

**Education Council of the Netherlands**



**Geert ten Dam**

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About our freedom of education

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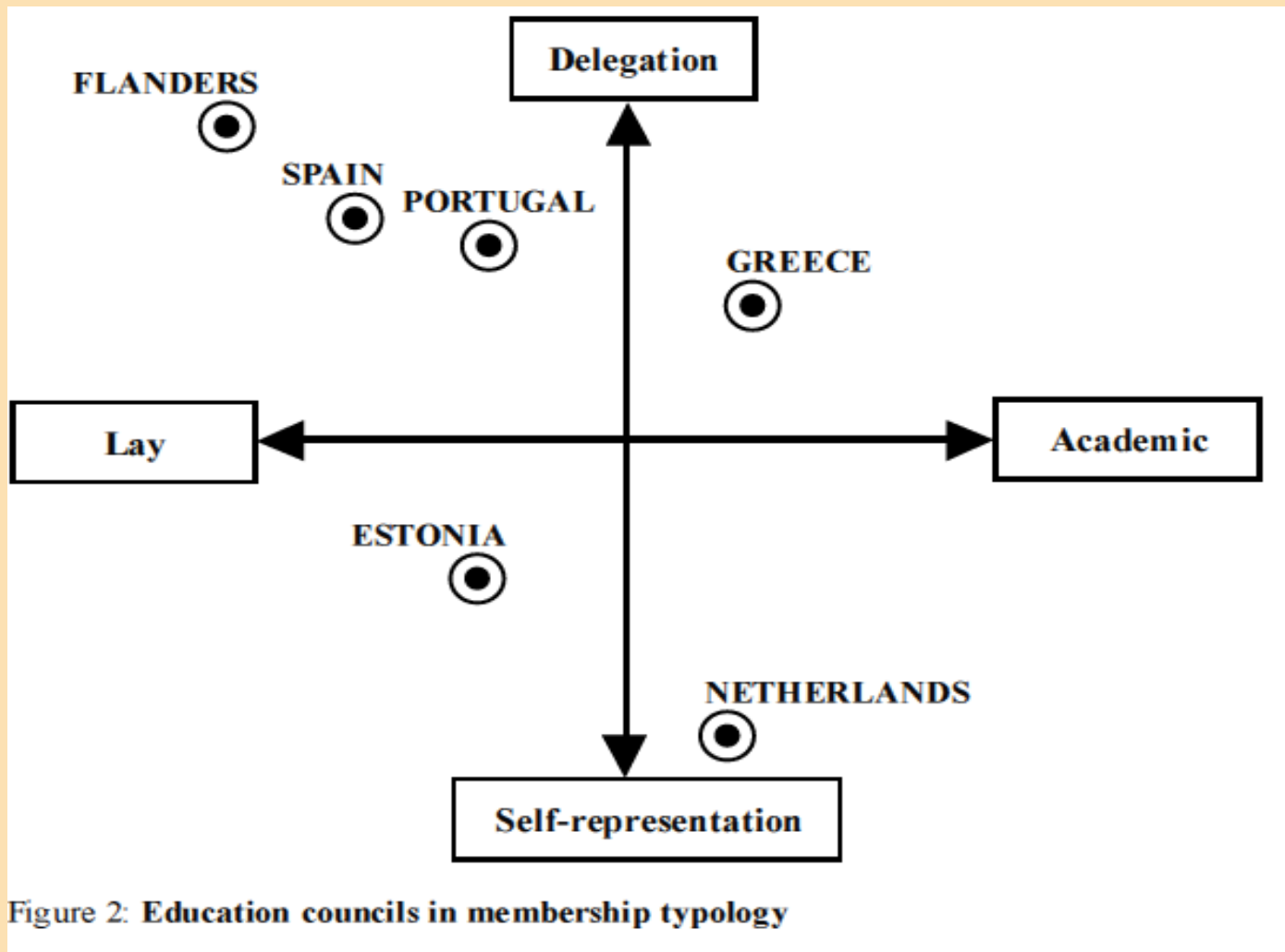
**The Education Council is an independent governmental advisory body which advises the Minister, Parliament and local authorities.**

