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Consensuspolitiek in Nederland: Een studie naar de politieke besluitvormingscultuur in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw
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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Consensus politics in the Netherlands

*A study of the political decision-making culture
in the second half of the twentieth century*

This thesis focuses on the political decision-making culture of the Netherlands in the second half of the twentieth century. The dominant view of Dutch politics has been strongly influenced by Lijphart's 1968 book *Politics of Accommodation*. In this study, he sketched a divided country in which the political elites worked together to resolve political conflicts, and to keep the social peace. According to Lijphart, this consensual style of politics was dominant from the Great Pacification of 1917, when the universal suffrage issue and the school struggle about financial position of religious schools were resolved, and lasted until 1967 when this so-called politics of accommodation seemed to come to an end. Since then, the extent to which the political culture may have changed at elite level is being debated. This study aims to contribute to this debate by studying the political decision-making process about some of the major political issues. In the scientific literature, three images arise about the development of the Dutch political culture after 1967:

1. The first image shows periods of consensus and majority politics succeeding each other. The politics of accommodation was at its peak in the 1950s and ended around 1967, after which a decade of polarized relations in politics and society began. A restoration of consensus-style politics started again around 1980 and lasted until 2002, after which another period of polarization and political struggle followed.
2. A second image highlights the continuity of the consensus-style elite behaviour. The Netherlands has always been a country of minorities and this simple fact led to a political culture of cooperation between different groups. Two mechanisms emerge in the scientific literature. The first mechanism emphasizes a deep-seated consensus culture dating back to the time of the Republic and its political, religious and geographical pluralism. A second mechanism highlights the political balance of power within the Dutch party system in which no political party has ever had a majority. This is partly the result of the extreme proportionality of the Dutch electoral system and the way it fragments political power among several political parties. From this fragmentation of power arises the inevitability of cooperation, and a necessity to make compromises.
3. A third and alternative image for the two images above, which has been put forward in this study, is the possibility that in a certain period of time, there will be both continuity and change in the political culture. Consensus politics could be dominant on certain issues, while at the same time a majoritarian style of politics can be seen on other issues. This expectation is based on the assumption that the degree of consensus politics might depend on the kind of political issues on the political agenda. The underlying argument is that the rules of consensus politics would be less easily applicable to particularly fundamental and dichotomous issues. The problem with such issues is that, due to the lack

of an alternative position between opposite positions, the outcome will have clear winners and losers. In the political science literature, some discussion exists about the idea that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to make compromises on particularly religious and ethical issues, such as abortion and euthanasia. This case rests on the assumption that the more dichotomous character of these issues complicates making compromises, while parties could move more easily to the centre on socio-economic issues.

The above reflections led to the following central question of this study:

- *To what extent was the political elite's behaviour consensual of character during the decision-making process on some of the major political issues in the Netherlands in the period from 1945 to 2002, and how should continuities and changes be understood?*

This question was answered by analysing the political debates on some of the most salient political issues in the second half of the twentieth century. The cases were selected based on both the time period and the types of subject that are related to the political cleavages that were dominant in period under study, i.e. the socio-economic and the ethico-religious cleavages. Three periods could be distinguished from the literature: from 1945 to 1967, from 1967 to 1982, and from 1982 to 2002. The following political issues were selected on this basis:

- Socio-economic issues: *Social Security Organization Act (OSV) (1949–1952); Occupational Disability Insurance Act (WAO) (1963–1966), General Occupational Disability Act (AAW) (1973–1976), Social Security Reform Package (Stelselherziening) (1982–1986), Reduction in Occupational Disability Schemes Act (Wet TBA) (1991–1993)*
- Ethico-religious issues: *Cremation (1949–1955), Abortion (1965–1982), Euthanasia (1979–2002).*

The character of the political culture in the Netherlands has been analysed by studying the rules of the political game applied in the parliamentary debates about these issues. These rules deal with the relations between political elites and their attitude towards the decision-making process, particularly on controversial issues. These rules are informal rules of conduct that determine the character of the political culture. Two sets of rules were distinguished for the analysis. These sets of political rules of the political game are opposed to each other and correspond to the dichotomy between consensus and majoritarian democracy:

- Consensus rules: pragmatic tolerance, business-like politics, depoliticization, proportionality, government's right to govern, top consultations, secrecy.
- Majority rules: policy-preference maximization, polarization, politicization, disproportionality, parliamentary activism, grassroots consultation, transparency.

