

# Do nothing is also working

Ype Wijnia

19 September 2014

This week, the Dutch national budget was presented for 2015, a phenomenon also known as Princes Day (in English Budget Day). It is not the budget that attracts the most attention. A huge hit is the ride of the king through The Hague in the golden carriage. Some people stand already 20 years at the same spot to wave. Indeed, that spot does so well that these people already stand there before dawn to defend their territory. Why it has to be just that spot is never quite clear to me, but it has something to do with the distance to the carriage if drives by, your height relative to the windows (obviously you have to be seen) and sight lines in both directions. After all, the carriage rides along later in the day, the same route back. Or of course it is just that they were there for the first time by chance, and the habit is ingrained. As an outsider, you can of course laugh, but how often is it not the case you sit in the same seat as before the break during a lecture or in a theater. If someone else sits in 'your' seat you can become seriously excited.

In second place in the competition for attention on Budget Day is the hat parade. Although this has nothing to do with the content and it is in no way required, it has become tradition the ladies wear a hat. Thereby they unzip sharply. From bowler to flying saucer, and from rose garden to fruit basket.

Only after these manifestations of ostentation follows the speech by our king (as a summary of the policy for the coming year) and the suitcase containing the budget. In the following days, this lack of attention fortunately is than offset by the general considerations in the House of Commons. The attention is primarily on the things that change. Only, these changes represent only a very small part of the total budget. Look at the table below. There are only some shifts in emphasis, but for each year the table is a copy of the previous year, at least with regard to the total.

**Tabel 1.2 Uitgaven begrotingen (in miljoenen euro)**

		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1	De Koning	41	40	40	40	40
2A	Staten-Generaal	139	144	137	136	139
2B	Overige Hoge Colleges van Staat en Kabinetten	116	120	114	110	108
3	Algemene Zaken	59	61	63	63	62
4	Koninkrijksrelaties	311	426	259	242	276
5	Buitenlandse Zaken	8.598	9.401	7.875	9.015	8.996
6	Veiligheid en Justitie	12.383	12.634	11.437	11.319	10.954
7	Binnenlandse Zaken	806	789	634	604	569
8	Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap	35.161	35.999	36.042	36.210	36.306
9A	Nationale Schuld (Transactiebasis)	12.325	16.766	13.070	15.160	17.329
9B	Financiën	17.540	10.560	6.923	6.900	6.665
10	Defensie	7.702	7.887	8.000	7.997	7.961
12	Infrastructuur & Milieu	9.857	9.949	9.236	9.394	9.723
13	Economische Zaken	5.015	5.166	4.871	4.779	4.770
15	Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid	29.290	32.914	32.422	32.876	33.672
16	Volksgesondheid, Welzijn en Sport	16.376	15.057	14.586	14.798	14.960
17	Buitenlandse Handel & Ontwikkelingssamenwerking	3.018	3.252	2.475	2.493	2.504
18	Wonen en Rijksdienst	3.146	3.502	3.603	3.705	3.873
50	Gemeentefonds	17.989	18.742	27.273	27.036	26.508
51	Provinciefonds	1.553	1.277	952	1.123	1.127
55	Infrastructuurfonds	6.249	6.149	6.163	5.911	6.350
58	Diergezondheidsfonds	11	20	22	22	22
64	BES-fonds	36	32	32	32	32
65	Deltafonds	1.064	1.213	1.375	1.276	1.161
AP	Aanvullende posten	0	25	2.232	3.833	5.428
90	Consolidatie <sup>1</sup>	- 6.697	- 6.917	- 6.454	- 6.671	- 7.012
HGIS	Internationale Samenwerking <sup>2</sup>	(4.898)	(5.218)	(4.647)	(4.636)	(4.549)
<b>Totaal</b>		<b>182.087</b>	<b>185.208</b>	<b>183.381</b>	<b>188.401</b>	<b>192.524</b>

<sup>1</sup> Dit betreft een correctie voor dubbelstellingen die ontstaan door het «bruto-boeken» van bijdragen. Het bruto-boeken houdt in dat zowel het departement dat bijdraagt, als het departement dat ontvangt de uitgaven op zijn begroting opneemt. Het gaat voornamelijk om bijdragen via de begroting van Infrastructuur & Milieu aan het Infrastructuurfonds en het Deltafonds.

<sup>2</sup> In deze tabel zijn de uitgaven voor Internationale Samenwerking toegerekend aan de begrotingen waarop deze worden verantwoord. De totale uitgaven voor Internationale Samenwerking zijn tussen haken vermeld en lopen niet mee in de totaaltelling.

In itself it is a good thing that there are not too many changes at once. The government is a large organization in which many employees are working on implementing a variety of policies. Regardless on whether you agree with all the policies, if you really change everything at once, for a while there will be done nothing at all because no one knows what needs to be done. Although, the most likely is that the employees continue to do what they have always done. So the fact, it is not possible to change everything even if you decide on paper.

Back to the reality of the national budget. In previous editions, there were serious concerns whether the Netherlands would continue to stay within the boundaries of the European budget agreements. Or actually it was quite sure that it was not going to happen, so the budget was mainly about savings to achieve it. At this time that care is a lot less. Whether it is due to the policy or by fortuitous circumstances<sup>1</sup>, it at least gives no reason for things to change drastically. And so that does not happen. But what is the blame? Lack of ambition<sup>2</sup>!

A normal person understands nothing at all of this. Several tiles wisdoms show us that you especially should not go messing around in things that work, because making changes to something that works well can lead to a deterioration. This awareness is widespread, from sports with *Never change a winning team* to maintenance through *If it is not broken, do not fix it* (obviously the motto of the asset manager). But instead, the motto seems *If it is not broken, it does not have enough features*. The latter is certainly applicable to the Dutch tax system, which has become uncontrollably complex due to a multitude of additional measures. A reform of this is absolutely necessary, but please do not conduct this like a headless chicken. While some of the criticism about the lack of ambition focuses exactly on the too slow pace of reform.

Of course there is some reason for the criticism. That we meet the European standards does not mean that the budget is quite in order, and the number of people out of work at home is perhaps a bit on the high side. But for the latter, we have a solution. Assets where maintenance is being conducted are not productive. Do nothing to an asset is making the asset work. Briefly stated: ***Doing nothing is working***. At least you are not standing on each other's toes. If we consider doing nothing as the new way of work, it at least solves some of the problems on paper.

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*Ype Wijnia is partner at AssetResolutions BV, a company he co-founded with John de Croon. In turn, they give their vision on an aspect of asset management in a biweekly column. The columns are published on the website of AssetResolutions, <http://www.assetresolutions.nl/en/column>*

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<sup>1</sup> See the column Regret of August 2012

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/cda-kabinet-schuift-problemen-voor-zich-uit>