

Master thesis

**The relationships between interest groups and
political parties in the Netherlands**

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Abstract

The central question in this thesis is: *What shapes the relationships between interest groups and parties in the Netherlands?* In order to provide an answer to this question, a review of the existing literature on the relationship between interest groups and political parties has been made. Thereafter, a qualitative, exploratory study has been conducted, in which interviews have been conducted with lobbyists and public affairs (PA) advisors from different interest groups in the Netherlands. The nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands has been investigated, as well as the factors that clarify these relationships. From this research project it becomes clear that the relationships between interest groups and political parties are multidimensional and dynamic. One can identify many relevant aspects when studying this relationship - such as the strategy used by the people and organizations involved, the reciprocal dependency between the interest groups and parties, or the role of ideology in the contacts between interest groups and parties – that depending on the specific actors and context all shape this relation to a greater or lesser extent.

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1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the relationship between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands. Interest groups and political parties are often viewed as important links between citizens and the government and as actors that contribute to democratic legitimacy in policy making processes. These organizations share a representative function and try to influence public policy (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). Traditionally, the field of party politics has received considerably more scholarly attention than interest groups. However, nowadays people seem to attach less importance to party politics than they used to and have less confidence in political parties than before (Beyers, Eising and Maloney, 2008). This trend is also visible in the Netherlands (CBS, 2017). Many Dutch citizens are unsatisfied about Dutch political parties and do not feel well represented in the Dutch parliament (Braun-Poppelaars, Berkhout & Hanegraaf, 2011; Remkes et al., 2017). At the same time, the number of interest groups is growing and interest groups are receiving increasing attention (Beyers et al, 2008). This increasing attention for interest groups seems to fit the inclusive concept of *governance*, which many scholars use to emphasize that nowadays governments are no longer dominant in international affairs, but accompanied by several non-state actors that play a significant role herein as well (Rosenau, 1995). Interest groups are in many cases more accessible for citizens in terms of topics they discuss and possibilities for participation for citizens (Braun-Poppelaars et al., 2011). They often function as a link between citizens and their representatives in the Parliament and draw attention to issues that are not addressed by politicians (Berkhout, & Hanegraaff, 2017; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). Hence, Otjes & Rasmussen argue that the relationship between interest groups and parties shapes “both the character of public policies as well as the quality of democracy” (2017, p. 96). Studying this relationship is thus of high importance.

1.1 The interest group-party relationship: state of art

As becomes clear from the literature review of his thesis, scholars focus on different aspects when describing the relationship between interest groups and political parties. On one hand, some authors argue that interest groups and political parties are contesting actors in the political field. They argue that they regularly use one another in order to achieve their goals and emphasize the important role of power in the relationship between interest groups and parties. Others argue that their relationship is rather complementary and includes lines of cooperation and dependence. These scholars argue that interest groups and political parties often need each other and point to the similar goals and interests of both types of organizations. Whereas political parties serve as gatekeepers to political power for interest groups, parties need interest groups for their expertise, constituency or support. Furthermore, some scholars focus on the common history and similar development over time of several interest groups and political parties. Other scholars mainly focus on the present when studying the relationship between interest groups and political parties and look at the actual contact between the two to describe their relationship. Besides, in scholarly literature, many authors argue that the relationship between interest groups and political parties has become weaker in the past decades (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al. 2015; Christiansen, 2012). A possible explanation for this is the *cartel party* thesis by Katz and Mair (2009). These authors claim that throughout the years political parties have moved closer towards the state. Parties get public subsidies and have therefore become more dependent on the government. This means that political parties would draw away from society, and become less dependent on

interest groups (Katz & Mair, 2009). However, several authors also emphasize enduring relationships between interest groups and political parties. They argue that it is important to study this relationship, and gain more knowledge on the interactions between interest groups and political parties, in order to fully understand democratic politics (Allern, 2010; Allern, 2012, Witko, 2009).

1.2 Scope and relevance of this research project

This study has both theoretical and practical relevance. This research is relevant for several theoretical reasons. There is a large amount of literature on political parties and an increasing amount of literature on interest groups. However, the relationship between interest groups and parties deserves further attention. As becomes clear from the literature review of this thesis, several scholars have investigated this interest group-party relationship. However, the amount of research on this topic is still limited and several scholars request more research on this topic (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al. 2008; Beyers, De Bruycker, & Baller, 2015; Fraussen, 2012; Heaney, 2010; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Witko, 2009). This research project can be considered a relevant and useful contribution to the current scholarly literature on the relationship between interest groups and parties. It answers to the request for more research on this topic in two ways. First, it gives a clear overview of the existing literature on the topic. It shows what has been written so far about the relationship between interest groups and political parties in a structured way. There is divergence in the ways that scholars approach this relationship. However, a clear overview of different ways in which this relationship can be approached seems to be missing. Only Allern and Bale (2012) have made an overview of the ways in which scholars conceptualize this relationship. However, this thesis gives a new and more elaborate overview, consisting of six aspects that one can focus on while studying the relationship between interest groups and parties. Furthermore, this thesis applies the literature to the case of the Netherlands, thereby providing further insight in this relationship. The focus in this thesis, is hereby on this relationship from the perspective of interest groups. Thereby, this research not only gives insight in what actually comprises the relationships between interest groups and parties in the Netherlands, but also gives an elaborate insight in the choices that interest groups make when it comes to contact they have with parties.

This research project is also relevant because of practical reasons. Scholars widely agree that the relationship between interest groups and parties shapes the nature of democratic governance. This implies that interest groups and parties and the interactions between them have a large influence on policy outcomes. Furthermore, in many cases interest groups form a link between citizens and political parties. Lobbyists, including those from interest groups, are said to have a large influence on politicians and thereby on public policy. However, for many people lobbying practices in The Hague are rather invisible and mysterious. This research project can therefore increase transparency of these contacts between interest groups and parties and give people better insight into the development of policy in the Netherlands.

This research project is a qualitative study, in which interviews have been conducted with lobbyists and public affairs (PA) advisors from six interest groups in the Netherlands. Since there are only a few theoretical ideas about the relationship between interest groups and political parties and empirical research has been limited, the aim of this research is not to test

hypotheses, but rather to explore and gain new insights about this relationship in the Netherlands.

1.3 Research question

The central research question in this thesis is:

What shapes the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

This research question will be explored by focusing on two sub questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?
2. What factors clarify these relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

The first question concerns the contact that takes place between interest groups and political parties. Here, one can think of the type of contact that they have and the intensity of the contact. The second question concerns the factors that determine why certain interest groups and political parties have (regular) contact with each other. Here, one can think of ideological reasons, strategic reasons or historical reasons, as will be clarified in more detail in what follows.

1.4 Outline thesis

The next chapter of this thesis contains a literature review and conceptual framework, in which relevant literature on the topic is discussed and the main expectations are clarified. This chapter is followed by a description of the research design and methods of this research project. This chapter elaborates on the ways in which data are gathered and analyzed. Furthermore, it also addresses the reliability and validity of this study. Next, the analysis chapter follows. In this chapter, the Dutch context is clarified and the results of the interviews are presented and discussed. Finally, the main findings and broader implications are presented in the conclusion of this thesis.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

This chapter contains the literature review of this thesis. It discusses the relevant literature on the topic of this research project and contains a conceptual framework, in which the main expectations are clarified. Interest groups and political parties are often studied independently from each other. On one hand, there is an increasing amount of literature on interest groups, while on the other hand parties have been a subject of studies for many years. However, limited research has been done on the relationship between interest groups and parties. This chapter will first elaborate on the definitions of interest groups and political parties and clarify the differences and the similarities between the two. Subsequently this chapter will clarify the state of art, by reviewing the existing literature on this topic and underlining the multiple calls by various scholars for more research on the relationship between interest groups and political parties. Next, this chapter will elaborate on the ways in which one can conceptualize the interest group-party relationship. Scholars have addressed this relationship in different ways and from different viewpoints. Thereafter, the focus of the research carried out for this thesis will be discussed, after which the expectations regarding the research question of this thesis will be put forward.

2.1 Defining interest groups and political parties

Before focusing on the relationship between interest groups and political parties, this thesis first elaborates on the differences and similarities between the two phenomena. Whereas the opinions of scholars on the relationship between interest groups and political parties differ substantially, scholars studying their relationship share similar definitions of interest groups and political parties (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al., 2008; Rasmussen 2012; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2009; Schattschneider, 1948; Witko, 2009). Interest groups and parties are similar, because they both have a representative function in politics and try to influence public policy, often sharing similar long time policy goals (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al., 2008; Rasmussen, 2012; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2009; Witko, 2009). Besides, among interest groups as well as parties, there is a wide variation. They both consist of many different types of organizations with different ideologies, goals and structures (Allern & Bale, 2012). Furthermore, the origins of several political parties lie in interest groups (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012). The main difference between the two types of organizations is that political parties participate in elections and seek public office, whereas interest groups do not (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al., 2008; Rasmussen, 2012; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Van Rooyen, 2009; Schattschneider, 1948; Witko, 2009). Therefore, parties generally have access to important decision-making processes. Hence, Beyers et al. (2008) argue that interest groups use a larger variety of strategies in order to exert influence. Furthermore, whereas parties usually need to take into account many different interests and formulate opinions on a broad spectrum of topics, the focus of interest groups on the other hand is usually narrower (Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al., 2008; Van Rooyen, 2009). Therefore, Van Rooyen (2009) argues that parties take a more central role in political debates and decision-making processes than interest groups. Moreover, he argues that the organizational structure of interest groups is generally simpler than those of parties, which often consist of several different organs and departments (Van Rooyen, 2009).

In this research project, the definition of interest groups as posed by Beyers et al. (2008) is used. These authors argue that a large number of different terms are used in the

literature when referring to interest groups, sometimes making it a broad or unclear concept. Beyers et al. propose three elements that define an actor as an interest group: *organization*, *political interest* and *informality* (2008, p. 1106). *Organization* refers to the composition of interest groups. The authors claim that “interest group politics concerns aggregated individuals’ and/or organized forms of political behavior” (Beyers et al., 2008, p. 1106). The second feature of interest groups comprises the efforts these organizations make in order to influence policy outcomes, which the authors call *political interest*. The third feature of interest groups is called *informality*. This means that interest groups do not formally seek office and do not participate in elections, but rather informally have contact with (members of) political parties and officials (Beyers et al., 2008).

2.2 State of art

Although both having a representative function and often sharing similar policy goals, the relationship between interest groups and political parties is not often addressed in the literature. Rather, interest groups and political parties are addressed independently from each other. Many scholars address this lack of research on the relationship between interest groups and political parties and point out that further research on the relationship between these two phenomena is desirable (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al. 2008; Beyers, De Bruycker, & Baller, 2015; Fraussen, 2012; Heaney, 2010; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Witko, 2009). The lack of research on this topic possibly exists, because scholars might view interest groups and political parties as “alternative intermediaries in democracy” instead of organizations with complementary roles, while in reality their relationship is much closer and more complex (Allern & Bale, 2012, p. 8). Therefore, as Allern (2010) suggests, this interest group-party relationship might just have been taken for granted. Beyers et al. (2015) argue that scholars often study one of the two types of organizations and then make inferences about the other. Furthermore, Beyers et al. (2008) argue that interest groups in general do not receive as much attention in the literature as for example political parties or elections. Another possible reason why this relationship has recently only been subject to few studies might be the often acknowledged weakening of the relationship between interest groups and political parties, which could make studies centered around this topic seem irrelevant (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al. 2015; Christiansen, 2012). Besides, Witko (2009) argues that scholars in the field of political science are often experts in either interest groups or political parties and therefore do not combine the two in their studies.

