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The Netherlands

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Introduction

The Rutte II cabinet had been installed in 2012, based on a coalition of the Liberal Party and the Labour Party, which between them had won a majority in the lower house of parliament (*Tweede Kamer*). Lacking the support of a majority in the upper house, the government effectively operated as a minority coalition, striking deals with opposition parties to ensure a majority in the *Eerste Kamer*. In 2014, the cabinet was tested a number of times: the cabinet lost two members; support for the government parties was tested in the European elections; the governing Labour Party lost two seats in the lower house due to an internal conflict; and finally, a major healthcare reform was vetoed in the Senate by dissenting members of government parties, bringing the cabinet to the brink of crisis.

Election report

European Parliament election, May 2014

Elections for the EP were held in the Netherlands on May 22. With respect to European affairs, Dutch parties can be divided into four groups. The first group includes the social-liberal D66 (Democrats 66/*Democraten 66*), the right-wing conservative liberal VVD (Liberal Party/*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*) and the CDA (Christian-Democratic Appeal/*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*). They support European integration in general and the solution the European Commission pursued for the eurozone crisis in particular, including increased European oversight to enforce budgetary discipline and austerity measures in the Member States. For these parties, the completion of the internal market was a key priority.

The second group, made up of the SP (Socialist Party/*Socialistische Partij*) and the PvdD (Party for the Animals/*Partij voor de Dieren*), is critical of the current policies of the European Commission. They opposed the fiscal discipline enforced by the European Commission and the liberalisation of economic sectors, such as the energy sector.

The third group, which includes the centre-left social-democratic PvdA (Labour Party/*Partij van de Arbeid*) and GL (GreenLeft/*GroenLinks*), endorsed further European economic integration but wanted the social-economic policies of the Commission to focus more on social values. For these parties, combating unemployment was a key priority.

The final group consists of the PVV (Freedom Party/*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) and the combined list of the conservative protestant parties CU (Christian Union/*ChristenUnie*) and the Calvinist SGP (Political Reformed Party/*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*). They want to restrict the European project to trade only. The PVV has gone furthest and advocates a Dutch withdrawal from the European Union. Much of the media campaign during the elections focused on the extreme positions of the PVV and their alliance with the French National Front. Both protestant parties were less radical in their policies, but criticised the ‘political haughtiness’ of the proposed integration of economic governance.

The election results are shown in Table 1. The pro-European D66 performed best in terms of votes, but because of an electoral alliance with the CU/SGP the Christian Democrats won the most seats. Compared to the 2009 European elections, the anti-European PVV lost votes (and one seat), while the governing Liberal Party expanded its support slightly. Its national coalition partner, the Labour Party, lost a considerable number of votes, but kept its three seats due to an electoral alliance with GL. As a result, it did better than the Socialist Party, which had received slightly more votes but won only two seats. The animal advocacy Party for the Animals won its first seat in the EP, while the senior citizens’ party 50Plus came quite close.

Cabinet report

The cabinet lost two of its members in 2014. On 30 January, State Secretary for Finance Frans Weekers (VVD) resigned due to problems managing the revenue service and his weak defence of his position in the lower house. On 4 February, he was replaced by Eric Wiebes (VVD). In September, the cabinet nominated Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans (PvdA) for the new European Commission. Timmermans acquired the portfolio of Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and also became the First Vice-President. He resigned from cabinet on 17 October, with his term as Commissioner beginning on 1 November. He was replaced in government by Bert Koenders (PvdA), who had been Minister for Development Cooperation between 2007 and 2010 in the Balkenende IV cabinet.

Parliament report

Lower house

Because the cabinet had to rely on support from other parties to pass legislation through the upper house, it often negotiated with opposition parties in the lower house for support for its proposals (see **Issues in national politics**). In 2014, the cabinet continued its cooperation with D66, the CU and SGP – the so-called ‘constructive opposition’ or ‘C3’.

