



Sociaal Economische Raad  
Social Economic Council

## WORKING VISIT OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL (SER) SINT MAARTEN TO THE NETHERLANDS

MAY 21-24, 2012

### REPORT

A delegation of the Sint Maarten social economic council (SER) paid a working visit to a number of similar organisations in the Netherlands from Monday 21st to Thursday 24th, 2012.

The delegation consisted of:

- R. Richardson, chairman SER
- E. Gumbs-Vlaun, independent member SER
- E. Henriquez-Dijkhoffz, member SER
- G. Richardson, secretary-general SER
- A. Alberts, senior policy advisor SER

The program of the working visit comprised:

- 1) Monday May 21st
  - Visit to the national SER in the Hague
  - Visit to the cabinet of the minister plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten
- 2) Tuesday May 22nd
  - Visit to the SER Delft
- 3) Wednesday May 23rd
  - Visit to the SER Zeeland
- 4) Thursday May 24th
  - Visit to the SER Brabant



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## 1. Monday, May 21st, 2012

### A. Visit to the national SER of the Netherlands

On Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, the entire delegation paid a visit to the Dutch SER, where a number of meetings were conducted.

Meeting with:

- Alexander Rinnooy Kan, chairman of the Dutch SER
- Véronique Timmerhuis, secretary general of the Dutch SER

Topics:

- Making acquaintance and exchange of information
- Methods of cooperation

The leadership of both SER's made their acquaintance, while the Dutch SER welcomed the youngest branch of the Kingdom SER family. A vintage gavel, used in the early years of the Dutch SER was presented to the Sint Maarten SER. Information on the specific socio-economic characteristics of Sint Maarten was exchanged, specifically the developments since 10/10/10 and the unique circumstance of an island divided in a Dutch and a French part. Several possible methods of cooperation between the Dutch and the Sint Maarten SER were discussed.





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Business lunch with:

- Marko Bos, director of economic affairs, Dutch SER Nederland
- Arnold Devreese, director of social affairs, Dutch SER

Topics:

Getting acquainted while discussing topics in the area of both policy directorates of the Dutch SER. Discussion of the possibilities for cooperation between both organizations, for instance internships for Sint Maarten SER employees with one of the directorates of the Dutch SER.

Presentation by:

- Niels Achterberg, policy worker directorate of economic affairs, Dutch SER
- Sander Tjeerds, policy worker directorate of social affairs, Dutch SER

Topics:

- Operations of the Dutch SER in all branches of the organizations, the process of drafting and completion of an advice.
- Similarities and differences between Sint Maarten's and the Dutch procedures.

In the Netherlands, SER advices are actually drafted in committees separate from the actual SER. These committees can be permanent or ad hoc. They consist of members representing labor unions, industry and independent members. However, these members are not usually SER members, but rather specialists in a certain area. The committee chairman is usually an independent member of the central SER. Unlike plenary SER meetings, committee meetings are behind closed doors. The resulting draft advice is approved but not usually discussed in depth in the plenary session of the SER.

The presentation was a follow up to the presentation done by both SER representatives in Curaçao last month for a meeting of the SER's of Aruba, Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

Meeting with:

- Alexandra van Selm, policy worker directorate of economic affairs, Dutch SER
- Tyche Riemens, policy worker directorate of economic affairs, Dutch SER

Topics:

- Current affairs on the SER agenda, like labor contract law and the position of "ZZP-ers" (individually operating independent contractors or consultants)
- Possibilities for cooperation between both SER's

As a case study of how a current topic is handled in the SER, a presentation was given about labor contract law (the legal rules for dismissal of employees) and about so-called ZZP-ers (individually operating contractors). In an in-depth discussion about both topics the situation in both countries was compared and similarities and differences were outlined. The possibility for assistance from the Dutch SER in drafting an advice on labor contract law was discussed at length, as the need for this is felt clearly by Sint Maarten.



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Social Economic Council

Attention was given to the new category of ZZP-ers who are neither employee nor employer and who play an increasingly important role in the social economic context of the Netherlands. In the SER, labor unions as well as industrial organizations both gave up a seat to a representative of the ZZP category.

Meeting with:

- Daniëlle Haenen, director of public administration, Dutch SER
- Evert van Bonzel, department head judicial affairs, directorate of public administration, Dutch SER

Topics:

- The administrative role of the SER.

Separately from its advisory role, the Dutch SER has a task in the administration of the product-oriented organizations that are anchored in public law, the so-called 'productschappen' and 'bedrijfsschappen', who organize businesses who are generally in the same business column. The SER also has some other administrative tasks directed towards the organization of businesses. Haenen and van Bonzel elucidated on the history of these functions and the current state of affairs. The role of the Chambers of Commerce in the Netherlands is currently changing. Because of the fact that the Chambers collect the fees that finance the SER, the financial structure of the SER will also have to be revised.

#### B. Visit to the cabinet of the Minister plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten

Meeting with:

- Richard Panneflek, deputy Minister plenipotentiary
- Cor James, director of the cabinet of the Minister plenipotentiary
- Perry Geerlings, policy advisor and deputy director

The delegation paid a visit to the cabinet of the Minister plenipotentiary, who himself was absent at that moment due to the taking of the oath of the new government Ministers. The delegation spoke to the outgoing deputy Minister Richard Panneflek, with director Cor James and deputy director Perry Geerlings. Information was exchanged with the cabinet about the task and role of the SER and the objectives of the working visit to the Netherlands, while the delegation was briefed on the activities of the Minister plenipotentiary and his cabinet.