However, one can find substantive reasons in the literature that point to the importance of studying this relationship. There is a general agreement that the relationship between interest groups and political parties constitutes democratic governance (Allern, 2010; Allern, 2012, Witko, 2009). Several scholars emphasize that interest groups and parties are not just each other’s alternatives in democratic systems, but argue that they complement and often need each other (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Beyers et al., 2015; Fraussen, 2012; Heaney, 2010). On one hand, political parties can provide access to decision-making processes to interest groups that want to influence public policy. On the other hand, interest groups can provide parties with information and support. Therefore, one needs to study both types of organizations alongside each other, in order to fully understand these organizations, how they mobilize and how they shape policy outcomes. Furthermore, also a more competing relationship between the two is suggested (Schattschneider, 1948). Additionally, there also

seems to be alignment and overlap in the nature of interest groups and parties, as they are argued to be formed along similar political cleavages and to share similar goals (Allern, 2012; Beyers et al. 2015). Beyers et al. (2008) therefore argue that the relationship between interest groups and parties is a complicated subject to study, because of both complementary, overlapping and competing aspects of this relationship and the involvement of different fields of study. The exact interplay between interest groups and political parties thus does not yet become clear from the current state of literature, which is an important gap in the contemporary scholarly literature.

There are some early works in which the relationship between interest groups and political parties is discussed, such as Schattschneider's (1948) *Pressure Groups versus Political Parties*, in which he focuses on the competition between both. Another influential work is Lijphart's (1968) *The Politics of Accommodation. Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, in which he describes the different pillars in Dutch society at that time and the role of interest group and political parties herein. Although recent research on the topic is limited, there are some relevant publications on parties and interest groups in the EU. Beyers et al. (2015) make the notion that the alignment of interest groups and political parties in the EU mirrors the party political cleavages in the Union. Marshall (2015) focuses on lobbying by interest groups in the EU, that not only lobby at their allies, but also at members from contradicting parties in the European Parliament (EP). Besides, Rasmussen (2012) studies the effect of the EU on the relationship between interest groups and political parties. Furthermore, especially Scandinavian countries are subject to several studies on interest group-party relationships. Allern, Aylott and Christiansen (2007) focus on trade unions and social democratic parties and study the institutional relationship between them in Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Also, Allern (2010) in her book thoroughly examines the interest group-party relationship in Norway from the perspective of political parties. In another case study, Allern (2012) focuses on the links between the Norwegian new left and populist right parties and interest groups in Norway. Furthermore, Christiansen (2012) examines the weakening relationship between interest groups and political parties in Denmark. Other studies include Warner's (2000) study on the catholic church as an interest group in several European countries and its relationship with political parties, *Interest group-party linkage in the twenty-first century: Evidence from Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom* by Rasmussen and Lindeboom's (2013), Verge's (2013) case study in Spain on different strategies that political parties use towards interest groups and Heaney's (2010) article about links between interest groups and parties in the United States (US). A very recent publication is a study by Otjes and Rasmussen (2017) on the factors that drive collaboration between interest groups and political parties in Denmark and the Netherlands. As becomes clear, even though in recent years research has been conducted on the interest group-party relationship, the literature on this topic is still limited. It has created some important insights, such as how the relationships between interest groups and parties have developed over time, on what grounds interest groups or parties decide to cooperate with other actors or how they can strategically use each other in order to reach their goals. Despite these insights, the existing literature also expresses the need for further research. Moreover, in this field of research many studies focus on particular countries, types of interest groups and political parties, which makes generalizing results hard (Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013).

2.3 Conceptualizing the interest group-party relationship

Scholars focus on different aspects when describing the relationship between interest groups and political parties. Whereas some scholars for instance focus on competition between the two types of organizations, others focus more on their similar ideologies. Allern and Bale argue that there is not one clear way in which this relationship should be studied, but rather speak of a “multidimensional phenomenon” (2012, p. 12). The authors summarize the different ways in which scholars view this interest group-party relationship, and label them as *contact*, *material*, *ideological*, *strategical* and *power balance* (Allern & Bale, 2012, p. 13). In this thesis, a similar, but somewhat different grouping is used, which is labeled as *historical*, *functional*, *organizational*, *dependency*, *strategic* and *ideological*. This grouping is based on the existing literature and gives a new and more elaborate overview, consisting of six aspects that one can focus on while studying the relationship between interest groups and parties. It thereby captures the different ways in which the relationship between interest groups and political parties is conceptualized in the literature and it provides clarity in the different aspects that one can focus on when studying this relationship.

Naturally, one does not solely have to focus on one of these aspects. They can also be studied in tandem to understand the relationship between interest groups and parties. Sometimes it is even hard to make a sharp distinction between these six different views on the relationship between interest groups and political parties. This becomes clear when looking at articles that scholars have written about the interest group-party relationship, as many authors (explicitely or implicitely) touch upon several different aspects of this relationship. These different aspects of the interest group-party relationship will now further be clarified.

2.3.1 Historical

The first aspect of the relationship between interest groups and parties is a historical one. Several scholars argue that interest groups and political parties have similar origins and that they have developed similarly over time (Allern et al. 2007; Allern, 2010; Heaney, 2010; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013). Some parties were officially founded and closely watched by interest groups. Therefore, the distinction between both types of organizations is sometimes hard to make (Allern et al. 2007). Originally, many interest groups arose from or were officially founded by political parties, often ensuring strong relationships between the two over time (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012). Heaney (2010) focuses on the American case and argues that interest groups and parties are for a large part shaped by the historical time in which they exist. He uses the term *co-evolution* to describe the process in which interest groups and parties evolve over time and continually adapt the role they play towards one another (Heaney, 2010, p. 571). This also means that when there is a lack of representation, new organizations can arise. For instance, when a political party does not adequately address the interests of citizens, new interest groups may arise that fill this gap. Similarly, this process of *co-evolution* also has a competing aspect, which means that organizations can become superfluous. At the same time, hybrid organizations arise that have aspects of both interest groups and political parties and which are therefore hard to define. Furthermore, authors such as Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013) argue that the relationship between interest groups and political parties also depends on the political system and the relationship between state and society in which they exist at a certain time in history. Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013) claim

that generally, ties between interest groups and parties are expected to be strong in pluralist systems, whereas they are expected to be rather weak in corporatist societies.

Furthermore, several scholars focus on historical aspects of the relationship between interest groups and parties when trying to explain why this relationship in general has weakened (Allern et al., 2007; Christiansen, 2012; Katz & Mair, 2009; Katz & Mair, 2012). The cartel party thesis as described by Katz and Mair (2009), presupposes that parties have become more dependent on the state and therefore less dependent on interest groups. The authors touch upon trends and changes in society, which can influence the relationship between interest groups and parties (Katz & Mair, 2012). They claim that large changes and processes in society such as industrialization, the upsurge of mass media or economic changes account for these weakening ties between interest groups and parties (Katz & Mair, 2012). Allern et al. (2007) make a similar argument. The authors seek to explain why relationships between trade unions and social democratic parties in Norway, Denmark and Sweden have weakened and why this happened to a larger extent in Denmark than in the other two Scandinavian countries. One of their conclusions is that this relationship is largely shaped by historical conditions. In Norway and Sweden the relationships between trade unions and social democratic parties were originally much stronger than in Denmark, which is still visible in the stronger relationship in these countries nowadays (Allern et al., 2007).

2.3.2 Functional

The second aspect that scholars focus on while describing the relationship between interest groups and parties, concerns the similar functions that both types of organizations perform. Christiansen argues that relationships between interest groups and parties arose in many Western European countries as part of “a struggle for the extension of democratic rights” (2012, p. 28). Both interest groups and political parties are often viewed as links between citizens and the government. Both types of organizations have a function of representation of interests and share similar policy goals (Allern, 2010; Allern & Bale, 2012; Rasmussen, 2012). Therefore, it is generally argued that interest groups and parties “shape the nature of democratic governance” (Allern, 2010, p. 4). Hence, Rasmussen names interest groups and political parties the “key actors of representation” (2012, p. 82). She focuses on interaction between the two in the EU and argues that one cannot study issues of representation and EU democracy by focusing on either interest groups or parties. Interest groups and parties share similar concerns and one should therefore also focus on their relationship. Furthermore, Heaney (2010) argues that both types of organizations have an important brokerage function. Interest groups can for instance act as brokers between different interest groups and other actors, just like interest groups can serve as brokers between parties and other actors. Furthermore, they can serve as brokers within party coalitions. One could think of an interest group that gets involved in the formation of a party coalition in order to unite the interests of different parties. Hence, Heaney (2010) claims that interest groups and parties are both connected in political networks.

2.3.3 Organizational

A third way of approaching the interest group-party relationship is by focusing on practical and organizational aspects of the relationship. Here, one looks at how much contact there is between the two in terms of for instance meetings between interest groups and political parties or one can think of overlapping memberships in both types of organization. Among

others, Allern (2010) focuses on this aspect. She approaches the relationship between interest groups and political parties from a party perspective. She argues that a party's relationship with interest groups can be measured by looking at the *closeness* of the relationship on one hand and at the *range* of the relationship at the other hand. When considering the closeness of the relationship between parties and interest groups, one can make a distinction between *overlapping organizational structures*, *inter-organizational links for contact* and *unorganized links for contact*. Here, the former generally indicates a stronger connection between both types of organizations, whereas the latter indicates a rather loose link between the two. Furthermore, the closeness of the relationship also depends on the regularity of such contact between (members of) the organizations. Allern defines the range of the relationship as "a combination of the total number of organizations and the political variety of interest groups included" (2010, p. 62). Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013) build on Allern's (2010) definition of the relationship between interest groups and political parties. The authors hence look at "actual interactions" when describing the interest group-party relationship (Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013, p. 268). The authors presuppose that this relationship is affected by factors such as the institutional structure, policy area, and a group's organizational structure. Furthermore, Christiansen (2012) argues that one can formally speak of a relationship between interest groups and parties when they are connected by statutes. In his article about the weakening relationship between interest groups and political parties in Denmark he focuses on organizational ties between interest groups and parties. To determine to what extent the interest group-party relationship in Denmark has possibly become weaker, he looks at organizational ties such as overlap in leadership and membership, mutual exchange of members and interest groups that support parties financially. Moreover, Verge (2012) also focuses on organizational aspects when describing the relationship between interest groups and political parties. She approaches this relationship from a party perspective and looks at the different strategies that parties use when interacting with civil society organizations. She distinguishes three strategies used by political parties. The first strategy is *creation of groups* (Verge, 2012, p. 46). Here, political parties officially found new organizations parallel to their party through which they can exert influence. Verge (2012) names the second strategy *penetration* (Verge, 2012, p. 47). Here, on one hand members of parties participate in already existing interest groups. On the other hand, parties recruit members of interest groups to participate in the parties or interest groups are even incorporated in parties. The third strategy is called *collaboration* (Verge, 2012, p. 47). As the name suggests, this refers to contact between interest groups and political parties by for instance collective meetings, joint committees or forums.

2.3.4 Dependency

A fourth and important aspect of the relationship between interest groups and parties concerns the earlier mentioned dependency between interest groups and parties. Interest groups and parties often have different resources available (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). One can imagine situations in which parties need the support of interest groups and vice versa. Interest groups and political parties often share similar goals. This makes collaboration between the two and a sometimes mutual dependency likely. When thinking about this aspect of the relationship between interest groups and parties, it seems obvious to use a rational choice perspective. This perspective assumes that both interest groups and political parties are rational actors that seek to maximize their goals and that can help each other herein.

