

BES laws approved

THE HAGUE--The Dutch Second Chamber on Tuesday approved the first batch of laws for the BES islands Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba. Party for Freedom PVV and the one-member Verdonk faction voted against. The same sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia amendments were approved as well. Christian Union (CU) and the reformed SGP party voted against.

The seven laws that Parliament approved were: Public Entities Law BES, Finance Law public entities BES, amendment to Electoral Law to accommodate the new status of the BES islands, Implementation Law BES, Adaptation Law BES, Protection Personal Data Law BES, and the approval to apply and annul treaties for the BES islands.

In total, 115 votes were cast in favour of the BES laws and 10 against. The Socialist Party (SP), initially highly critical of the fiscal aspects of the BES laws, also voted in favour.

Two smaller Christian oriented parties, Christian Union and SGP voted against one of the seven law proposals, the Adaptation Law, or Aanpassingswet in Dutch. The parties said they couldn't support the law proposal because with the approved amendments parts of the law would go against the earlier agreement that had been reached with Bonaire, St. Eustatius, and Saba.

The two Christian parties objected to the amendments to the Adaptation Law on ethical issues like same sex marriage, abortion, and euthanasia. A majority in the Second Chamber on Tuesday approved the amendments to make abortion and euthanasia legal and introduce same sex marriage on the BES islands. Abortion will be regulated in one year and euthanasia and same sex marriages, in two years.

CU Member of Parliament (MP) Cynthia Ortega-Martijn said her party wanted to limit the introduction of Dutch legislation on the BES islands to what had been jointly agreed upon. "Laws are now being forced on these islands without consultation. It was always agreed that we would take the islands' own identity, size, and culture into account," she said.

Ortega-Martijn said her party was "upset" that in the process of constitutional reform, The Hague was not sufficiently taking the cultural differences between the Netherlands and the BES islands into account.

"These issues (abortion, euthanasia, and same sex marriages, ed.) are very sensitive on the islands and are not supported by the majority. The already fragile process of constitutional reform is being pressurised unnecessarily by forcing laws on the islands. This shows a lack of respect," said Ortega-Martijn.

SGP MP Kees van der Staaij said his party too had "serious" objections to the amendments in question. "We are principally against the content, but we also find it incorrect that the citizens of the BES islands couldn't make their judgement on this," he said.

CDA voted in favour of the same sex marriage amendment, but voted against the amendments to make abortion and euthanasia legal in one and two years, respectively. "The government has said it wasn't possible to introduce abortion and euthanasia in a careful manner in one or two years. It will take a minimum of three years. So we voted against," said CDA MP Bas Jan van Bochove. According to Van Bochove, abortion and euthanasia can only be legalised after thorough preparation. But, he added, CDA is in favour of introducing these issues in due time. The amendments didn't keep CDA from voting in favour of the Adaptation Laws BES.

Member of the First Chamber Hans Hillen (CDA) called the approved decision by the Second Chamber to swiftly arrange same sex marriage, abortion and euthanasia per law "arrogant and neo-colonial." He accused the vast majority in the Second Chamber of having only self-consideration. "There is insufficient attention for the delicate development between the islands and the Netherlands," Hillen stated in an interview with Radio Netherlands.

The Bonaire opposition party UPB of Ramonsito Booi stated in a recent letter to the Second Chamber that the BES

islands should be granted more time to get used to same sex marriage, abortion, and euthanasia. Booi said it also took the Netherlands many years to accept these ethical issues.

The Second Chamber during Tuesday's meeting approved three motions that were presented during last Thursday's general debate on the BES laws. Approved was a motion of Ortega-Martijn and Van Bochove which said the outcome of a future Bonaire referendum had to be taken into consideration when the amendment of the Kingdom Charter was handled in the Parliaments in the Kingdom.

A second motion by John Leerdam of Labour Party (PvdA), Ineke van Gent of green left party GroenLinks, Johan Remkes of liberal democratic VVD party, Ronald van Raak of Socialist Party (SP), Cynthia Ortega-Martijn (CU) and Bas Jan van Bochove (CDA) relating to health care and education was approved. The motion requested the Dutch government to annually report on improvements in health care and education in the BES islands.

The third approved motion, submitted by Remkes (VVD) and Van Gent (GroenLinks), requested the Dutch government to take Dutch pension regulations into account to prevent a distinction between pension arrangements of politicians and civil servants in the Netherlands and on the BES islands.

9 March 2010