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Theme 1 - Fundamental constitutional rights and freedoms - participation, trust and public debate as conditions for democracy

Thank you Chair.

One of Roosevelt's four freedoms, one of the basic rights of an individual living in a state rooted in democracy, is the freedom of speech. To be able to voice your opinion freely. To demonstrate.

In the history of the Netherlands, demonstrations have nearly always been against cabinet policy. Against the main institutional power. Examples are the 1981 and 1983 demonstrations against the placing of new nuclear arms in Europe, and the 2003 and 2004 demonstrations against the war in Iraq.

Demonstrating is a democratic, basic right. People must always have the right and opportunity to demonstrate against the government and its policies.

This summer, some demonstrations in the Netherlands were not directed against an institution, against cabinet policy. They were religiously motivated, extremist and about something happening many kilometres away from our borders. People started demonstrating for the Islamic State. Later, in response, some people demonstrated against the Islamic State.

When people are demonstrating for an extremely violent organisation, full of hatred, such as the Islamic State, can you say that they are still within the boundaries of their democratic right?

Because how far do you let it come to, when demonstrations cause and whip up extremism, and, feelings of hatred in society? When people become scared to voice their opinion because of possible retaliations by others? When demonstrations start to undermine the state, what it stands for and its rule of law?



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blad 2

According to me, this is a line that should not be crossed. A situation that should not be tolerated. A democratic right should not undermine democracy itself, the state nor the rule of law.

Finally, in anticipation of theme 3 "majority and opposition", I would like to add that although the freedom of speech is a basic right, there should always remain a certain level of respect for the rights and liberties of other people, whether they belong to a minority or a majority. That is the bottom line.

Thank you.