When the costs of interaction are lower than the benefits, it seems like the rational thing for both organizations to support each other (Allern et al., 2007; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013). Put briefly, whereas political parties are office-seeking actors who want as many votes as possible, interest groups aim at getting many members whose interests they can serve (Allern et al., 2007). In order to help political parties, interest groups can provide them with information, policy expertise, financial means, organizational backing and political support (Allern, et al, 2007; Allern, 2010; Beyers et al., 2008; Christiansen, 2012; Rasmussen, 2012; Warner, 2000). Political parties on the other hand, are described by Allern (2010) as the “gatekeepers to political power”, who can turn demands into legislation (Allern, 2010, p. 5). Hence, several authors speak about this aspect of the relationship between interest groups and parties in terms of exchange of resources (Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Warner, 2000). The earlier mentioned cartel party thesis by Katz and Mair (2009) also relates to this dependency relationship. Whereas political parties used to be highly dependent on the financial support of interest groups, they became less dependent on them, because of financial support provided by the state.

Berkhout and Hanegraaff argue that whereas there is often the impression that interest groups put pressure on political parties to change their viewpoints, in reality contact between interest groups and parties can rather be seen as exchange of information (2017, p. 206). Interest groups help political parties by providing them information in order to win debates. However, the authors argue that the exact style that interest groups use in their practices towards political parties can differ per organization and country.

2.3.5 Strategic

Whereas much has been written about the dependency relationship between interest groups and political parties, scholars also mention a rather opposite relationship between both, namely a more strategic and sometimes competing relationship. Although often sharing similar goals, interest groups and parties do not always cooperate, but sometimes rather use each other in order to achieve their goals (Allern et al., 2007; Christiansen, 2012; Heaney, 2010; Marshall, 2015; Schattschneider, 1948; Warner, 2010; Witko, 2009). One could view the dependency relationship between interest groups and political parties in a different way. Instead of cooperation and exchange of resources, one can rather focus on competition and strategy used by both types of organizations (Allern et al., 2007; Christiansen, 2012; Warner, 2010). In his article about party group lobbying in the EU, Marshall (2015) gives a clear example of this phenomenon. He describes how interest groups in the EU lobby not only at members of parties with similar ideologies, but also strategically lobby at members of parties with contradicting ideas. Schattschneider’s (1948) *Pressure groups versus political parties* might be the clearest example of an article about competition between interest groups and political parties. In his article, the author emphasizes how interest groups and parties in the US seek power at each other’s expense. Witko (2009) is one of the scholars referring to his argument. He argues that whereas the previously described dependency relationship between interest groups and political parties can be described as a non-zero-sum game in which both parties can reach an optimum, Schattschneider’s (1948) view on this relationship assumes a zero-sum game in which success for one leads to failure of the other. One can imagine that both interest groups and political parties might compete for money from donors or want the expertise and support from the same people in their organizations. Otjes and Rasmussen (2017) also touch upon the strategic aspect of the relationship between interest groups and parties. The authors

argue that next to ideology, power is the main factor that prompts interest groups and parties to collaborate. They propose that interest groups are more likely to seek contact with (members of) parties with strategic resources, such as powerful parties and parties with many seats and influential party members at important seats in order to achieve their goals (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017).

Heaney (2010) also argues that interest groups and parties use each other as means to achieve their goals. This leads to a continuous power struggle with several faces. The first *face of power* consists of coercion or threats (Heaney, 2010, p. 574). The second one entails agenda setting, in which some topics are placed on the agenda while others do not receive attention. The third face of power involves framing certain topics in a way that they become undebatable in politics, for instance by creating a sense that certain issues should be decided upon by professionals, such as judges. The fourth face of power, referred to by Heaney (2010) as discipline, is about influencing who can participate in politics. The author gives several example of interest groups in the US that (are sometime founded to) make sure to place people in political positions who share a certain viewpoint, for example by controlling who get selected as party nominees for elected positions. On the other hand, parties can also discipline interest groups, by stimulating interest groups to hire certain people to work for them or by trying influence who get key positions within interest groups.

2.3.7 Ideological

The sixth aspect that scholars focus on when describing the relationship between interest groups and political parties can be labelled as an ideological one. Many interest groups and political parties share similar goals and have similar ideologies along which they can be grouped. Scholars often refer to ideological cleavages along which interest groups and parties can be grouped (Allern, 2010; Beyers et al., 2008; Christiansen, 2010). However, as Beyers et al. (2008) argue, the amount of research in this area is still limited. Yet, it seems an almost unavoidable aspect of the relationship between interest groups and political parties, since similar ideologies are often an important reason for both types of organizations to collaborate or support each other. Besides, many parties originate from interest groups (Allern, 2010). The representative function of interest groups and parties is clearly visible here. Allern argues that one could consider both interest groups and political parties as “manifestations of underlying social cleavages” (2010, p. 34). These organizations often pair and express similar interests. They can be distinguished along different axes, which scholars can use in order to study their relationship. Allern (2010) gives the example of Rokkan’s (1966) classical model of the Norwegian case. He made a distinction between labor, capital and agrarian interests. However, several other distinctions can be made, such as the obvious left-right distinction, as made by for instance Allern (2013) and Otjes and Rasmussen (2017). Also Christiansen (2012) addresses the ideological distinction that can be made between groups of interest groups and parties. He focuses on the Danish case and indicates four pairs: the Social Democrats and trade unions, the Liberals and the farmer’s associations, the Conservative People’s Party and trade associations and the Social Liberals and smallholder associations (Christiansen, 2012, p. 31). Another clear example of the role of ideology in the connections between interest groups and parties is Warner’s (2000) book about the Catholic Church in Europe. In her book she poses the question of why the Catholic Church allied with certain political parties, of which some seem obvious, considering ideological similarities, but some are not. From the literature it becomes clear that parties and interest groups nowadays do not ally with just one or two

actors, but interact with a rather diverse group of organizations (Allern, 2010; Christiansen, 2012). Contrary to what one might expect, Marshall (2015) argues that interest groups lobby at parties with opposing ideologies. However, Otjes and Rasmussen (2017) claim that legislators with similar ideologies are essential for interest groups and hereby point to long-term relationships between interest groups and parties. The authors argue that, although interest groups sometimes lobby at legislators with different ideologies, in the end interest groups want to fulfill their policy goals and interests and therefore interest group-party relationships will mostly follow ideological lines. Besides, the authors claim that interest groups are most likely to collaborate with centrist parties, because these often have a key role in decision-making processes. In case of simple majority voting, centrist parties are often the ones that can either make a majority or break it (Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017). Heaney (2010) approaches this aspect at a more individual level in terms of identity. He elaborates on how individuals identify themselves with certain parties or groups on the basis of for instance religion, class or profession and on different ways in which identities of groups and parties interact with each other. These identities can cause conflict but also reinforce each other, creating interesting dynamics within and among organizations. An example could be an interest groups that motivates its people to support a certain party with similar identities.

From this section it becomes clear that the relationship between interest groups and political parties is a multidimensional one. Scholars focus on different aspects when describing it. However, the distinction made above is not a strict and all-encompassing one. In reality, one can find much overlap between different aspects that are now being treated separately. It does however give an overview of the different aspects of the interest group-party relationship that one can take into account. *Table 1* gives an overview of the six different aspects.

Conceptualizing the relationships between interest groups and political parties

<i>Relationship</i>	
Historical	Origin, development over time
Functional	Similar function as representative, broker
Organizational	Direct contact, overlapping membership, joint meetings
Dependency	Reciprocal dependency on money, votes, expertise, access to decision-making processes
Strategical	Seek contact with influential and powerful actors, use the other as mean to an end, influence other organizations
Ideological	Share similar (or opposing) ideology, group along this ideology

Table 1

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This research focuses mainly on the nature of the relationships between interest groups and parties in the Netherlands and on the factors – such as strategy, history and ideology- that shape these relationships. The central research question in this thesis is:

What shapes the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

The two sub questions are:

1. What is the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?
2. What factors clarify these relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

Because of the exploratory nature of this research project, it does not test certain hypotheses. Rather, based on the literature some expectations for each sub question are put forward. These expectations serve as a starting point and guideline for the interviews and the analysis.

The first sub question is: *What is the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?* A first expectation concerns the nature of contact between interest groups and parties. It is expected that a wide variety of contacts can take place between interest groups and parties. One can expect more formal contact, such as letters and meetings and more informal contact, such as text messages or informal face-to-face meeting. Furthermore, it is expected that both interest groups and political parties may initiate contact.

The second expectation with regards to this question concerns the durability of relationships between interest groups and political parties. It is expected that they can be either long or short term. Long term relationships seem likely when contact is based on history or ideology, when organization have traditionally had contact or when they seek contact with like-minded partners. These relationships might fluctuate slightly over time, but exactly because they are based on routine and history, they are expected to be durable. Relationships based on strategy are expected to be rather short term and to only emerge when either interest groups or political parties need each other to pursue their own goal. On the other hand, interactions between interest groups and parties can also be expected to be more long term when based on strategy. Interest groups for instance seek contact with new parties in order to establish a good relationship with them in case they need them in the future.

The second sub question is: *What factors establish and maintain the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?* Based on the literature certain expectations can be pointed out. First, as mentioned in the literature review of this thesis, the interest group-party relationship can be (partly) based on historical grounds. Interest groups and parties might interact, because originally they were affiliated or because they have had a relationship for a long time. Certain interactions between the organizations might occur because of habit, routine or mutual expectations between the organizations. In the Dutch context, one could therefore expect interest groups and parties with origins in the same pillar in times of pillarization to have strong contact.

A second expectation is based on ideology. An obvious reason for interest groups and political parties to interact with each other would be to achieve similar goals. Here, interaction between the organizations could be characterized as some type of collaboration and mutual support. Interest groups and parties would seek contact with each other, because they can help each other in achieving their partly common goals. One could think of an interest group that focuses on environment that seeks contact with Groenlinks, the Dutch Green, left-wing party.

A third expectation with regards to the first sub question is based on strategy. Interest groups and parties are expected to have contact because of strategic reasons. Instead of collaborating as a ways of achieving common goals, they rather use each other while pursuing their goals. Their contact is in this case thus not based on similar views or a similar history, but rather on strategic grounds. Interest groups might seek contact with large parties or parties that are part of the coalition, because these parties are expected to be more powerful than opposition parties. Furthermore, whereas for the previous expectation one would expect like-minded interest groups and parties to collaborate, in this case interest groups might seek contact with parties with different views, because there is more to gain at such parties.

3. Research design and methods

This chapter elaborates on the research strategy and design of this research project, the methods that have been used to carry out the research. Besides, this chapter discusses issues of reliability and validity of this research project.

3.1 Research strategy and design

This research project has a qualitative nature. The aim of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the interest group-party relationship in the Netherlands. Therefore, interviews have been conducted with members of six interest groups in the Netherlands. This means that this research project focuses on a small number of cases. Instead of getting data about as many cases as possible, as in a quantitative approach, this qualitative approach aims to collect richer data and to get a better contextual understanding (Bryman, 2012).