These rules of the political game were used to assess the extent to which political elites resolved the issues by following consensual or majoritarian rules.

This study consists of four parts and sixteen chapters. Part I is about theory and research design. In **chapter 2**, a further explanation of Lijphart's politics of accommodation is described, and the three images from literature on elite behaviour after 1967 are further discussed. **Chapter 3** discusses the methodological aspects of this study, with attention for the selection of political issues and the way in which elite behaviour can be analysed in relation to these issues on the basis of the rules of politics. The empirical chapters cover two parts in this study. Part II (chapters 4 to 10) focuses on the political debates about some of the major socio-economic issues. Furthermore, part III (chapters 11 to 14) focuses on the political debates about some of the major ethico-religious issues. Part IV contains the final consideration of this study. In **chapter 15**, a further characterization and comparison of the selected political debates has been given. Finally, in **chapter 16** the main findings of this study in relation to the three images from the literature on Dutch politics after 1967 are discussed, and the main question of this thesis is answered by a further characterization and interpretation of the degree of consensus politics.

In this summary the main points of these parts and chapters are subsequently discussed in the following pages.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEBATES

The socio-economic debates about social security could be divided into three major episodes. The first episode (chapter 4 and 5) is about the structure and character of the social security. The second episode (chapter 6, 7 and 8) is about the extension of the social welfare program, and finally the third episode (chapters 8, 9 and 10) is about the reform of the social security.

The organisation of the social security

In the years after the economic crisis of the 1930s and the horrors of World War II (1940–1945), a departure from a strongly *laissez-faire* politics of state-absenteeism was followed by politics which encompass a more active role of the state, particularly in the economy and towards social life in general. An economic model combining a free market capitalist economic system alongside an extensive social welfare system was gradually established in the three decades after 1945. The prologue in **chapter 4** discusses this development towards a Keynesian policy consensus.

One of the first building blocks of this modern social welfare system is discussed in **chapter 5**: the *Social Security Organization Act* (OSV) of 1952. This act provided the system's basic organisational framework in which the welfare state could be established.

The creation of this framework was an important issue, because the decisions made during this debate would deeply affect the character of the welfare state. Two main positions could be recognized. Christian democrats and conservative liberals tended towards a system based on the contract relation between the employee and employer and a private implementation structure governed by the employee's and employer's organisations (the social partners), while the social democrats preferred a system based on the principle of solidarity with a national insurance and an implementation structure with a more central role for the state. It is important to realize that the political struggle about the OSV was therefore no longer about whether the social security programs should be expanded, but rather about how that should be done.

The parliamentary majority of Christian democrats and conservative liberals aimed strongly at reducing the role of the state in the proposed legislative bill, and instead, increasing the role of the social partners. Ultimately, they won the debate over the social democrats, but they were only partially victorious. In the bill, amended heavily by parliament, almost all social insurances would become 'privatised'. However, the social democratic ministers depoliticized the issue, and prevented a cabinet crisis by postponing a decision on one of the most politically sensitive aspects of the bill, namely the administration for the old age pension (AOW) which was to be introduced. The social democrats strongly preferred a public administration instead of a private administration, because this element of the public administration was strongly connected to the possibility of the introduction of a state pension. In the end, the parliamentary majority of Christian democrats and conservative liberals got their way and the social democrats voted against the OSV, though, surprisingly, this did not lead to a cabinet crisis. Ultimately, a grand compromise was formed when the new Old-Age Pension Act (AOW, 1956) got a public administration and, as a consequence of this, the Netherlands got a mixed social security system with public and private insurances.

The debate over the *Social Security Organization Act* (OSV) in 1952 could be seen as majoritarian at first sight, but when taking a closer look from the perspective of the 'grand compromise' the debate on the organisation of the social welfare state does have some characteristics of consensual politics.

Extension of the social security system

In the decades after the institutional framework of the social welfare system was established, which happened in the early 1950s, many new social laws were introduced until the mid-1970s. The Dutch social security system emerging from this process is a product of all major political parties and carries characteristics from both conservative-corporatist and social-democratic welfare states. The debate

about the extension of the social security system is discussed in chapters 6, 7 and 8, and analyses two major new disability insurances.

The political debate about the *Occupational Disability Insurance Act* (WAO) is discussed in **chapter 6**. This new and progressive insurance was introduced in 1966, and it was supposed to be “the jewel in the crown” of modern Dutch social security.

