



## Prof. Jouke van Dijk: 'Building the Zuiderzee Line will not solve the credit crisis'

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**'The intentions are good, but it's not thought through', is how University of Groningen professor of Regional Labour Market Analysis Jouke van Dijk typifies the proposal by VVD MP Hans van Baalen to return the idea of a Zuiderzee Line to the political agenda as a way of solving the credit crisis. Van Baalen made his proposal during a New Year's gathering organized by Stichting Bedrijfsbelangen Eemshaven. He wants to use the financial crisis to make the Netherlands stronger. Building the Zuiderzee Line would help this, according to Van Baalen.**

'Of course the government can tackle the financial crisis by investing heavily', responds Van Dijk. 'But a new Zuiderzee Line debate is not very sensible in that context. We need to invest in plans that are much more advanced and which can be started quickly. It'll be years before the first spade can go into the ground for the Zuiderzee Line, and this crisis will then be far behind us.'

### Within two years

Van Baalen's statement surprised Van Dijk very much. 'I thought it was very short-sighted of the cabinet to cancel the Zuiderzee Line. There were a lot of points where their arguments could be challenged, so I'd expected the discussion to flare up again within ten years. But it's gone a lot more quickly than that; it's not even two years since the cabinet made its decision.'

Van Baalen, who will shortly be transferring from the Lower House of Parliament to the European Parliament, wants to use his time in Brussels to promote a swift construction of the Zuiderzee Line, he announced. Van Dijk also shrugs his shoulders about this comment. 'It's true that Europe has a lot of money available for infrastructure projects. However, if Brussels wants to improve train connections in Europe, it's got other options to choose from.'

### Swift start

Van Dijk agrees with Van Baalen that government must make major investments in order to stimulate the economy. 'From September on, construction companies will probably have less

work. It would be a good idea to earmark infrastructure projects that could be swiftly started before the summer. Investments in health care and education would also be useful, according to the professor. These would be realizable in the short term and would also have positive effects in the long term. The fear of mass redundancies is unfounded, incidentally, according to Van Dijk. 'There are still about 250,000 job vacancies, particularly for trained personnel. Anyone who is made redundant now has a reasonable chance of finding another job.'

### **It will happen**

Van Dijk has no doubt at all that the Zuiderzee Line will eventually happen. The northern provinces were awarded about two billion euros in compensation when the Zuiderzee Line project was cancelled. Groningen and Friesland want to use that money to construct a train connection between Heerenveen and Groningen. Van Dijk: 'Let's just start with that. Once that connection is there, someone's bound to come up with the idea of laying a track along the last eighty kilometres, between Lelystad and Heerenveen.'

Building a railway line will not immediately lead to a huge increase in jobs, says Van Dijk, but in the long term it will definitely strengthen the economic development. 'Anyone who looks at our railway network can't miss the gap between Lelystad and the North. That sort of gap shouldn't be there in a modern country like the Netherlands. And certainly not now the economic growth possibilities in the Randstad are levelling off. A great deal more economic growth is possible in the quiet north.'

### **Curriculum Vitae**

Jouke van Dijk, tel. 050-363 37 65, (1956) is professor of Regional Labour Market Analysis at the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. He studied Economics in Groningen and has worked at the University of Groningen since 1981. In 1986 he was awarded his PhD by the University for a thesis entitled 'Migratie en Arbeidsmarkt' [Migration and the Labour Market]. Van Dijk is an expert in the field of labour market issues and regional economics.

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