Furthermore, the focus of this research project is not on testing theories, but rather on gaining new insights in and a deeper understanding of the relationship between interest groups and political parties. As becomes clear from the literature review of this thesis, this research project aims at developing new insights about a topic that has been subject to relatively little studies and about which there are few theoretical ideas. Therefore, one can speak of exploratory research. The results of exploratory research are not firm explanations of cases that can just be generalized, but can rather be seen as insights to be further explored and that might form the basis for new theories (Toshkov, 2016). This also points to the inductive nature of this research project. This means that the theoretical framework of this thesis does not include certain fixed concepts and hypothesis that are tested, but rather contains certain *sensitizing concepts* as first defined by Blumer (1954, p. 7). Whereas definitive concepts are fixed concepts with clear indicators and descriptions, sensitizing concepts rather give a researcher “a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances” (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). One can consider these concepts as some kind of background ideas that one uses when doing research and that guide one’s actions.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection of this research consists mostly of 6 semi-structured interviews. These are interviews in which a list of interview questions has been prepared prior to the interview, which guides the interviews and will be used during every interview. However, this list is not necessarily strictly followed, allowing space for the interviewer to add extra questions that come up during the interview and providing the respondent the opportunity to answer the questions freely (Bryman, 2012). The questions list used during the interviews was based on the conceptual framework of this research project. In the course of the interviews the question list was slightly changed, in order to improve the quality of each next interview. During the period in which the interviews were held, an interview log was made in order to keep track of the interviews. The majority of questions was similar for each interview that was held, such as how important political parties were to the organizations that the respondent worked for, with which parties the organization did or did not have contact or what comprises the contact between the interest group and the political parties. Some questions were posed in only one or a few interviews, for example because these were specific for one organization or because they came up during the interview.

The interviews were held with respondents from different interest groups: the lobbyist of the *Algemene Onderwijsbond* (AOB), the public affairs advisor of the *Vereniging van*

Universiteiten (VSNU), the lobbyist of Land- en Tuinbouworganisatie (LTO) Nederland, the public affairs advisor of Patiëntenfederatie Nederland, the lobbyist of Natuurmonumenten and the lobbyist of the Groene 11. These organizations were selected, because they are a mix of different types of interest groups and therefore show the diversity in interest groups in the Netherlands. Whereas the AOb is a trade union, LTO Nederland and VSNU are employers' associations and the Patiëntenfederatie is a consumer organization. Besides, these organizations form a mix between more traditional and institutionalized interest groups such as the AOb and LTO Nederland and newer ones that were founded to draw attention to certain topics or groups of people, such as the Patiëntenfederatie. Furthermore, the different organizations give a good mix of different topics and themes: education, nature and environment, farming and healthcare. The interviews were held with the lobbyist or PA advisor of the organizations, because these are the people from the organization that have most contact with political parties and therefore are expected to have the best insight in the relationship between the interest group and political parties.

At the start of each interview the aim of the research project was briefly explained to the respondent. Furthermore, the respondents were asked whether they gave permission for recording the interview. Besides, each respondent was asked whether they wished to read either the transcript of the interview or the pieces of the interview that were used in the analysis chapter of the thesis. Some of the respondents wanted this. Either the transcript of the interview or the pieces that were used in the analysis of the thesis were sent to them for approval.

3.3 Data analysis

After each interview that was conducted, a transcript of the interviews was made by listening to the recordings of the interview and typing out everything that was said during the interview. After transcribing the interviews, they were coded in order to structure the answers given by the respondents. Coding can be considered the first step in the analysis of interview data (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). Miles and Huberman (as cited in DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 137) define codes as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study". A researcher assigns codes to raw data in order to structure and simplify these data. This enables him to reveal bigger themes that emerge from these data and to connect ideas and concepts (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011).

Furthermore, a draft code book was made, in which the name of each code was included, as well as a definition of each code and for each code an example (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). *Data-driven* codes were used, meaning that codes were used that emerged from the data that were gathered by the interviews that were conducted (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p.). The themes that emerged from the interviews were used to determine the codes that were used for the analysis. Then, every piece of transcription was given a certain code. The use of a codebook made it possible to recognize certain themes in the respondents' answers and to structure their answers. However, during the process, sometimes new codes arose as well.

3.4 Reliability, validity and research ethics

Reliability and validity as well as research ethics are considered important requirements of qualitative research. During this research process, close attention has been paid to these requirements.

Reliability refers to the extent to which a study can be replicated by other scientists and produce the same results (Toshkov, 2012). This research is replicable to a certain extent. However, qualitative research is always to some extent subject to the interpretations of the researcher and the context (Mosley, 2013). To ensure the reliability of this study, the steps that have been made during the research process are described in this thesis. The methods that have been used are described as well as why certain choices have been made. Furthermore, the list with questions used during the interviews is attached in the appendix of this thesis. These measures make it possible for other researchers to carry out a similar study. However, it will never be possible to duplicate this study entirely. One can imagine that respondents can react differently depending on the kind of person that is in front of them or that researchers interpret data in different ways (Mosley, 2013). Furthermore, the outcomes will always be some kind of snapshot of reality.

One can distinguish two types of validity: internal validity and external validity (Bryman, 2012). Internal validity refers to whether a researcher actually finds out what he wants to measure. There should be a correct link between what a researcher observes and the theoretical ideas that he generates. Internal validity can be considered a strength of qualitative research compared with quantitative research, because a researcher gets a better understanding of individual cases (Bryman, 2012). He can therefore be confident that his measurements are more accurate than in large-N settings. In order to achieve high internal validity, a researcher should try to leave out as much of his own interpretations as possible and stick to the original observations. In the case of this research project, this means that when conducting interviews with respondents, it is important to clarify respondents' answers and sometimes ask additional questions in order to be certain what the respondent actually means. Besides, during interviews I have tried to pose questions in a way as clear as possible to respondents. When it felt necessary, I have explained certain questions and terms that I used. Also I have always asked respondents whether everything was clear and in order to ascertain that I rightly understood respondents' answers, I regularly summarized their answers. Furthermore, during the interviews I have tried to prevent respondents from giving socially desirable answers to my questions. I have tried to make them feel comfortable during the interviews and try to ensure them that I would handle the data with care. Moreover, I have recorded every interview and made a transcript from these recordings. In this way, I made sure not to leave out certain answers or forget what had been told during the interviews. Besides, I conducted each interview in Dutch, whereas the thesis is written in English. Therefore, I needed to translate the interviews in English. I have tried to translate the pieces of the interviews that I used as precisely as possible in order to warrant an as high as possible internal validity. All the measures above have contributed to the internal validity of this research project. However, one can never be entirely sure of the accuracy and truth of the answers given by respondents. Despite efforts of a researcher, a respondent can still give a socially desirable answer or simply not know and/or tell the exact truth. Furthermore, in qualitative research a researcher is usually closely involved in the research process. Hence, qualitative research will never be completely free of any interpretation of the researcher (Mosley, 2013). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge this role. Besides, I asked all

respondents whether they would like to read either the transcript or the parts of the interview that I used in my thesis to ensure that I rightly understood the answer of my respondents and correctly processed their answers in my analysis.

The second type of validity is external validity, which refers to the representativeness of measurements. External validity is high when findings of a research project can be generalize across different settings (Bryman, 2012). Whereas external validity is a strength of large-N research, this an exploratory research that contains a small sample. Therefore, one cannot generalize its results. Further research would be needed in order to do so.

Additionally, attention has been paid to certain ethical considerations. Since this research includes interviews, it automatically also includes several participants who should not be harmed by this research project (Mosley, 2013). In order to guarantee ethical research, I have tried to inform the respondents at the beginning of each interview. I gave the respondents information about the project and the interview in order to ensure that they knew what they were participating in. Furthermore, I emphasized that participation was voluntary. I have tried to get as much relevant information as possible from the respondents, but I have never pressured them into answering questions if they did not want to. Furthermore, I always asked the respondents if they wished to read the transcript of the interview before using it in my research.

4. Analysis

The analysis chapter of this thesis first provides an insight in the political landscape in the Netherlands in the past and present and gives a brief description of the interest groups that were interviewed for this thesis. Furthermore, it gives an overview of the results that arise from the interviews with the different respondents. Thereafter, this chapter provides an answer to the research question of this thesis by answering the two sub questions.

4.1 Interest groups and political parties: past and present

When talking about interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands, it seems unavoidable to consider the impact of the pillarization that took place from the beginning till the sixties of the last century. Lijphart (1967) introduced the term *pacification democracy* (pacificatie-democratie) to characterize the Dutch democratic system during these decennia (Lijphart, 1967, p. 11). According to Lijphart (1967), a pacification democracy is characterized by a strong division between different groups. Leaders of these groups cooperate in order to prevent political instability, while the mass public is only limitedly involved in politics and has a great trust in their leaders. One can consider the pillarization in the Netherlands as a special case. The lines of division between the different pillars were rather strong compared to many other Western European countries, but nevertheless the Dutch democratic system has for a long time been considered as a very stable one. Political leaders of the different pillars had big differences, but had to somehow overcome these in order to solve problems and therefore they needed to 'pacify' (Lijphart, 1967).

During the roughly fifty years of pillarization in the Netherlands, one could distinguish three main pillars or groups: the Catholic pillar, the Protestant pillar and the general pillar (Lijphart, 1967). Sometimes a distinction between four pillars is made, in which the general pillar is divided into the socialist and the liberal pillar. This last division was caused by relatively large social-economic differences in the Netherlands during those years. The people in each of these pillars lived separately from the people of the other pillars. Each pillar had its own institutions, including political parties. Whereas the Catholic one had the *Katholieke Volkspartij* (KVP), the protestant pillar had the *Anti-Revolutionaire partij* (ARP) and *Christelijk Historische Unie* (CHU) and whereas the socialist pillar had the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA), the liberal pillar had the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD). Furthermore, one can make a similar distinction between several smaller parties as well. These parties could each rely on strong support from their constituency in their pillar. Lijphart shows that during these years each pillar represented a certain part of the Dutch citizens, but definitely not the average Dutch citizen (1967, p. 44). Each party represented certain religious or social economic groups from whom they received support, while they did not from other groups.

Not only in politics this strong division in the Dutch society was visible. It was also visible in different interest groups. Trade unions were strongly connected to the different pillars and there was an even stronger connection between trade unions and political parties. The same applies to employers' organizations. The three major ones were the *Algemene Katholieke Werkgeversorganisatie*, the *Verbond van Protestants-Christelijke Werkgevers* and the liberal *Centraal Sociaal Werkgeversverbond*. Furthermore, the division between the different groups in the Dutch society also reached to education: Catholic children went to Catholic schools, whereas Protestant Children went to Protestant schools. Moreover, the same applied to the media. Each pillar had its own newspapers, such as the protestant *Trouw*, the Catholic *Volkskrant*, the socialist *Het Parool* and the liberal *Algemeen Dagblad*, all

newspapers that still exist nowadays. Also many of the broadcasting corporations that still exist today have roots in different pillars (Lijphart, 1967). Lijphart (1967) argues that within each pillar there was a group of elites who were generally strongly connected. Even though there were not many formal ties between different organizations of a pillar, he points to many *interlocking directorates* (Lijphart, 1967, p. 68). These were people with positions in different organizations within one pillar, such as someone who was a member of parliament of the KVP as well as a board member of a catholic trade union.

Nowadays, the term pacification democracy does no longer seem to apply to the Dutch system. At the present time, the Dutch democratic system is often characterized as a neo-corporatist one. In neo-corporatist societies, labor unions and employers' organizations cooperate with each other and the government on a voluntary basis. To some extent, these organizations are mutually dependent on each other and need to make compromises in order to achieve their goals (Crouch & Streeck, 2006). However, the pillarization still has its traces in the Dutch democracy today.