The debate on the disability act could be characterized as a highly depoliticized decision-making process with an almost complete dissolvment of all political tensions. This substantive agreement was partly the result of the “business-like attitude” of the political elites. They approached this bill in particular, and the development of social security in general, as very important issues. Both the ministers and the members of parliament avoided any potential points of conflict. The created consensus was further strengthened by the fact that leading politicians, especially from the three Christian-Democratic parties and, to a lesser extent, from the social democratic PvdA, gave the subject an extra “ideological charge” by presenting the law as a very important aspect of the modernisation of the country. This is somewhat in contrast with Lijphart’s explanation of the rule of business-like politics where an ideological approach carries the risk of paralyzing the decision-making process.

This compelling belief in progress combined with a principled and serious approach to the subject led to a strong parliamentary conformism that became evident in the way in which critical discussions from the professional field and divergent views from the past were put aside with a certain disdain. Ultimately, both chambers discussed the WAO and almost unanimously adopted it in 1965 and 1966. As a result, the Netherlands got a relatively progressive and ambitious disability insurance, with high benefits and flexible admission requirements.

However, two groups were not yet covered by the WAO: the majority of self-employed entrepreneurs and small-business owners and those people who got a disability early in life. All parties in parliament saw this as a major social problem. The *General Disability Insurance Act* (AAW), which is discussed in **chapter 7**, would be an addition to the WAO, and had to provide a social minimum in the social security system for all citizens who were disabled. The AAW completed the modern social welfare state, and it would be the last major social insurance that was introduced.

In 1975, the Dutch parliament debated the bill in the context of an economic downturn and a growing demand for unemployment and disability benefits. In both chambers, however, the law could count on a broad political support. Even the critical conservative liberals voted in favor of the extension of the disability insurances, and only the small orthodox Calvinist parties voted against the bill. This did not mean that there were no points of conflict, but the general “business-like” attitude was that

such points should not stand in the way of the AAW's adoption. Potential points of conflict, such as the issue of the organization of social security or the position of women in the social security system, were depoliticized by the political elites.

Despite this consensus, the parliamentary discussion about the AAW can be seen as a turning point in the political history of the social security. It was the moment that the potentially explosive issue of the affordability of social security was briefly discussed in parliament. It did not become a central issue, partly due to the avoidance of the issue for the risk of polarization. The adoption of the AAW was simply more important than starting a big debate about the affordability of social security. However, the economic sustainability of the Dutch welfare state would become one of the most salient issues in the 1980s and 1990s. Until this moment, the general attitude of the political elites was to avoid any serious discussion and to directly depoliticize potential disputes that could jeopardize the higher objective of developing a modern social security system.

Social security reform

The introduction of the AAW marked a change in the political debate on the Dutch social security. The period of gradual expansion of the social security system came to an end. The intermezzo in **chapter 8** discusses the economic stagnation in the mid-1970s and the shift in economic policy. Policy initiatives from that moment on were almost all directed at reducing the budget deficit and government spending. **Chapter 9** discusses the first round of social security reforms aimed at reducing the costs of social security and controlling the inflow into social insurances.

In 1982, a centre-right coalition government of Christian democrats (CDA) and conservative liberals (VVD) was formed. The main policy objective of this first Lubbers cabinet (1982–1986) was to strengthen the economy, to reduce the high unemployment rate and to make the Dutch economy competitive again. Several policies were proposed as 'pills' to cure the so called 'Dutch disease'. These propositions included wage moderation, the reduction of the government's budget deficit, and the improvement of the financial position of the private sector. A key aspect of these plans was the reform of the social security system. The cabinet came with a reform package that was primarily meant to reduce the level and the duration of benefits, and to tighten eligibility criteria, especially of the unemployment and disability insurances. This package was a core element of the first Lubbers cabinet's reform policy, and it had to contribute to keeping social security affordable and to reducing the tax burden and social contributions for both citizens and businesses.

Parliament debated about the reform package in 1985 and 1986. The largest opposition party, the social democratic PvdA, was strongly opposed to reform plans. They were convinced that an active labor market policy and Keynesian-style government

investments were the central means to solve the socio-economic problems, while CDA and VVD primarily sought to resolve the issues by reducing the social contributions, taxes and benefits of the recipients. Eventually, the reform package only got the support of the coalition parties. Both the left-wing opposition and the small conservative Calvinist parties voted for opposite reasons against the reforms. The decision-making process was, without a doubt, majoritarian in nature. The coalition parties had a large parliamentary majority in favor of their reform plans and this combined with a strong sense of urgency to finally reform the social security system contributed strongly to this majoritarian process. According to the coalition parties, the economic crisis made reforms simply inevitable. Therefore, fixing the problems became more important than broadening the political support for the reforms.

