

**Speech of Marijke van Hees, Chair of ATR,
the Dutch Advisory Board on Regulatory Burden**

On the occasion of the launch of the “Alliance for the Reduction of Bureaucratic Burden”
21 September 2026

Ladies and gentlemen,

Across Europe, we ask businesses, citizens and public professionals to help deliver some of the most important ambitions of our time: the green transition, digital transformation, stronger competitiveness, better public services and greater resilience. At the same time, the burden of regulation needs to diminish. How to go about it? Today, we have been asked to present ourselves as a best practice in helping to solve this puzzle. We are greatly honoured to do so.

Already twenty-six years ago, the Dutch government created an independent body that it hoped would eventually make itself unnecessary. Its name was Actal and its task was to challenge new rules before those rules became reality.

Today, I chair already for more than nine years, Actal's successor ATR; the Dutch Advisory Board on Regulatory Burden.

In 2026 ATR received a permanent statutory basis. Independent scrutiny has become part of Dutch lawmaking, but honestly that's no guarantee that we can prevent all unnecessary regulatory burden. But, the aim is important because regulatory burden affects investment, innovation, public trust and the practical capacity of people and organisations to deliver.

The political will to reduce *existing* regulatory burden is clearly present, and strongly represented here today. What we would like to add is the importance of a timely, balanced and independent analysis of the regulatory burden arising from *proposed* legislation.

The State Secretary has already referred to a number of important policy initiatives in the Netherlands aimed at tackling existing regulatory burden: initiatives that ATR supports wherever possible.

ATR assesses the quality of the evidence and justification of regulation, not the political objective itself. That is for the government and Parliament to decide. We test the evidence and the design of proposals made by the ministries in an early stage.

For the political leaders in this room, independent scrutiny does not take decisions away from you. It ensures that you take them knowingly. It also brings back the perspective of the person or organisation that has to comply.

A broad mandate

So, ATR's *raison d'être* is to identify unnecessary regulatory burden, not to pursue fewer rules as an objective in itself. The aim is regulation that is necessary, proportionate and workable in practice.

ATR has been given a broad and permanent statutory mandate. In addition to our core task of *ex ante* scrutiny of new national legislation, we also advise on:

- The Dutch assessment of regulatory burden in new legislative proposals from the European Commission, before the Dutch negotiating position is finalised.
- We also advise on existing regulatory burden, where signals from businesses, citizens and professionals may give rise to independent advice on simplifying regulation. A dedicated reporting point has been established for this purpose.
- We can also advise on rules developed by implementing organisations and supervisory authorities, on evaluations of existing regulation, and on policy visions.

How do we work?

ATR's independent board consists of three appointed members who adopt ATR's formal opinions. We use our own assessment framework and publish our formal opinions online, ensuring transparency.

When we assess proposed laws and regulations, we do this on the basis of four questions:

1. Is the measure necessary and proportionate, given the burdens it imposes?
2. Is there a less burdensome way to achieve the same objective?
3. Do the rules work in the day-to-day practice of those who must comply with them?
4. Have all regulatory burden costs been identified and correctly quantified?

ATR carries out formal scrutiny when an initial draft is available, often in parallel with public consultation, and we usually present our opinion within four weeks. So the Ministries receive public feedback and ATR's opinion while the draft can still be changed relatively easily. ATR's staff may also provide guidance earlier, without compromising the board's independent judgment during formal scrutiny.

Each formal opinion ends with a clear conclusion:

1. Proceed
2. Proceed after some adjustments are made
3. Do not proceed unless some important adjustments are made
4. Do not proceed at all

In 2025, ATR issued a record of 156 formal opinions. Half were critical or negative. Around 400 further cases were handled through a shortened procedure.

Now I like to turn to the European network of scrutiny bodies of which we are a member: RegWatchEurope.

RegWatchEurope

This network represents independent national scrutiny bodies across Europe. We exchange knowhow and discuss the position of national bodies in European regulation and legislation.

We have submitted various opinions and position papers to the Commission, recently for instance on:

- Strengthening lighter forms of evaluation that offer the opportunity to reassess the regulatory burdens once the facts on the ground have become clearer.
- We also asked for greater detail in European cost calculations in impact assessments, so that they can be used more effectively for national follow-up.
- And together we investigated a policy cycle, specifically that of the GDPR: how did the associated regulatory burdens become so unclear?

Within RegWatchEurope, we have observed that there are often significant differences between countries when it comes to the implementation of European laws. These differences are not always deliberate, and they create unnecessary barriers to economic growth. This is precisely where cooperation between Member States and the Commission can make a real difference.

We hope that the Alliance being launched today will also help prevent regulatory burden, and that cooperation within the Alliance will strengthen or help establish organisations that, like ATR, are entrusted with carrying out this work independently. In our view, this is in the interest of both the legitimacy of the European Union and its economic resilience.

The Alliance

I hope to have shown that independent analysis can strengthen the political drive to reduce burdens. Early scrutiny is cheaper than repair.

From our perspective, a joint agenda should also include the following 4 actions:

1. Combine political reduction targets with independent, evidence-based ex-ante scrutiny at national level.
2. Develop shared methods for cost calculation, practical workability and cumulative regulatory burden, also on national implementation choices.
3. Use follow-up data and mutual knowledge exchange to continuously improve scrutiny practices.
4. Involve existing — and, where appropriate, newly established — independent national scrutiny bodies at an early stage in European policymaking.

So my invitation today is this: let's make this Alliance a important platform for preventing unnecessary regulatory burdens. Involve independent scrutiny bodies early, share evidence and methods openly. Together you can ensure that every major European initiative is tested not only for its ambition, but also for its workability in practice in the member states. We at ATR would gladly contribute where we can. Thank you for your attention.