4.2 Political parties in the Netherlands

Nowadays, Dutch political parties, just like in many West-European countries, are mostly member parties. However, since the sixties of the last century the total number of members of political parties in the Netherlands has declined. Whereas on one hand, some parties experienced an increase in members, many other parties dealt with decreasing numbers. In 2014 only 2,4 percent of the Dutch citizens were members of a political party (SCP, 2014, p. 94). Lijphart (1967) shows that during the pillarization political parties could count on a relatively stable constituency. However, nowadays citizens are much less committed to one particular party. Instead, in times of elections the media speak of *swing voters* who are not committed to a particular party, but make the outcomes of elections rather uncertain (Koppe, 2016).

Currently, 13 parties are represented in the Dutch Parliament (Parlement & Politiek, 2018), consisting of 150 seats in total. The largest party in the Dutch Parliament is the VVD, with 33 seats. The VVD is a conservative liberal party. Second comes the nationalist and right wing populist *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) with 20 seats. The *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA) and *Democraten 66* (D66) both have 19 seats in the Parliament. The CDA is a Christian-democratic party, whereas D66 is a social-liberal party. The green-left party *Groenlinks* and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) both have 14 seats in the Parliament. The social democratic *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) currently holds nine seats. The *Partij van de Dieren* (PvdD) focused on animal rights and environment and the Christian-democratic *ChristenUnie* both hold five seats. The main focus of *50PLUS* lies on pensioners. The party holds four seats in the current Parliament. Left and multiculturalist party *DENK* and the conservative *Christian Staatskundig Gereformeerde Partij* (SGP) both hold three seats in the Parliament. The smallest party is the national-conservative and Eurosceptic *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD), with two seats. The coalition consists of the VVD, D66, CDA and ChristenUnie (Parlement & Politiek, 2018).

4.3 Interest groups in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a country that is typically considered as neo-corporatist, interest groups have an active role in relatively many policy fields, such as education or health care, whereas in many other countries, private actors are active in these sectors. Besides, the Netherlands has a strong network of voluntary organizations, partly consisting of interest groups. Because

of these two reasons, civil society in the Netherlands is relatively big when compared to many other countries. In the Netherlands, the government gives relatively many responsibilities and privileges to interest groups when compared to other countries. Many interest groups, have a seat in formal decision-making bodies, such as the Sociaal Economische Raad (SER), in which they have exclusive rights to voice their opinion. Furthermore, one can think of collective labor agreements in which trade organizations have a large say or pension funds that are managed by these organizations (Berkhout & Hanegraaff, 2017).

4.4 Organizations

Interviews have been held with six interest groups. The organizations are briefly described below.

The Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOB)

The AOB is the largest trade union in the Netherlands that focuses on education. The organization represents the interests of everyone working in education, with a focus on people working in primary, secondary, vocational and higher education (AOB, n.d.). The AOB strives for improvement of their working conditions and high-quality education. The organization is affiliated with its umbrella organization, the *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging* (FNV) and has over 85.000 members. In 1997 the organization arose from two education trade unions: the *Algemene Bond van Onderwijzend Personeel* (ABOP) and the *Nederlands Genootschap van Leraren* (NGL). The organization is active in The Hague, but also internationally in several networks.

The Vereniging van Universiteiten (VSNU)

The VSNU represents the interests of the 14 Dutch Universities. The VSNU was founded in 1985, as a successor of previous initiatives focusing on universities. The organization is committed to high-quality higher education and scientific research and a leading position of the Netherlands in higher education internationally. The organization formulates and promotes the collective ambitions of the Dutch universities and also serves as the employers' organization for Dutch universities (VSNU, n.d.).

The Patiëntenfederatie Nederland

The Patiëntenfederatie Nederland was founded in 1992 in order to improve active participation of patients. 25 years later, the organization serves an umbrella organization of 170 patient organizations in the Netherlands. The organization is committed to a strong position of the patients and strives for better and affordable healthcare and transparency in healthcare. The organization wants to establish a good link between what patients want and need and the healthcare that they get (Patiëntenfederatie, n.d.).

The Land- en Tuinbouworganisatie (LTO) Nederland

LTO Nederland is the entrepreneurial and employers' organization for entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. LTO Nederland is the umbrella organization of three smaller regional organizations that each represent agricultural entrepreneurs in a part of the Netherlands. The organization was founded in 1955 and nowadays represents almost 50.000 farmers and gardeners. The organization is one of the larger employers' organizations in the Netherlands and has a seat in the SER. It raises awareness for important issues in the Hague as well as

internationally and aims at strengthening the societal and economical position of its members (LTO Nederland, n.d.).

Natuurmonumenten

Natuurmonumenten is an association dedicated to the nature in the Netherlands. The organization was founded in 1905. The organization is committed to preserving the Dutch nature and cultural heritage and owns over a 100.000 hectares of land. Natuurmonumenten has over 700.000 members as of today and thereby is the largest nature movement in the Netherlands (Natuurmonumenten, n.d.).

Groene 11

The Groene 11 is a public affairs partnership that operates on behalf of 13 nature- and environmental organizations in the Hague. These organizations include among others Natuur & Milieu, Greenpeace, Natuurmonumenten, Vogelbescherming Nederland and Milieudefensie. The Groene 11 has contacts with relevant stakeholders in the Hague and informs and advises the affiliated organizations and regularly operates on behalf of them in the Hague (Groene 11, n.d.).

4.5 The nature of the interest group-party relationships in the Netherlands

This section presents the results regarding the first sub question of this research project. This question is:

What is the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

The relationships between interest groups and political parties can consist of a wide variety of activities. These activities can be both formal and informal and initiated by interest groups as well as political parties. Examples are emails, meetings, phone calls, texts, working visits and so forth. Whether contacts are more formal or informal depends for instance on the organizations that have contact, the particular people that have contact with each other and the context. Interest groups often initiate the contact with political parties, because they want attention for a certain topic. However, parties initiate contact as well, for instance when they want information or the viewpoint of an interest group on a certain issues. Furthermore, the media are a means that is often used by interest groups to get the attention of politicians. They use Twitter, their own media channels, or for instance a newspaper, to get attention for a politician or to make their opinion known to a large group of people.

Furthermore, in the contact between interest groups and parties, a lot of strategy and tact is used. Several respondents explain the importance of empathy in the contact they have with political parties. They are conscious of the language they use when speaking with a party member and they try to find similarities between their viewpoints and those of the party members. This can make the difference between occasional contact and a relationship in which both parties listen to each other and help each other.

Different respondents emphasize that no contact is the worst. It is better to have some contact between an interest group and a party than no contact at all. Respondents argue that in most cases, contact is more or less continuous, even though different or more or less

frequent through time. They for instance explain that contact can differ when elections are to come, when the formation is going on or at the beginning of a new coalition period.

The following paragraphs elaborate on the themes that emerged from the interviews with the respondents; on the types of contact that interest groups and parties have, on how the contacts between interest groups and parties evolve and might differ through time, on the differences between occasional contact and a real relationship between interest groups and parties, on the role of policy officers in this contact and on the role that particular people can play in this contact. About some themes, such as the types of contact that interest groups and parties have and their contact through time, specific questions were prepared beforehand and asked in the interviews. Other themes, such as the differences between occasional contact and a real relationship between interest groups and parties and the role of policy officers in this contact, rather arose in the course of the interviews. There were no specific questions prepared in the list of interview questions about these themes before the interviews started. However, these themes came up during the interviews.

4.5.1 Types of contact

Contact between interest groups and political parties is both formal and informal and is initiated by both interest groups and political parties. Contact coming from interest groups often consists of letters, meetings, phone calls, emails, petitions or WhatsApp conversations. But one can also think of drinks or an election debate that an interest group organizes. The lobbyist of the AOb explains that depending on the person she has a meeting with, she regularly has a beer together with an MP while discussing things. She also points to the strikes that the AOb sometimes organizes to get attention from politicians. LTO Nederland often organizes working visits, for example to a horticulture company. The Patiëntenfederatie has 'donated' MPs a real patient, meaning that MPs were brought into contact with a patient with a certain condition. They could for example visit the patient or do an activity with them. In this way, the Patiëntenfederatie tried to make a link between what is decided in The Hague and what happens in reality. Furthermore, lobbyists and PA advisors are often in the Hague present to follow debates, but also to show their commitment to MPs. They want to show MPs that they follow relevant debates, they want to show them their support and want to be accessible to them. Besides, the Patiëntenfederatie and the Groene 11 explain that they regularly cooperate with other organizations in order to join forces. The type of contact that takes place between interest groups and parties also very much depends on the people they have contact with. Some MPs prefer much more formal contact than others and some MPs like to get last minute notifications on issues while others like to receive information a few weeks before a debate takes place.

The media are also an important means that interest groups use towards political parties. Interest groups use their own media channels, such as Twitter, their website or a newsletter, or they try to place something in newspapers. About using media, the lobbyist of LTO Nederland argues that it works in different directions. The organization uses the media to put problems on the agenda and get the attention from MPs on one hand. On the other hand, the organization sometimes uses the media as a stage for MPs when they do something the organization supports. The lobbyist of the AOb says: "The press can be really useful in getting things done and the public opinion is *very* important." About the synergy between lobby and the media, the PA advisor of VSNU says: "It does not happen only in the Parliament, it does

not only happen in the newspaper, but you really need to build it up together. It takes some planning and some courage, and it is quite difficult to accomplish, but in terms of content it is very easy, because you need to be super consistent. If something is stuck, you just need to give the same signal everywhere.” Furthermore, all respondents use Twitter. They use a personal or a corporate account to bring issues under the attention of politicians and to retweet or comment on things that politicians have said. Twitter seems like an important medium in the Hague that politicians and interest groups can barely go without. The lobbyist of the AOb says that it differs from one party to another. While the constituency of SP is barely active on Twitter, the constituencies of D66 and the VVD are very active on the social platform. Whereas Katz and Mair (2012) argue that the upsurge of mass media is one of the changes in society that accounts for the weakening relationships between interest groups and parties, from the interviews with respondents it becomes clear that the media actually appear to play an important role in these relationships nowadays in the Netherlands

Contact is not only initiated by interest groups, but also from time to time by political parties. Party members for instance contact interest groups in order to gain information about a certain topic to use in a debate, to ask advice or to ask the viewpoint from an organization and its constituency on a certain topic. The lobbyist of LTO Nederland argues that politicians attach much value to the opinion of both employers’ organizations like LTO Nederland and trade unions. From the above, the reciprocal relationship between interest groups and parties becomes clear. An exchange of resources takes place, in which interest groups need parties who function as gatekeepers to political power on one hand, and parties need the expertise and support of interest groups and their constituency on the other hand (Allern, et al, 2007; Allern, 2010; Beyers et al., 2008; Christiansen, 2012; Rasmussen, 2012; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013; Warner, 2000).

4.5.2 Contact through time

Contact between interest groups and parties seems to be going on almost continuously. The PA advisor of VSNU states: “There is always some kind of basic relationship [...] depending on the importance of a relationship for us, it is more intensive or less intensive. So if parties have a vital role, we will make sure to have regular contact with them. But of course there are peak seasons and moments in which it is less important. At the end of a government term when the minister is demissionary, you see it getting a little less. [...] and at the same time [...] we approach a new part of a political party, which is responsible for the election program.”