Disability insurance act reform

The reform package and the preceding cuts on wages and benefits kept the social security system affordable in the short term. However, it was not the structural reform that curbed the influx into the system. Extra reforms were deemed necessary in the late 1980s to get grip on particularly the disability insurances.

Chapter 10 deals with the debate on the occupational disability insurance reforms in the early 1990s aimed at reducing the number of beneficiaries. During the formation of the third Lubbers cabinet (1989–1994) of CDA and PvdA, they set themselves the goal that the number of beneficiaries should not increase. This so called “stabilization objective” was agreed upon, but other than some minor interventions at the level of prevention of disability and the financial involvement of employers, concrete measures were avoided. However, the number of people with disabilities allowances continued to rise during the governments’ term of office and additional measures were considered necessary. These extra reform plans would be included in the Reduction in *Occupational Disability Schemes Act* (Wet TBA), and would touch on the vested interest of a large group of beneficiaries.

The parties were deeply divided on this subject, and particularly on whether the amount and duration of allowances should also be affected as a result of new health checks of current beneficiaries. The social democrats were only in favor of some extra measures aimed at reducing the inflow, while the Christian democrats in parliament wanted to intervene on the level and duration of disability benefits, in line with the cabinet’s perspective. However, such reforms would be a particularly explosive issue for the social democrats.

A political struggle erupted between the coalition parties, and within the PvdA, an uproar among its members followed. However, the social democratic party leadership in the cabinet eventually defied the party base, and focused on making a compromise deal on the reforms.

A long and bumpy decision-making process about the bill followed, and eventually, parliament debated about an adjusted compromise bill in January 1993. This long and arduous process was about the balancing between conflicting interests within the given framework of the “stabilization objective”. This was a joint effort by the coalition leaders to find a substantive compromise. This consensual process threatened to get stuck because politicians of both coalition parties took a more majoritarian stance. The tone among the leading politicians hardened, and they would highly polarize the issue. Ultimately, the cabinet leadership, and in particular the political leaders of the CDA and PvdA, i.e. Lubbers and Kok respectively, had to force a compromise by linking their positions to the cabinet’s survival, and thereby enforcing the political rule of the government’s right to govern.

ETHICO-RELIGIOUS DEBATES

The prologue in **chapter 11** discusses the background of the political debates on the studied ethico-religious debates. It highlights a noticeable consensus on ethical issues during the period of the politics of accommodation from 1917 to 1967. This was especially prevalent when a prudent elite cooperation was, according to Lijphart, at its peak in the two decades after 1945. This consensus can partially be explained by the success of the politics of accommodation, but perhaps it is better understood as a result of a fundamental consensus in politics and society on all kinds of ethical issues such as abortion and euthanasia. This consensus is reflected in the undisputable position of the relative lenient morality laws of 1911 about prostitution, homosexuality and abortion until the mid-1960s.

The views on these kinds of issues would only really start shifting from the mid-1960s, and subsequently, the demand for legislative change of the morality laws became louder. This would lead to important legislative changes in several areas, such as the legalization of abortion (chapter 13) and the legalization of active euthanasia (chapter 14). The debates about this took place after the mid-sixties. For the preceding period, the debate on the legalization of cremation (chapter 12) has been studied.

The big difference between these periods is that the power relations were clearly distinctive. Before 1967, the parliament had a conservative and mainly confessional majority on ethico-religious issues, while after 1967 there was a predominantly secular and progressive majority. The decision-making process about the legalization of cremation, abortion and euthanasia furthermore mostly took place within ideologically deeply divided coalitions of Christian Democrats on the one side and conservative liberals and/or social democrats on the other side.

Cremation law

The cremation law, that was proposed in the early 1950s, is discussed in **chapter 12**. It had to end the unsatisfactory and decades long state of non-enforcement of the anti-cremation regulation in force. In doing so, the government wanted to consider the fact that large groups of the population had serious objections to corpse burning, but at the same time the government had tolerated cremation for a long time. In practice, “corpse burning” had therefore taken on such a large scale that, according to the government, a prohibition “would go beyond the limits of reasonableness”. In the explanatory memorandum of the bill, the government wrote that a “mode” had to be found to allow corpse burning within certain limits. This was a compromise within the government coalition. The three Christian democratic parties (KVP, CHU, ARP) in the coalition were reluctant in legalizing, such a pagan practice, while their social democratic (PvdA) coalition partner was more inclined to equate cremation with the traditional funeral practice. The biggest opposition party, the conservative liberals, were strongly opposed to this compromise, and wanted a complete equation of cremation with the burial of corpses.