**The Council provides advice, both solicited and unsolicited, to the Minister of Education, Sciences and Cultural Affairs and the Minister of Economy.**

**Moreover, the Council may be asked for advice by the Dutch upper and lower chambers of parliament.**

**Local authorities can call on the Education Council in special cases of local education policy.**

# European Councils [www.eunec.eu](http://www.eunec.eu)



# **Dutch freedom of education**

**In the Netherlands → state education and independent education**

**The Constitution, Article 23:**

- **Education is an item of ongoing concern for the government**
- **The giving of education shall be free**

# **Dutch freedom of education**

**In the Netherlands: state education and independent education on equal foot in terms of funding and quality**

**Full funding → Belgium, Ireland**

**Partial funding → France, Germany**

**Little or no funding → Greece, UK**

# **Dutch freedom of education**

**The Constitution, Article 23, regulates the relationship between government and schools**

- **Government must ensure the proper functioning of the system as a whole**
- **but has to act with restraint**
- **because of the freedom of education**

**This holds not only for independent schools but also for state schools**

# Dutch freedom of education

## Two essential values:

### ➤ Freedom of (school) choice

- independent schools reflect parental views and values
- state schools provide ('neutral') education for a diverse population

### ➤ Social cohesion

- independent schools often have homogeneous pupil population → strong internal cohesion
- state schools often have heterogenous pupil population → living together as a matter of course

**Both type of schools can contribute to strengthening social cohesion.**



# **The Constitution and the Dutch Council of Education**

**At the installation of the Education Council, the Minister for Education De Visser said:**

***"In you, I see represented the spiritual currents that are at play today in the field of education; for me you are the personification of the demands that education places on the minister; the bearers of educational ideals derived from the actual needs of the people."***

# **Current issues regarding the Dutch freedom of education**

- **Diversity in society goes further than the current distinction between state schools and independent schools. Parents freedom of choice is restricted.**
- **Growing tensions between the government's duty to assure the quality of education and the schools' freedom to provide education based on their own principles.**
- **Do some independent schools abuse their freedom?**
- **Do Islamic schools have the same rights?**

# **Advice needed**

**In 2011 the Dutch House of Representatives asks the Education Council to come up with a comprehensive advice about Article 23 of the Constitution:**

**Is Article 23 still fit for purpose? Or do we, given the current society we live in, need to take a different view of the freedom of education?**

# **Advice about the freedom of education**

**The freedom of education is still of immense value, even after 100 years:**

- **It offers parents freedom of choice**
- **It creates a strong basis for social cohesion**

**However, to offer a better fit with the present time:**

- **A more open interpretation of the concept of 'conviction' is needed**
- **A stronger focus on the quality of education is needed**

# **'A more open interpretation of 'conviction'**

- **An increase in life views and ethical frameworks, no longer reflecting the traditional pillars of Dutch society that formed the basis for the current interpretation of Article 23.**
- **Education should be able to continue to respond to new demands from parents.**
- **A school that attracts sufficient numbers of pupils is meeting a need by society, and has the right to receive government funding.**

# **A stronger focus on the quality of education**

- **Good education: international right of pupils.**
- **Schools should be compliant with democratic norms and values.**
- **Schools should meet basic quality standards in terms of teacher competences, school plan, and governance structure.**
- **And once it has pupils: are the learning outcomes sufficient?**

# Criticism on the advice

## Critique on:

- **the proposed open interpretation of the concept of conviction**
  - Dutch schools has show a large absorption capacity of new convictions and new groups of pupils. No need for change.
- **the proposed conviction-free planning of new schools**
  - fragmentation, a cacophony of all kinds of new groupings and small schools? Inefficient education?
- **the position and value of state education**
  - not addressing the importance of living together in a multicultural society

# **Educational landscape for the 21st century**

- **Government is losing its monopoly on public issues**
- **Complex problems without clear solutions; multiple voices and diverse parties**
- **Space for variety in education is needed, because of local collaborative partnerships and networks**
- **More specifically: variety is needed for delivering quality**
- **A networked society demands freedom for schools to shape the education as they see fit; tailored to their pupil population, the parents and local circumstances.**





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**[www.onderwijsraad.nl](http://www.onderwijsraad.nl)**