Throughout time, the type of contact that interest groups seek with political parties differs. For example during the election period and when the parties write their election programs, interest groups strategically approach political parties and bring forward points that are important to their organization. Several parties organize events where interest groups can give their input. The lobbyist of the Groene 11 explains that during the election period, the organization already thinks about which people will possibly sit at the formation table. Furthermore, several interest groups organize activities during this period. The Groene 11 and LTO Nederland for instance organized an election debate. During the formation, the interest groups try to get their points discussed at the formation table. Therefore, they strategically think about which people to approach. However, the formation can be some kind of “blackbox” to the outside world, as the PA advisor of VSNU calls it. You can send emails and talk to politicians, but you are never sure of what is taken into account and what comes out of it.

4.5.3 From contact to relationship

In many cases, the relationship between interest groups and parties can really be considered a relationship, in which mutual respect, empathy and understanding are important. Respondents argue that it is important for MPs to trust them, know them and know what they can offer. The PA advisor of the Patiëntenfederatie argues that it is important she answers her phone when party members call her with a question and to show MPs that she is involved with issues, by being at the gallery during debates or posting comments about a debate on Twitter. This shows the commitment that the lobbyists and PA advisors show towards the political parties in order to maintain a good relationship.

Several respondents emphasize the importance of empathy in their relationship with party members. The lobbyist of the AOb for instance explains that she always tries to take into account the busy agenda of MPs when she approaches them. She asks them first when they would have time for an appointment with her and then tries to make space in her own schedule. The PA advisor of VSNU argues that empathy is very important in maintaining a good relationship with a political party. "You need to understand why some issues are very important to a party. And I think that can make the difference between sending a note to the Hague from time to time and really being heard and having a conversation with an MP in which you can convince him or her, or in which you can give relevant information that only he or she has and can use in a debate". He argues that it is important to invest time and effort in a relationship. Besides, one needs to understand why an MP has a certain viewpoint. Otherwise, contact will just be superficial. Several, respondents argue that it is important to find similarities between the viewpoints of an interest groups and those of a party. Also, often it is needed to make concessions to get something done. About this, the lobbyist of the AOb argues: "That is what many trade unions do wrong. We are the Education Union, but there are all kinds of other unions that fight for their points and say that they will continue doing so until they get their way. However, it is important to move along." A few respondents argue that one needs to be careful in going against party members, because otherwise the effect can be counterproductive, making the relationship with a party only worse.

Several respondents stress that towards different parties, a different type of approach is needed. Using the exact same arguments towards each party will probably lead to short conversations and little success. Rather, in contact with a member of a certain party, one should highlight the aspects of a certain issue that is important for that particular party. This can be an aspect that is not so important for an interest group, but that one can use to convince a party to vote in favor or against a certain legislative proposal. In contact between interest groups and parties, framing can thus be very important. The PA advisor of VSNU argues that the use of certain language can be very important. Therefore, he often does some research on someone's language and attitude in a debate, before he speaks with him or her. The lobbyist of Natuurmonumenten gives another example of a tactic that she uses to maintain a good relationship with MPs. "If you tell it (information) to someone, knowing that someone is going to tell it to someone else after, you need to make sure to transfer your information in a way that suits that person and enables him or her to frame it as his or her success."

4.5.4 Role of policy officers

Interest groups not only have contact with the MPs, but also with the policy officers working at the parties. All respondents emphasize the importance of the policy officers. They argue that they can be just as important to have contact with and in some cases even more important. The lobbyist of the AOb for instance says: "For the lobby it is very important to know the policy officers of the parties in the Parliament very well, because they write everything; they write motions, they talk with the MPs and tell them where to focus on. The MP decides the main points, but if you are able to persuade a policy officer it helps a great deal." The role of policy officers differs from party to party, explains the PA advisor of the Patiëntenfederatie. She explains that in some parties they have a supportive role, in which they make appointments and for example join working visits. In other parties they have a more substantive role. There they sit at the table at important moments, have contact with other organizations and are for a large part responsible for the input. In many cases the policy officers work at the parties for a longer time than some MPs and therefore have a lot of substantive knowledge, especially about more complex issues.

4.5.5 Personal contact

The relationship between interest groups and political parties depends partly on personal contact and the personality, history and preferences of the people active in the organizations. About personal contact the lobbyist of Natuurmonumenten notes: "Of course you need to have a personal connection with someone. But in the end you are there to bring information and also take something back, that is what it is about in the end in The Hague and in lobbying, exchanging viewpoints. It helps if you know and like someone, but in the end that is not the basis for making decisions. That is based on substance, on majorities or on group discipline. So a personal relationship does not really have control over that, even though it can make things easier." The lobbyist of the AOb argues that the relationship between the AOB and parties is often a very personal one: "You often think, it is a party, an idea, but you do need to like each other. If you simply find someone very annoying... Sometimes you hear from MPs that there are very annoying lobbyists. Then they say, well, I am not going to meet with those people again." Furthermore, she explains that the type of contact she has with party members very much depends on the type of person she has contact with. She gives an example of an MP active for the SGP, who is very formal and who she approaches in a very formal way, while her contact with an MP active for the PvdA is much more informal. The latter shares information much more easily, giving her much more knowledge. Furthermore, several respondents emphasize that it is important in their contact with parties that party members know them and what to expect from them. The lobbyist of LTO Nederland argues: I think that a lot depends on personal contact you have with people. I have been doing this for two years now and I notice that now everything is kind of in order. That they know you, know they can count on you, that they trust you and know that the information you give them is correct. That you are honest and tell them in case there are certain things you do not know, that you are nice, patient and that you understand their situation and viewpoint as well. You very much depend on personal relations in this function, so it definitely matters." She explains that she has been active at a political party in the Parliament before and that that has advantages as well as disadvantages in her current job of which she experienced the disadvantages most. On one hand previous experience brings knowledge, experience and network contacts. On the other hand, one needs to win the trust from MPs from other parties. The PA advisor of VSNU

points out that the ideal lobbyist would be someone with a great amount of political experience, but without having been a member of a political party. However, he argues that a lobbyist speaks on behalf of an organization and needs a certain degree of neutrality. He says: “In the end, politicians are used to handling lobbyists and are mostly interested in the interest you serve and the substance you bring with you at that moment [...]. What matters is the issue at stake at that moment.”

Furthermore the people working at an interest group or party also have influence on the substance they talk about and thereby on the contact between them and other organizations. The lobbyist of the Groene 11 gives a few examples. She explains that in the case of the VVD, when it comes to green topics, it really depends who she speaks with. She explains that some people at the VVD are very liberal and green compared to others, so the Groene 11 also sometimes tries to exert influence by contacting those people in particular. Furthermore, she explains that traditionally the SP is a party that likes to keep lobbyist at a distance. However, she now has good contact with current MPs from the SP. Because the MPs change every few years, a relationship with a party can also slightly change. Contact with certain politicians might get colder, whereas when new people take seat in the Parliament this can have a positive effect on the relationship between interest groups and parties.

From this section it becomes clear that one should perhaps not only look at interest groups and parties as a whole, when studying the relationship between them. Within these organizations many different individuals are active who can influence this relationship. Heaney (2010) touches upon the multiple political identities that people belonging to a certain interest group or party have. He argues that people bring their own political identities with them that can create different dynamics within and among organizations.

4.6 The factors that clarify the interest group-party relationships in the Netherlands

This section discusses the results regarding the second sub question of this research project:

What factors clarify the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

From the interviews with the lobbyists and PA advisors it becomes clear that history does not always play an important role in the contact that interest groups have with political parties. From the respondents with whom interviews were conducted, only the lobbyist of LTO observes that contacts with certain parties are based on historical grounds. Some other respondents describe some routine or habit in contact with certain parties. However, in most relationships between interest groups and political parties this does not seem to play a vital role.

Ideology seems to play an important role in the contacts between the interest groups and parties. This becomes clear from comments made by of several respondents, in which they explain that the contact they seek with certain parties largely depends on the topic they want to discuss. Many respondents argue that they generally have good contact with parties with similar ideas and viewpoints. However, for some organizations there is also a downside. They argue that some political parties sometimes stereotype them. Except seeking contact with like-minded parties, interest groups also seek contact with parties that somewhat disagree with them. These parties are interesting for many interest groups, because there is most to gain at these parties. These parties might somewhat disagree with the viewpoints of

an interest group, but are receptive to their arguments. Hence, interest groups might be able to find common ground and to convince them of (some of) their viewpoints. Parties with completely opposite views are less interesting for most interest groups. Seeking intense contact with these parties might be counterproductive, because this can even harm the relationship or create tensions. Most interest groups seek some basic contact with these parties, but do not spend too much time on them. By and large, no matter how similar or different the ideas and viewpoints of a party are compared to those of an interest group, actors often seek for common grounds as the base of contact. A relationship with a certain party might be good when it comes to one topic, while it might be not as good when it comes to a different topic.

Strategic considerations are visible in many ways in the contact that interest groups seek with parties. During the interviews, respondents describe several strategic choices they make in reaching out to parties and specific people. Several respondents argue that they often look at which parties they need on a particular topic to get a majority in the Parliament. Furthermore, respondents point out that good contact with coalition parties is important, because one needs them to get a majority. Furthermore, large parties are important to many interest groups. These parties have a large amount of votes, but also more manpower than smaller parties. Respondents argue that they seek contact with the smaller parties like Forum voor Democratie and Denk as well. However, especially Forum voor Democratie is given as an example of a small party with little manpower, that is barely present at debates and therefore not so interesting to many interest groups. Besides, interest groups are also strategic in the particular people that they seek contact with. They for instance seek contact with party members that are likely to do something with their point or with party members on strategic positions, such as a seat at the formation table. Even though in this research project interviews were conducted with interest groups only, these strategic considerations also seem to work the other way around. The lobbyist of LTO Nederland for instance argues that politicians regularly contact the organization and find its viewpoints very important, among other things because LTO Nederland has a very large constituency.

The following section discusses the different factors that emerge from the interviews with the respondents and that can clarify the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands. It first discusses the role of history in the relationships between interest groups and parties. Subsequently, it elaborates on the role of ideology in this relationship, by discussing the contacts that interest groups have with like-minded parties, parties that somewhat disagree with them, parties with opposite viewpoints and by discussing contacts that interest groups have with different political parties depending on the topic that is subject to discussion. Thereafter, this section elaborates on the contacts that interest groups have with parties depending on the position of these parties. It for instance discusses the possible difference between contact that interest groups have with coalition parties and opposition parties. Furthermore, the possible influence of the size and structure of political parties on their relationships with parties is discussed. Lastly, this section discusses the actual importance of a relationship with political parties to interest groups.

4.6.1 General image of contact

From the interviews with the respondents it becomes clear that from the side of interest groups contact with all parties is often desired. This is in line with the claims made by Allern

(2010) and Christiansen (2012), who argue that nowadays, parties and interest groups do not just ally with one or two actors, but interact with a large and rather diverse group of organizations. The respondents argue that they seek contact with all parties. However the intensity and amount of contact can differ per party. The PA advisor of VSNU finds transparency in lobbying important. The organization therefore provides basic information, such as lobby documents, to all political parties. The lobbyist of Natuurmonumenten also explains that the organization sends its documents to all parties. She argues that the organization does not prefer certain parties over others. The lobbyist of AOB argues that it is important to always keep in touch with parties, even though you do not agree with them. She argues that the worst thing is not to have any contact at all.

