

The elections for the European Parliament are still fresh in memory. For a couple of weeks, Europe was the most important topic for media and in European parliaments. In my own household it was an important matter too, and not only because of the politics. My daughter just turned eighteen, and she was so excited to be allowed to vote... at last! The omnipresence of Europe during these weeks made clear that the Netherlands is an autonomous country, but is also part of a greater entity. Just before the elections, our chamber – the ‘Tweede Kamer’ – endorsed the report ‘Ahead in Europe’, that has been written by the rapporteur on democratic legitimacy, Mr Leegte. The main conclusion of this report is that the Dutch parliament can effectively influence European decision-making – more than we currently know and do.

This meeting today builds on the recommendations of ‘Ahead in Europe’. We took the initiative to invite you here to talk about a topic that concerns us all: the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor’s Office, also known as ‘EPPO’.

The majority of our parliament supports cooperation of European member states, especially when it concerns problems that exceeds borders. I'm not sure whether it is an expression in your country too, but here we say the whole is more than the sum of its parts, in many fields. To combat organised crime for example, the urgency for close cooperation across borders is evident. Criminals and swindlers tend to ignore borders.

However, the proposal of the European Commission to establish a European Public Prosecutor's Office aroused aversion in several national parliaments. This aversion concerns both the idea of it – should we organise the fight against fraud with EU funds on European level? – and the proposed modus operandi, that compromises national sovereignty to great extent. In October of last year, fourteen chambers from eleven member states issued the second yellow card in history.

The decision of the European Commission to ignore the yellow card was a big letdown for us and the other parliaments. I think it is important that our voice is being heard. This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to get your way, but there must be some kind of dialogue between the Commission and the national parliament, that represent the people whom it's about. It fits our Dutch no-nonsense mentality not to reconcile ourselves to this situation. As a response we appointed Member of Parliament Ard van der Steur as rapporteur, with two main areas for attention.

On the one hand, he's given the mandate to emphasize our feelings of discontent towards the European Commission. Their response to the yellow card drawn by the parliaments didn't do justice to the importance of this signal.

Exemplary for the understanding of his task is Van der Steur's presence at the Citizen's Dialogue, hosted by Mrs Viviane Reding and the mayor of Amsterdam in the 'Rode Hoed' in Amsterdam – sometimes called a 'red wing stronghold'. In the weeks before that evening, Mr Van der Steur attempted to arrange a meeting with the Commissioner to discuss the proposal for an EPPO. Time after time he tried... but without result. As a last resource, Van der Steur – who is a convinced liberal – travelled to Amsterdam, to the 'Rode Hoed', right into the lion's den. And guess what... there was a meeting between the Commissioner and the rapporteur that evening. Talking about Dutch no-nonsense mentality!

Van der Steur's second main task is to engage in a constructive dialogue to find solutions for the problem that actually does exist: cross border fraud with EU funds. He can't find the solution on his own; partners are vital for a constructive dialogue. Therefore I'm happy you came to this meeting.

We are glad to clarify our worries regarding a European Public Prosecutor's Office. I believe it is a good sign in the direction of European voters. It shows that their opinion is important, and that we insist that the Commission listens to us... to them. I hope you consider this event a call to action. You are a liaison between the Dutch parliament and parliaments of other member states, and therefore you can help us in our diplomacy towards your own parliament. I hope we can work together on this important matter.