In 1955, the Dutch parliament discussed the bill. A particularly fundamental discussion ensued about the extent to which the government was allowed to favor certain moral customs over others, and whether the restrictions imposed on cremation violated fundamental human rights. A fierce debate followed about the desirability of the compromise the bill represented and about whether the coalition parties had found an appropriate “modus vivendi” for dealing with ethical differences, especially between the PvdA and the opposition of conservative liberals (VVD) and communists (CPN).

This compromise only became possible because the coalition parties followed the rules of consensus politics during the decision-making process, such as the business-like and non-ideological approach. Also helpful was the work of the broadly composed committee, which already laid down the foundation for the compromise bill in the pre-parliamentary phase that was also supported by both the proponents and the opponents of cremation. This contributed to the consensual outcome of the debate. It was especially important for the social democrats, because in the debate they were able to fall back on the work of the committee. Eventually, only the coalition parties supported the bill in both chambers, and an unusual alliance of orthodox Calvinists, communist and conservative liberals voted against the bill.

Abortion laws

As discussed in chapter 11, the morality laws of 1911 had strict restrictions on abortion, and these were not seriously disputed until the cultural revolution of the 1960s when abortion especially became a central political issue for the feminist

movement. The abortion debate in the Netherlands would come to an end with the adoption of a 'liberal' law in the early 1980s. The political struggle on abortion is discussed in **chapter 13**. This struggle was essentially between those who endorsed a more traditional morality, which was primarily based on Christian morality, and those who embraced a liberal ethic of freedom, individual choice and self-determination. First, the latter group prevailed in society, especially under doctors and lawyers, and as a result the old abortion legislation of 1911 quickly lost its power and a free and barely regulated abortion practice was the result. The political struggle that emerged hereafter was about the adjustment of the existing abortion legislation in a progressive or conservative direction in order to at least regulate the new liberal practice.

The political decision-making process about abortion had moments where consensus or majoritarian politics were dominant. Three phases can be distinguished.

In the first phase, the political elites tried to follow the rules of consensus politics. Initially, they depoliticized the issue by reformulating it as primarily an issue for doctors and lawyers. Later on, they composed and installed an ideologically broad state advisory commission. However, this process of consensus-building ended when in the early 1970s social democratic members of parliament came with a private member bill to create a breakthrough and to decisively shift the outcome of the debate towards their position.

This activism marked the second phase of a battle about the rules of the game. This debate was about whether the issue should be settled with a compromise at cabinet level – following the rule of the government's right to govern – or whether it should be left to the free power play of the majority formation in parliament. Eventually, this last option was chosen during the formation of the Den Uyl cabinet (1973–1977) after the general elections in 1972. The parties involved in the formation process concluded to leave the abortion issue open for the parliament. Eventually, two private member bills were introduced in parliament: one combined bill from social democrats (PvdA) and conservative liberals (VVD) in favor of liberalizing the abortions laws, and a Christian democratic bill (KVP, ARP) that was set up to restrict and regulate the liberalized abortion practice. Both bills were discussed in parliament in 1975. The PvdA/VVD-bill was adopted by the House of Representatives after a long and calm debate, but the bill got voted down by the Senate, mainly because a majority of the conservative liberal senators voted against this bill.

With the rejection of the initiative bill by the Senate, a third phase began, in which the leading politicians attempted to settle the issue in a more consensual way. During the formation of a new cabinet after the general elections in 1977, the parties made some arrangements about the procedure on how to settle the abortion issue

by a compromise at cabinet level. A substantive agreement was found during the cabinet's term of office. In 1982, the parliament debated and adopted a CDA/VVD-bill that liberalized the abortion laws.

After all, this compromise was only possible after the Christian democrats had accepted the women's right to self-determination. Only then it became possible to negotiate on a few sub-aspects of the bill, such as the five days rule for women to think their choice through. The abortion issue was thus settled in a more majoritarian way. The parties had simply not been able to find a real middle ground between the woman's right to self-determination on the one side and the protection of unborn life on the other. The Christian Democrats had essentially lost the battle over the abortion issue.