4.6.2 History

As becomes clear from the literature review, several scholars claim that interest groups and political parties have similar origins and a similar development over time (Allern et al. 2007; Allern, 2010; Heaney, 2010; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013). Therefore, one can expect relations between interest groups and political parties that are based on historical grounds. However, for most organizations that were interviewed in this research project history does not seem to play an important role in their contact with political parties. Only the lobbyist of LTO Nederland argues that contacts between the organization with some parties can be explained by means of history. The lobbyist of LTO Nederland argues that traditionally, some parties had many farmers in their constituency. Therefore, the organization had a strong relationship with these parties. Nowadays, farmers are more diffused and represented in the constituency of other political parties as well.

Some other respondents describe some routine or habit in contact with certain parties. However, this does not seem to play an important role in the contacts between most interest groups and parties. One of the reasons for this is that the people that have a seat in the parliament or that are responsible for certain topic change every few years. Several respondents point out that individuals also play an important role in the relationship between interest groups and parties. Therefore, a party might have a good relationship with a party during one coalition period, whereas a few years later when someone else with a different personality and different viewpoint takes seat in the parliament, this relationship might get less strong and vice versa.

4.6.3 Contact with like-minded parties

From the literature review of this thesis it becomes clear that several scholars look at ideology when studying the relationship between interest groups and political parties. They refer to ideological cleavages along which interest groups and parties can be grouped (Christiansen, 2010; Beyers et al., 2008, Allern, 2010). Interest groups and parties with similar interests and viewpoints can be expected to have a relationship in which they support and inform each other.

From the interviews with the different respondents it becomes clear that for interest groups, contact with like-minded parties is important. The PA advisor of VSNU argues that it is important to keep a close relationship with the people and parties that agree with your points and to not forget about them. The AOb for instance has much contact with the SP, Groenlinks and PvdA, because these organizations often agree with the viewpoints of the AOb and also quite a lot with D66. The Groene 11 has a lot of contact especially with D66 and the

ChristenUnie and during the last coalition period also with the PvdA. The lobbyist of the organization argues that it is not really a strategy of the organization, but that in reality there is much common ground between the organization and these parties.

4.6.4 Contact with parties with different viewpoints

However, the interest groups do not only seek contact with the parties with the most similar viewpoints, an observation that is in line with findings of Marshall (2015) regarding lobbying by interest groups in the EU (2015). Especially parties that occasionally agree with the viewpoints of an interest group, can be seen as interesting parties to seek contact with. The PA advisor of VSNU for instance states that these are interesting contacts. These are parties that do not entirely agree with your viewpoints, but they are receptive to your arguments and they do see the importance of the societal interest that you represent. Next to such parties and like-minded parties, the PA advisor of VSNU describes a third group. This group, in the case of VSNU, consists of parties that have a very different viewpoint on or little affiliation with higher education and are not willing to invest much in it. Such parties are not so interesting to put a lot of effort in for VSNU. The PA advisor of the organization gives an example about internationalization of higher education. Some parties are positive about this development. Others are more sceptic and see both advantages and disadvantages. A third group thinks this is a bad development and argues that higher education in the Netherlands should be in Dutch. About contact with this last group the PA advisor states: "It is interesting to give some information there and once in a while we have a conversation with them, but the chance that you can convince such a party that it is really important to make room for that is so small, that the chance is relatively high that such a conversation could get unpleasant, because you end up in some kind of conflict." He argues that the organization has limited time and capacity and therefore often strives for optimization of what it can reach. It thinks about which conversations are useful, which often leads to contact with parties that either agree with the organization or that partly agree and disagree, but are open to discussion.

The lobbyist of the AOb explains that even though the viewpoints of the organization might be most similar to those of the SP, PvdA and Groenlinks, the organizations also seeks contact with parties like the VVD or CDA. She argues that if the organizations would always have contact only with left parties, the organization would not be taken seriously anymore by other parties. Therefore, she actively seeks contact with all parties and tries to find common grounds with the parties to cooperate on. Especially when the AOb is not really sure about the viewpoint of a certain party on a particular topic, the organization seeks contact with this party. The organization can possibly achieve more by speaking with members of such a party, than at a party like the SP that agrees with the AOb on certain topics by all means.

Furthermore the lobbyists of the AOb and the Groene 11 argue that sometimes, their organizations are politicized by parties, while they want to have a neutral image. The lobbyist of the AOb argues that the AOb is often seen as a left oriented organization by many political parties, because the organization is a trade union. She argues that his label is quite bothersome for the organization. The lobbyist of the Groene 11 explains that because the organization is green, some parties consider the organization as left oriented and associate the organization with Groenlinks. However, the Groene 11 rather seeks common ground with all different parties and tries to stay away from the left-right distinction.

4.6.5 Contact depending on the theme

A distinction between like-minded parties and parties with opposing views is not always easy to make. In case of the Patiëntenfederatie it is hard to make a clear division between parties that the organization has much contact with and ones with which this happens less. For the Patiëntenfederatie contact with political parties very much depends on the subject. The organization represents the interests of a wide variety of people and is committed to a broad range of health care topics. Therefore, it would be hard to say that certain political parties always agree or never agree with the organization. Rather, contact depends on the subject. The PA advisor of the organization explains for instance that innovation and e-health are topics in which the VVD is interested, the SP is active on the topic of birth care, the Christian parties on the topic of palliative care, whereas Groenlinks and PvdA find quality in healthcare and the say of patients important topics. Also for Natuurmonumenten contact with parties often very much depends on the topic. The lobbyist of the organization mentions Groenlinks a few times as a party that the organization has good contact with, but also mentions CDA, PvdA and VVD. Natuurmonumenten often seeks contact with parties that are expected to do something with a certain topic. Furthermore parties themselves seek contact with the organization on for them relevant topics. Also within parties there can be differences between MPs and the topics that they find important. The PA advisor of VSNU also brings some nuance when speaking about the relationships with different parties, and argues that a relationship with a party can depend on the theme. VSNU for instance agrees with the VVD on certain topics, whereas on other topics the two organizations disagree. The PA advisor thus argues that when one topic is under discussion and attention, the relationship between VSNU and a political party can be considered good and warm, while in case of another topic they might disagree and have a somewhat colder relationship. Here, it depends on whether you can find a common ground to talk about.

4.6.6 Contact depending on the position of parties

In line with the arguments of Otjes and Rasmussen (2017), besides ideology, strategy and power seem to play an important role as well in the relationships between interest groups and political parties. The authors argue that interest groups are more likely to seek contact with parties with strategic resources. As becomes clear from the interviews, the contact that interest groups have with political parties is also in many cases influenced by the distribution of seats in the Parliament and by the parties that are part of the coalition. The PA advisor of VSNU for instance argues that the organization has most contact with the coalition parties VVD, CDA, ChristenUnie and D66. He describes the relationship with these parties as an intense one in which regular contact takes place. The relationship is strong, because the coalition parties are those who form a majority in the Parliament and who are therefore responsible for policy or change in it. Furthermore, education is very important to D66 and the party supplies the Minister of Education, which makes the relationship between VSNU and this party even stronger.

The contact that the AOb has with parties can differ depending on the coalition. Whereas in the previous coalition period the VVD and PvdA sometimes needed D66 to get certain points through, the lobbyist of the AOb argues that currently the coalition parties very much stick to the coalition agreement in which many points are fixed. Therefore, usually when the parliament votes on a motion all coalition parties vote the same on one hand and the opposition parties vote similarly on the other hand. This makes it very hard for opposition

parties to get a majority and get their points through. The lobbyist of the AOb explains that the organization in general has a good relationship with D66, but that now that D66 is in the government, the party is less receptive to the AOb's points, because they need to act in line with the coalition agreement that they signed with the VVD, CDA and ChristenUnie. Furthermore, the AOb and PvdA have always had a close relationship. However, when the PvdA was in a coalition with the VVD, the AOb was very critical of the party and its actions and contact between the two got less strong. Now that the PvdA is in the coalition again, the PvdA seeks rapprochement with the AOb and the relationship between the two is slowly getting better again.

The lobbyist of the Groene 11 explains that the organization tries to use its lobby strategically by considering which topic to discuss with which parties. Depending on the issue and the moment in time, the organization looks at which parties it needs to get something through. During the last electoral period and the formation period, the Groene 11 for instance tried to invest in contacts with VVD and CDA, because these parties were likely to become part of the coalition. The organization considered on which topics the organizations could find common ground and which members of the parties were in the network of the Groene 11. The lobbyist of the organization explains that during the last coalition period, there was a so-called 'green majority' in the Parliament, consisting of green parties. During the current coalition period, this green majority does not exist anymore. Therefore, it is often harder to get certain green issues through. She gives an example on the topic of deposit fees on bottles and cans and how the organization operates to get this issue on the table: "Those are exciting topics, about which nothing has been decided in the coalition agreement. It is a free topic, so there you can really see dualism, which makes it very exciting. It can go in any direction. [...] So in such a case you really look at which parties do we need, in this case the CDA, and how can we get in contact with those policy officers in charge of this issue. Some municipalities also joined alliances on deposit fees, so we looked at aldermen in those municipalities. In that case we do not need to bring up the topic. It is much better if others who find the topic important as well make this point, especially because the CDA is a leaders party that really listens to its constituency. [...] It is a bit like playing chess at different chess boards."

The descriptions above, given by several respondents, are coherent with the claim made by Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013), who argue that the relationship between interest groups and political parties can very much depend on the institutional structure in which these organizations operate, such as the structure of the party government. However, the lobbyist of Natuurmonumenten argues that there is no real difference for the organization in contact with coalition parties or with opposition parties. She argues that you need coalition parties to get a majority in the Parliament, but that there is no difference in transferring information to these parties or in the moments of contact.

4.6.7 The size and structure of political parties

The size of a political party also seems to play a role, when it comes to the relationship between interest groups and parties. When it comes to parties that the interest groups have little or no contact with, Forum voor Democratie is mentioned many times. Furthermore, also Denk and 50PLUS are mentioned by some respondents as parties with which they do not have a close relationship. Most respondents do send these small parties basic information and sometimes invite them for events, so these parties know their viewpoints and know how to find them. Some respondents also point out that these parties can play an essential role in

getting things done when a majority is needed. However, these small parties often do not seek contact with the interest groups and are usually not present at debates. One of the respondents argues: “Sometimes I choose to inform them about our standpoint, but I usually do not spend too much time on that, because they are usually not present at such a debate anyway”. Different respondents state that they have only limited time and capacity and want to use this as efficient as possible. Therefore, they do not put too much effort in small parties when they know they will not do anything with their points anyway. This observation is in line with the arguments made by several authors who argue that interest groups and parties make rational considerations when it comes to contact with one another (Allern et al., 2007; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013).

Furthermore a few respondents argue that it is hard to get in touch with the PVV. The lobbyist of the AOb for instance argues that the organization seeks contact with all political parties and has contact with almost all parties except for the PVV and Forum voor Democratie. The organization would like to have contact with these parties as well, but does not get any reactions from them when it sends out information or requests. The lobbyist of the AOb argues that PVV and Forum voor Democratie are parties which are very different from the others when it comes to for instance internal democracy and structure, and therefore request a different approach. She argues that in these parties, the party leaders play a much bigger role than in other Dutch political parties. The lobbyist of the Groene 11 describes Forum voor Democratie as some kind of “blackbox” in which the party leader has the last word. Also making contact with the PVV is hard to establish for the organization, even though the Groene 11 thinks it should take this large party seriously. These observations correspond to the claim that the relationship between interest groups and parties is affected by a group’s organizational structure, as argued by Rasmussen and Lindeboom (2013).

