

THE HAGUE, 30/11/07 - The government is paying many times more than companies do for IT projects. Additionally, figures are lacking on a large scale on budget overruns and delays, Trouw newspaper reports. The Lower House now wants a parliamentary investigation.

IT professor Chris Verhoef said yesterday in the newspaper: "The 73 government projects cost on average 57 million euros. I have looked at 6,000 projects for companies and they cost on average 0.3 million. The most expensive project there cost 30 million; the most expensive for the government nearly 300 million."

As well, documents on big losses in government IT projects are on many fronts incomplete. As an example, Verhoef gives the Sagitta customs project. "On the list it says this project ran from 2006 to mid-2007, but a finance ministry press release from 2003 shows it should have been ready at the beginning of 2004."

Peter Lievense, another specialist on automation in the government, gives the example of the Electronic Children's File (EKD) project. "The direct IT costs were budgeted at about 5 million euros. The project failed and the EKD Foundation set up for it has been abolished, after spending 9.6 million. Municipalities now have to carry out the project, and they have already been promised 6.7 million." This puts the counter at 16.3 million already, "but under 'cost overruns,' it says: 'none'."

In October, Home Affairs Minister Guusje ter Horst reported to the Lower House that the 73 large automation projects currently underway for the government are budgeted at an estimated 4.2 billion euros. The report was requested by parliament in June after signals of chaos. Ter Horst said at the time that most projects are running "according to plan" and within "regular frameworks."

The Government Auditors (Algemene Rekenkamer) yesterday presented a relatively mild report on government IT projects. But "the government auditors based this on data from the Central Bureau for Statistics. We think that the definition that the CBS uses is not broad enough," said Christian democratic (CDA) MP Hessels.

CDA, the Socialist Party (SP), leftwing Greens (GroenLinks) and Party for Freedom (PVV) therefore want a parliamentary investigation of the IT projects. Together, they have 82 of the 150 House seats, a Lower House majority. Whether Labour (PvdA) and the conservatives (VVD) will vote in favour as well is not yet clear.

In a parliamentary investigation, experts and politicians can be heard by a committee of MPs. One is currently underway on education reforms since the 1970s.