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## 2. Tuesday, May 22nd, 2012

Visit to the SER Delft

Meeting with:

- Aletta Hekker, chairlady SER Delft
- Herman Wensveen, secretary general SER Delft
- Helga Spaargaren, secretariat SER Delft
- Stineke Heinen, municipality Delft



Topics:

- History and role of the SER Delft
- Tasks and procedures of the secretariat of the SER Delft
- Current topics at the SER Delft
- Options for cooperation with Sint Maarten

The delegation was briefed on the establishment of the SER Delft, with its uncommon position as a local SER, where most similar organization in the Netherlands are national or regional. Originally an advisory body existed with representatives of industries and government only. By adding organized labor a full-fledged SER was created. Important theme in the economic development of the city of Delft is the position of the technical university TU Delft. TU Delft is the largest employer of the municipality and the most important source of new entrepreneurship.

The office of the SER Delft is driven by municipal civil servants, who execute this role part-time next to their day-to-day tasks. This leads to some degree of conflict of interest, as the same civil servant who drafts an advice on authority of the SER, could later on be involved in drafting the reply of the municipal government to the same advice. The chairman position is an unpaid job, Mrs. Hekker is otherwise employed as deputy mayor of a municipality in the province of Noord-Holland.

The visit was continued with a walking tour through the historical city centre of Delft, followed by a visit to 'YES!' a so-called 'incubator' center for starting entrepreneurs, mostly recently graduated students of TU Delft, who are provided with space, marketing and financial advice to develop a concept or product with a realistic chance of economic success. This concept seems relevant to Sint Maarten from the point of view of economic diversification, stimulating small and medium businesses and providing opportunity to recent graduates.



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Social Economic Council

### 3. Wednesday, May 23rd, 2012

Visit to the SER Zeeland

Meeting with:

- Luit Ezinga, chairman SER Zeeland
- Jan Bruurs, secretary general SER Zeeland
- Zaky Verner van der Spil, member of SER Zeeland representing organized labor
- Hans Goovers, member SER Zeeland representing small and medium business



Topics:

- Tasks and procedures SER Zeeland
- Socio economic characteristics of the Zeeland province
- Opportunities for cooperation with Sint Maarten

The SER of the Zeeland province is supported on a part-time basis by employees of the Zeeland Chamber of Commerce. The chairman position is a part-time job as well. SER Zeeland is a small SER at the provincial level. SER Zeeland conducts monthly coordination with the national SER in the Hague.

Important economic activities in Zeeland are the sea harbors with their logistical role towards the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, the growing tourist industry and agriculture. Trade and tourism specifically are sectors with similarities to the Sint Maarten situation.

The province of Zeeland has issues of an aging population and 'brain drain' i.e. students who pursue studies at universities in other parts of the country and who do not return to develop their careers in Zeeland.

Exploratory talks were held about possibilities for future exchanges and cooperation between Sint Maarten and SER Zeeland.

The visit was concluded with a tour of the 'Watersnoodmuseum' the museum dedicated to the North Sea flood of 1953, a storm-induced flood that killed 1,800 people in this province and made 100,000 people homeless. Like Sint Maarten, Zeeland is surrounded by the sea and shares a history of vulnerability to the forces of nature.



#### 4. Thursday May 24th, 2012

Visit to the SER Brabant

Attended:

- Plenary meeting of the SER Brabant

Through fortunate planning the delegation was able to attend part of a plenary meeting of the SER of the province of Brabant. The entire SER, comprised of representatives of labor unions, business organizations and independent members, was present and discussed several draft advices.



Meeting with:

- Gerrit Jan Swinkels, chairman SER Brabant
- Leo Dubbeldam, secretary general SER Brabant
- Erik van Merrienboer, director of economic and transport affairs, Noord-Brabant province

Topics:

- Tasks and organization of the SER Brabant
- Socio economic characteristics of the province of Noord-Brabant
- Opportunities for cooperation with Sint Maarten

Over lunch in the provincial administration building, with the chairman and the secretary general of the SER as well as the director of economic and transport affairs of the province of Noord-Brabant, the economic development of Brabant and the role of the SER were discussed.

The SER Brabant is part of a long-standing tradition of harmonious cooperation between the organizations of labor and entrepreneurs. Especially in economically challenging times, when traditional industries fade out, new employment opportunities were created in cooperation between the three socio-economic partners. In this way, mass unemployment was averted in this province.

Furthermore, the issue of retaining graduates from the universities of Tilburg and Eindhoven was discussed as well as the promotion of an internationally attractive image for these university cities.

Special attention was given to the “economic program Brabant 2020”, a vision document drafted by the province in close cooperation with the SER. This initiative is of special relevance for Sint Maarten.

Finally, opportunities for future cooperation between both SER’s were discussed, for instance through internship of SER Sint Maarten employees with SER Brabant, or the deployment of specialist expertise from Brabant.