4.6.8 Importance of political parties for interest groups

From the interviews with the different respondents it becomes clear that the relationship with political parties is considered rather important to the interest groups. When asked how important the relationship with political parties is to their organization, all respondents label this relationship as either quite important or very important. However, several respondents also point out the importance of the ministries. The PA advisor of VSNU argues that political parties are important to the organization, but that the lobby relationship with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is the most important one for the organization. He argues that if the organization wants to address an important issue and bring about change, in many cases it would be too late to contact party members. Often it is more effective to address an issue before it is discussed in the Parliament. The lobbyist of LTO Nederland also considers the relationship with the ministries as the most important one. She argues that everything an organization can accomplish there, does not need to be accomplished anymore in the Parliament. However, she also underlines the importance of the parties and the reciprocity between the ministries and Parliament. The Chamber can for instance be very important for signaling certain issues that usually do not get much attention in the ministries. The PA advisor of the Patiëntenfederatie also describes this reciprocity and argues that at some moments contact with ministry is important, while at other moments it is more effective to have contact with party members. The lobbyist of the AOb also argues that it is very important to have good and regular contact with the relevant people working at the ministries. She points out that a good relationship with employees at the ministry often provides her with a lot of information that

MPs sometimes do not even know yet. A lobbyist can then use this information to inform or influence MPs.

4.7 Summary of the results

What is the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

The relationship between interest groups and political parties consists of a wide range of different activities. Contact between interest groups and parties is initiated by interest groups as well as by parties. Whereas political parties function as gatekeepers to political power, interest groups have important resources, such as information, expertise and the ability to influence their constituency and the public opinion. Therefore, the two types of organizations can partly depend on each other when it comes to achieving their goals. Contact between interest groups and parties is important, according to the respondents. It is important to always keep in touch with each other. The type and intensity of contact may differ through time.

In this contact, the substance as well as social aspects are important. Respondents argue that many social aspects are important in the relationships they have with political parties. They point to the importance of commitment, understanding and empathy. They for instance claim it is important to show you are accessible, present at debates and willing to make time for the other. Furthermore, it is important to understand why the other has certain viewpoints that may be different from yours, to pay attention to the ways in which you communicate with the other and to try to find common ground. These factors can make the difference between occasional contact and enduring relationships in which both parties listen to one another. Besides social aspects, the respondents argue that the substance is very important in the contact they have with political parties. You can like someone very much, but the substance is always at the center of contact.

What factors clarify the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands?

As becomes clear from the paragraphs above, several factors seem to influence the relationship between interest groups and parties. From the existing literature about the relationship between interest groups and political parties history, ideology and strategy come forward as factors that can shape the relationship between interest groups and parties. From the interviews with the interest groups it becomes clear that all of these factors can play a role to a greater or lesser extent in the relationship that they have with parties in the Netherlands. The influence of history or routine seems to be limited, however. Only the lobbyist of LTO Nederland really acknowledges the role of history in the contacts that the organization has with certain parties. Other interest groups recognize some routine in the contacts they have with parties. However, since MPs change every few years, the relationship that interest groups and parties have can thereby also change.

Ideology appears to be an important factor that influences the interest group-party relationships in the Netherlands. Respondents explain that it is important there is common ground in their contact with interest groups. They argue that they it is important to have a

good relationship with like-minded parties. Furthermore, parties that often partly agree with an interest group seem to be interesting parties to seek contact with, because they can be receptive to their arguments of interest group and possibly change their viewpoints. Parties with opposing ideas and viewpoints are often not really valuable for interest groups. Putting much effort in these parties will probably not change their viewpoints anyway. The interest groups often do seek some contact with these parties, with opposing views, because they think information should be widely spread and they think transparency is important. However, they do not push too much, because this might harm the relationship between the two or cause the opposite effect. Furthermore, which parties an interest groups seeks contact with often depends on the topic.

Strategy seems to be an undeniable factor in the relationship between interest groups and parties and is visible in many ways. The actions of interest groups depend on the topic, the division and structure of parties and the moment in time. Interest groups for instance seek contact with powerful parties, such as parties that are in the government or the parties that they need in order to get a majority in the Parliament. Furthermore, interest groups are rational actors; they use their limited time and capacity efficiently. They do not put too much time in smaller parties when they know these parties will not be present at a debate anyways and they will not try to convince parties with completely different viewpoints of their standpoint, as they know that will probably not be effective.

5. Conclusion

This chapter first provides the main findings of this research project. Besides, the limitations of this study are pointed out. At the end of this chapter the broader implications of this study and suggestions for future research are put forward.

5.1 Main findings

The aim of this thesis was to explore the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands. The main question of this thesis was: *What shapes the relationships between interest groups and parties in the Netherlands?* This thesis has provided an answer to this question, by answering two sub questions. From this research project it becomes clear that the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands can differ, depending on the organizations and people involved, on the topic that is at stake, on the moment in time and on the political landscape.

In the conceptual framework several expectations regarding the sub questions were formulated. First, there were several expectations regarding the nature of the relationships between interest groups and political parties in the Netherlands. It was expected that different types of contact – both formal and informal – take place between interest groups and parties, initiated by interest groups as well as by parties. The descriptions given by the different respondents are in line with these expectations. Respondents described different types of contact they have with political parties, such as formal or informal meetings, letters, phone calls or the use of media, such as Twitter or newspapers. In the interviews the respondents described reciprocity of contact. They argued that they seek contact with parties on one hand. On the other hand, they explained that political parties often make an appeal to their organization, by asking for their viewpoints or for information. Another expectation regarding the nature of the interest group-party relationships in the Netherlands comprises the durability of these relationships. From the interviews with respondents it becomes clear that these relationships seem to be going on sort of continuously. The respondents explained that the intensity and types of contact they have with parties can differ on the people that have a seat in the Parliament and on the moment in time. The contacts between the organizations during the formation period can for instance differ from those in times of elections. Furthermore, several other themes emerged during the analysis besides the expectations that were raised beforehand. Respondents pointed to the importance of commitment, empathy, understanding and respect in their relationships with different parties. They argue that it is important to invest in a relationship, to have regular contact, to understand the viewpoints of the other and to have empathy. This makes the difference between occasional contact and an actual relationship. Additionally, all respondents pointed to the importance of policy officers in the contact they have with political parties. They argued that in many cases, next to the MPs, policy officers have an important role in political parties and can often exert much influence.

Secondly, in the conceptual framework several expectations were raised about what clarifies the relationships between interest groups and parties in the Netherlands. The interest groups interviewed for this research project argued that they wish to have contact with all parties to a greater or lesser extent and in many cases to approach all parties. However, the intensity of the contact between them and the different parties differs.

History, ideology and strategy were expected to play a role in the relationships between interest groups and parties. At the start of the interviews it was expected that

relationships can be based on historical grounds or routine. However, only in the case of LTO Nederland history seems to play a role. Amongst others, because the MPs change regularly, the role of routine and history appears to be limited. Furthermore, it was expected that ideology plays a role in the relationships between interest groups and parties. It was expected that organizations with similar viewpoints and interests are likely to have contact with each other. The role of ideology indeed appears to be large. The respondents explained that a good relationship with like-minded parties is important to them. Moreover, it is interesting for interest groups to have contact with parties that somewhat agree with their viewpoints. These parties are often receptive to the arguments of an interest group and might be convinced by them to vote in a certain way. The respondents furthermore argue that they seek some contact with parties with opposing views, but that these parties will probably not be convinced of their ideas. Therefore, investing too much time and effort in these parties is often not worth it. As expected beforehand, from the interviews it becomes clear that contact between interest groups and political parties involves many strategic considerations on both sides. Organizations carefully decide in whom and what they invest their limited time and how they shape their contact towards others.

Overall, the description by Allern and Bale about the relationship between interest groups and political parties as a “multidimensional phenomenon” appears to be a just (2012, p, 12). It seems impossible to give one all-encompassing description of this relationship that fits all cases and all different aspects of his relationship. Furthermore besides multidimensional, this relationship also seems to be a dynamical one that evolves over time. The relationship with parties is important to the interest groups. However, respondents emphasize the importance of the relationship they have with the ministries as well. Many respondents argue that this relationship is even more important than the relationships they have with parties, because in many cases it can be more efficient to signal issues earlier in the process to bring about change. What can be accomplished at the ministries does not need to be accomplished anymore in the Parliament.

5.2 Limitations

This thesis can be considered a useful contribution to the existing literature about the interest group-party relationship. This study provides a clear and up-to-date overview of the different aspects of this relationship that one could look at. Furthermore, this research provides insight in this relationship from the perspective of interest groups in the Netherlands, a country that had so far been subject to only a few studies about this relationship.

It is important to consider the advantages as well as the limitations of this research. Because of the exploratory nature of this research project, rich data and contextual understanding could be generated. However, only a few cases have been studied and this study was conducted in the Netherlands only. This means that the results of this research should be seen as new insights to be further explored and that can serve as the base for new theories. Furthermore, in this study the relationship between interest groups and political parties has been studied from the perspective of interest groups. Because of limited time an availability, interviews have only been conducted with respondents from interest groups. Therefore, one should take into account that only one perspective on this relationship has been studied. In order to make draw firm conclusions, further research is needed. The paragraph below makes a few recommendations to that end.

5.3 Broader implications and suggestions for future research

In order to fully grasp the relationship between interest groups and political parties, additional research is desired. This research has generated some relevant insights in the interest group-party relationship in the Netherlands. It has exposed the nature of this relationship and clarified that strategic and ideological considerations strongly shape this relationship. Historical ties seemed to play a rather limited role. Furthermore, it has exposed the importance that respondents attach to commitment, mutual respect and understanding in this relationship, which makes the difference between occasional contact and a real relationship between interest groups and parties.

However, in order to draw firm conclusions, further research would be needed in which more cases are included. Moreover, this study focused on the viewpoint of interest groups only. In order to gain a full understanding of the relationship between interest groups and political parties, additional research that also focuses on the perspective of political parties is needed. Furthermore, a similar study in other countries could lead to additional insights and possible differences between countries. Additionally, this study has exposed the important role that social aspects can play in the relationships between interest groups and parties. Therefore, further research on the role of commitment, empathy and understanding in these relationships is advisable.

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Appendix

Question list interviews

1. Introduction
 - Explain research and interview procedure
2. Could you first tell me a little bit more about your job?
3. In general, how important is contact with political parties for (organization)?
4. If you look back at past year, which parties did you (mostly) have contact with?
5. Are there parties that you had no contact with?
6. What comprises the contact that your organization has with parties? Is this formal or informal?
7. What is the role of the media in this contact? Do you often use the media?
8. Does contact with parties change regularly or is it more stable? What does contact evolve through time?
9. Is there a difference in contact between coalition parties and opposition parties when it comes to contact?
10. Are there certain times during which you have more contact with certain parties? (for example before elections or during the formation period)
11. Who usually initiates contact?
12. Looking at the parties that you have contact with, what are the main reasons you have contact with those parties in particular?
 - History
 - Ideology (for example like-minded parties or rather parties with opposing views)
 - Strategy (for example powerful parties)
13. Could you give an example of an important political file that you worked on and the contact you had with political parties in your work on it?
14. Do you think that as a person you have a lot of influence on the contact (organization) has with parties (for example because of earlier experiences or political preferences)?
15. Is there anything you would like to add?
16. Do you have any documents or suggestions that could be useful for my research?
17. Wrap up, thank you.