Euthanasia laws

Chapter 14 highlights the issue about euthanasia. When the House of Representatives firstly spoke in the 1970s about this issue, they spoke very reluctantly while the debate and controversy around the issue of abortion was still in full swing.

When looking at the political debate about euthanasia there are three different phases to be distinguished in which certain rules were dominant, just as it was the case with the abortion issue. After a first phase in which the consensus rules were followed, a second phase began with the proposal of a private member bill which initiated a political struggle over the rules of the game. A more consensual politics was ultimately enforced by the government and a third phase followed in which the political debate was dominated again by consensus rules.

The first phase of the debate on euthanasia from the 1970s to the early 1980s was consensual in nature. The attitude of the political elites was characterized by a business-like and pragmatic approach to the issue, and by a great deal of reluctance to not unnecessarily politicize this sensitive and complex issue. The elites also tried to build some consensus between the parties by installing a broadly composed state advisory commission.

The first sign that this consensual decision-making was slowly coming to an end and would pass to a second phase, was the criticism of the supposed "conservative" composition of the state advisory commission. Supporters of the liberalization of the euthanasia laws expected that the committee would not propose any legislative changes. In retrospect, this criticism proved unfounded. The real tipping point in the decision-making, however, would be the introduction of a private member bill to legalize euthanasia by the Liberal Democrats of D'66. In 1984, they submitted a bill whereby the doctor would go free when committing euthanasia, if he should adhere to certain conditions of due care.

The first Lubbers cabinet (1982–1986) of Christian democrats and conservative liberals was put under pressure by a parliamentary majority to adopt the private member bill of D'66. The cabinet was particularly pressed by the VVD parliamentary group to support this bill. However, the Christian democratic ministers in the cabinet vetoed the D'66 bill, and the cabinet subsequently came up with a draft bill with some minor steps towards liberalisation. This road was only acceptable for the Christian Democrats, if the government was leading in this process and not the parliament, as it was the case during the abortion debate. This meant on the one hand that CDA was prepared to support limited legalization of euthanasia, but on the other hand that the views of the Christian Democrats, although they took a minority position on this issue, had to be considered during the legislative process.

Hereafter, the debate was no longer about the fundamental question of the permissibility of euthanasia, but it shifted to the question about how the euthanasia practice should be regulated. Several bills were proposed by the succeeding two Lubbers cabinets in which the CDA worked together with the VVD (1986–1989) and later on with the PvdA (1989–1994). These bills can all be characterised as compromises within ideologically divided coalitions, whereby the political elites in the coalition played the political game by the rules of consensus politics.

After the general elections in 1994, CDA lost and was put into an opposition role after forming a cabinet of PvdA, VVD and D66. This first “Purple” cabinet (1994–1998) continued the euthanasia policy of the Lubbers cabinets, and no direct attempts were taken to liberalise the laws. This was quite remarkable, because an amendment of the law in line with the D66 bill would have been possible without CDA. It was not until the end of the first purple cabinet that D66 parliamentarians came up with a private member bill for the liberalisation of euthanasia. This *Law on Termination of Life on Request* (Review Procedure) got the support of the VVD and PvdA. During the formation of the second Purple cabinet (1998–2002), they agreed to include the bill in the coalition agreement. The government presented the bill as the final step in line with the policies of the previous cabinets. The bill would mainly be the codification of the grown euthanasia practice. Furthermore, the idea that it was a radical change was strongly rejected.

In 2001, the parliament debated about this bill. The issue was approached fairly pragmatically and non-ideologically by the cabinet and the coalition groups in parliament. This approach reflected the fact that the fundamental opposition between the protection of life and the right to self-determination was not played out sharply. In addition, the Justice and Public Health ministers, and in particular the PvdA and VVD spokespersons, made it clear – on several occasions – that the right to self-determination was not the central principle of the law and that they did not want to legalize the extremely sensitive ‘completed life’ issue. Also, other

