the central government should monitor and intervene if local authorities do not comply.' In 2014, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights was accredited with a so-called A-status by the United Nations. It has the capacity to contribute and participate to meetings within the UN-human rights council and other supervisory organs of the UN. The Institute ensures that it performs its research and work independently from the government and parliament and independent from civil society organizations. The process of its research projects are open to the public and in communication with civil society as it tries to operate as transparent as possible.

There seems to be a consistent contribution of human rights organizations to regional (European) and international treaty body' reports. What we also see is an increasing critical perspective from these organizations in terms of government (in)action. However, there is a certain lack of practical clarity with regards to the process of information gathering of these organizations and their internal organizational power structures. To what extent human rights organizations are 100% independent requires further research.

Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

Modalities of publication of administrative decisions and scope of judicial review

3000 character(s) maximum

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Implementation by the public administration and State institutions of final court decisions

3000 character(s) maximum

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The enabling framework for civil society

Measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations

3000 character(s) maximum

In late 2019, the Dutch government introduced a policy regarding the framework for civil society organisations in which it introduces partnerships (e.g. Power of Voices and Women, Peace and Security). It emphasizes how important it is to support these organizations in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The measures aim to strengthen the scope of policy framework of civil society organizations. It also seeks to broaden the 'civil scope' in which these organizations operate in order for them to fulfill their goals and contribute to the (SDGs). To financially support organizations, the government will make funds available. The measures are set to take effect from January 2021 to December 2025. (See 'Beleidskader Versterking Maatschappelijk Middenveld')

Furthermore, in a letter to the government in June 2019, Minister Kaag of Foreign Trade and Development expressed the importance of supporting civil society organizations and that the government strives to create an equal level playing field for these organizations to cooperate with the government as well as other local, regional and international organizations. (https://www.partos.nl/actueel/nieuws/artikel/news/de-kaderbrief-maatschappelijke-middenveld-is-verschenen/)

Other - please specify

3000 character(s) maximum

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