Hello, I am Martin Buijsen, professor of health law and author of the Element entitled *Euthanasia as Privileged Compassion.*

Euthanasia is a subject fraught with controversy. As of yet, it is permitted in only a few countries. At the moment, however, several countries are considering allowing euthanasia to some extent. Since the Netherlands was the first country to legalize it, my main objective is to see what lessons can be learned.

Dutch policy on euthanasia is not based on autonomy, as is often thought. Dutch policymakers have acknowledged that a physician who granted a patient’s request for euthanasia can be seen as having acted out of compassion. The Dutch law does not entitle patients to euthanasia; it grants impunity to physicians. The Dutch Euthanasia Act is not a patients’ law but a doctors’ law first and foremost.

Opponents of legalization often put forward the so-called slippery slope argument. Once euthanasia is allowed for those requesting it, at some point, it will also be permitted for those who do not. The Dutch experience shows that there is some truth in that. The Euthanasia Act itself caters to the needs of physicians facing requests for euthanasia from adult patients deemed competent at the moment of euthanasia. In the Element, I argue that Dutch physicians have succeeded in having rules in place – modeled after the Euthanasia Act – granting impunity for euthanasia performed on other patient groups: incompetent adults with advance directives and children.

One lesson to be learned from the Dutch experience is that rules based on physicians’ compassion will run into difficulties. Although the Euthanasia Act itself agrees with human rights law, the Dutch rules on euthanasia for children do not.

Another lesson to be learned is that once euthanasia policy is laid down in a doctors’ law, there is little tolerance for non-physicians performing euthanasia. There is even less tolerance for rules based on autonomy. For the Euthanasia Act to be applicable, individuals requesting euthanasia must suffer hopelessly and unbearably from a medical condition. However, people may want to die for other reasons. People may also feel that end-of-life decisions are an entirely private affair. To be clear, a law on euthanasia based on autonomy may very well agree with human rights law, too.

The Dutch experience with euthanasia is unrivaled since it covers almost half a century. Euthanasia is being discussed everywhere; the Netherlands has an important story to tell the world about what happens once the political decision is made to allow it.

That’s it. Thank you!