issues, such as euthanasia in the case of dementia and on young children, were not allowed by the new law and a discussion about this was avoided for the time being. Ultimately, the bill was supported by a majority of coalition groups and the left-wing greens (GroenLinks). The small orthodox Calvinist parties voted against the bill because of major fundamental objections, while the CDA and the socialist SP voted against the bill for more practical reasons.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In **chapter 15**, the political issues are further analysed and compared with each other. An important first observation is that the political issues studied in this research are difficult to position within the dichotomy of consensus and majoritarian politics. Only a few cases can be included, while most cases do not fall into either category or have characteristics of both. A pure form of consensus politics could not really be recognized in the studied debates. The goal of the political elites was generally not aimed at achieving a supra majoritarian consensus between the parties in parliament on the basis of a certain democratic ideal. More noticeable was a pragmatic effort to forge political majorities in order to continue the coalition. Only the decision-making on the *Social Insurance Organization Act* (OSV, 1952) can be regarded to some extent as an example of the ideal-typical consensus politics. The treatment of the social security reform package of the 1980s and the legalisation of euthanasia (WTL, 2002) were more of a majoritarian nature, while the abortion legislation of 1982, the euthanasia bills of the Lubbers I, II and III cabinets (1982–1994) and the occupational disability insurance reforms of the early 1990s can in the end be seen as substantive compromises within ideologically divided coalitions. The decision-making on the *Occupational Disability Insurance Act* (WAO, 1966) and the *General Occupational Disability Act* (AAW, 1976) are characterized by highly depoliticized decision-making processes.

In **chapter 16**, the main findings of this study in relation to the three images from the literature on Dutch politics after 1967 are discussed, and the main question of this thesis is answered.

Image 1: Continuity and change, 1967 and 1982

On the basis of the studied political issues (chapters 4 to 14), it can be concluded that the relations between the parties on the socio-economic cleavage did not really become polarized until the mid-1970s, while the polarization on the ethico-religious cleavage already became polarized in the late 1960s. As a result of this, no clear turning points in the political culture and the behaviour of the political elites appear from the perspective of the decision-making on these specific political

issues. Nonetheless, some changes in the nature of political culture can be observed in the period from 1945 to 2002.

An important continuity that emerges in this study is that the political elites worked together and made compromises within ideologically divided coalitions both before and after 1967. This finding seems to indicate that the differences over time were less significant than is often suggested. If there was a change in 1967, then this was by no means the “almost revolutionary change” that Lijphart has proposed. This also means that the changes around 1982 are less likely to be signs of a return to a tradition of the old consensus politics than has often been proposed.

Decision-making on the cremation law in the 1950s was different from that on the abortion legislation in the mid 1970s. In the cremation debate, the coalition parties were still working together, and this was no longer the case in the abortion debate. The coalition left the initiative for new legislation to the House of Representatives. This led to majoritarian politics with a reversal of the rules of the game relative to the compromise-oriented politics during the cremation debate.

Considering political decision-making on some of the central political issues in the second half of the twentieth century, it is too schematic to present the Dutch political culture as a pendulum that moves between periods of harmonious cooperation and periods of polarization and majoritarian politics. The political culture at the elite level did not make a clear turn to its opposite around 1967, and there did not follow a complete restoration around 1982. Therefore, periods of consensual politics and periods of majoritarian politics did not simply follow one another. A more correct image is that in certain periods consensus politics could be dominant on some issues and that, at the same time, majoritarian politics could be dominant on other issues.

The behaviour of the political elites seems to be determined more casuistically. It depends on the type of issues and the political divisions within the coalition. Therefore, it is difficult to make any generalisations and to point out moments where the political culture changed dramatically. However, this does not mean that there were no changes.

An important finding of this study is that it seems to have become more difficult for the political elites after 1967 to apply compromise-oriented politics. This manifested itself mainly in the way that the rule government’s right to govern became disputed by a form of parliamentary activism. This activism could be seen in how sensitive issues were politicized by members of the House of Representatives, as was the case in the abortion and euthanasia debates. In these issues, the attitude of parts of the opposition – towards the ideologically divided cabinet – was that a minority should not limit the will of a parliamentary majority. Some members of parliament were

therefore prepared to politicize and to polarize the issues by introducing a private member bill, and thereby preventing a compromise in the coalition.

Image 2: Pluralism and the continuity of consensus politics

This study seems to confirm the thesis that the continuity of the consensual style of politics is the result of the pluralism of Dutch politics. The political elites had to make compromises after all within ideologically divided coalitions, and this process should primarily be understood as a result of the power relations within the coalition and between the coalition and the opposition. This implies that the political culture at elite level is determined only to a limited extent by all kinds of unwritten political norms and rules of conduct that go back to a normative ideal of a more inclusive democracy.

This compromise-oriented style of coalition politics is in line with the rules of consensus politics, but it is primarily a consequence of the necessity to mediate the political disagreements within the coalition. This became clear in the debates about cremation (1955), abortion (1977–1982), euthanasia (1984–1994), and reforms of the disability insurances (1991–1993). The rules of politics were in these cases used instrumentally in order to forge compromises that could count on parliamentary majorities. Within coalitions cooperation was standard practice, parties took a business-like and pragmatic approach to the issues and showed understanding for each other's diverging views.

However, it should be noted that the degree of pluralism of Dutch politics depends strongly on the chosen perspective. If we look at the number of political parties in the parliament, a high degree of pluralism can be seen as after all, no political party in Dutch parliamentary history has ever had a majority. However, from the perspective of political cleavages, an image emerges of a political space with some clear majorities. On the ethico-religious cleavage after 1967, a progressive majority of mainly social democrats and conservative liberals replaced a conservative, confessional majority. On the socio-economic conflict dimension, there was a consensus on the extension of the social security system from the mid 1950s until the mid-1970s, and after this period a reformist centre-right majority of Christian democrats and conservative liberals was formed.

Image 3: Consensus politics and diverging kinds of political issues

In the second chapter of this study, the rules of consensus politics were suggested to be more applicable to some issues than to others. As a consequence of their more dichotomous nature, the expectation was that ethico-religious issues would be more difficult to resolve in a consensual way than socio-economic issues. This distinction

appears to have been set too sharply, and the findings even seem to be somewhat contrary to the formulated expectations. In addition, there are some aspects that are related to the nature of political issues, and that seem to hamper consensual decision-making and compromise-oriented politics in general. These aspects are relevant for a better understanding of the complex image of elite behaviour both before and after 1967. A number of things stand out.

A first observation is that a consensual decision-making process on socio-economic issues seems to become more difficult if the political elites are convinced that reforms are necessary and urgent given the socio-economic circumstances. This was clearly the case in the debate in the 1980s on the reform package. A second observation is that a consensual decision-making process on ethico-religious issues seems easier in the beginning, mainly because of the lack of a compelling necessity and urgency to act quickly and decisively. With the debates on cremation, abortion and euthanasia, the political elites still had the time to depoliticize the issues. In the beginning there was time to set up a state advisory commission or to see how the issue would develop in case law. These issues needed to be regulated at some point, but there was no urgency for politicians to intervene.

However, this politics of depoliticization had also its limits. The debate in politics and society will continue, and a parliamentary majority in favour of some kind of legal change will probably be formed. If this majority does not coincide with the majority of the coalition, it will be interesting for the opposition groups to steer the outcome of the decision-making process towards the position of this alternative majority in parliament, as this was also the case in the debates on abortion, euthanasia and to some lesser extent also in the debate about the reform of the disability insurance in the early 1990s.

Consensus politics in the Netherlands

The most important finding of this study is that, within the given political institutions, the political elites primarily act on the basis of their own interests, and less with regard to higher normative notions that underlie the concept of consensus politics. As a result, the Dutch political culture at elite level has two faces: on the one hand a compromise-oriented style of politics is visible within politically divided coalitions in which the rules of the consensus politics are followed to reach a compromise between the coalition parties. On the other hand, a majoritarian politics is recognizable in relatively homogeneous coalitions to resolve certain issues decisively. This aspect of the Dutch political culture seems to be largely independent of time and subject.

Real consensus politics is perhaps a great democratic ideal, but it does not seem to correspond with reality. After all, it is highly unlikely that politicians who are

confronted with large, complex and polarized issues will be inclined to complicate the decision-making process to create a larger parliamentary majority than necessary, and to include also the views and interests of the opposition parties in some kind of bigger compromise.

This rule seems to apply to both united and politically divided coalitions, but some change over the studied period can be seen here. A political compromise within divided coalitions seems to have become more difficult after 1967. The consensus rule of the governments' right to govern came under pressure from an emerging parliamentary activism. It did not, however, make a compromise-oriented politics impossible, but it had to be enforced by the leading politicians within the coalition. This finding does not affect one of the main conclusions of this research that consensus politics, understood as considering also the views and interests of political minorities outside the coalition, did not really occur in the Dutch political practice. It should be noted, however, that the bar of consensus politics is fairly high. It assumes that politicians partly go against their own interests, views and preferences, and thereby also give up some of their power in favour of the minority. Such a consensual attitude actually did not emerge in the cases studied: the power of the number was always stronger than the power of morality.