In 2014 a number of MPs broke away, and some were expelled from their parliamentary parties in the lower house. On 20 March, Roland van Vliet left the parliamentary group of the PVV. He disagreed with the statements made by party leader Geert Wilders, who after the municipal elections of March 2014 called for ‘fewer Moroccans’ in the Netherlands. Van Vliet remained in parliament as an independent MP. Partly for the same reason, a

Table 1. Elections to European Parliament in the Netherlands in 2014

Party	EP group ^b	N	Votes			Seats			
			%	Δ%	N	%	ΔN ^c	Δ% ^c	
Democrats 66/ <i>Democraten 66</i> (D66)	ALDE	735,825	15.5%	+4.2%	4	15.4%	+1	+3.4%	
Christian Democratic Appeal/ <i>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</i> (CDA)	EPP	721,766	15.2%	-4.9%	5	19.2%	0	-0.8%	
Party for Freedom/ <i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> (PVV)	NI	633,114	13.3%	-3.7%	4	15.4%	0	-0.6%	
Liberal Party/ <i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i> (VVD)	ALDE	571,176	12.0%	+0.6%	3	11.5%	0	-0.5%	
Socialist Party/ <i>Socialistische Partij</i> (SP)	GUE/NGL	458,079	9.6%	+2.5%	2	7.7%	0	-0.3%	
Labour Party/ <i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> (PvdA)	S&D	446,763	9.4%	-2.7%	3	11.5%	0	-0.5%	
Christian Union & Political Reformed Party/ <i>ChristenUnie & Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i> (CU & SGP)	ECR	364,843	7.7%	+0.9%	2	7.7%	0	-0.3%	
GreenLeft/ <i>GroenLinks</i> (GL)	Green/EFA	331,594	7.0%	-1.9%	2	7.7%	-1	-4.3%	
Party for the Animals/ <i>Partij voor de Dieren</i> (PvdD)	GUE/NGL	200,254	4.2%	+0.7%	1	3.8%	+1	+3.8%	
50Plus/ <i>50Plus</i>	-	175,343	3.7%	+3.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	
Others	-	114,989	2.5%	-	0	0.0%	-	-	

Note: ^aAfter ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, representation for the Netherlands in the EP increased from 25 to 26, and although electoral procedures led to the allocation of one additional seat to PVV, the deputy eligible for that seat entered as an independent, so the allocation among existing parties from the Netherlands in the EP remained unchanged

^bFor acronyms, see the introductory chapter 'Political data in 2014'.

^cFigures for change reflect differences between 2014 and the pre-Lisbon Treaty totals resulting from the 2009 election. Comparison to the post-Lisbon seat distribution produces the following alternate figures for seat change between 2009 and 2014 (those parties not specified here are not affected by the Lisbon allocation): D66 +1 seats, +3.8%; CDA 0, 0.0%; PVV 0, 0.0%; VVD 0, 0.0%; SP 0, 0.0%; CU & SGP 0, 0.0%; GL -1, -3.8%; Others -1, -3.8%.

Sources: Kiesraad (2015).

day later his colleague Joram van Klaveren resigned. On 15 April, Van Klaveren formed a parliamentary group with Louis Bontes, who had been expelled from the parliamentary group of the PVV in the autumn of 2013. On 28 May, the two founded the party VNL (*VoorNederland/In Favour of the Netherlands*) – a classic liberal party, which aimed for a radical reduction of the tax burden and the restoration of the sovereignty of the Netherlands.

Table 2. Cabinet composition of Rutte II in the Netherlands in 2014

Duration of cabinet Period covered by table Type of cabinet	Inception From Minimum Winning Coalition (MWC) ^a	5 November 2012 1 January 2014		Dissolution Until	Still in office at end of 2014 31 December 2014	
A. Party/gender composition on 1 January 2014	Seats in cabinet N	%	Seats held by women N	% of party	Seats in parliament N	%
Liberal Party (VVD)	7	53.8%	3	42.9%	41	27.3%
Labour Party (PvdA)	6	46.2%	2	33.3%	38	25.3%
Totals	13	100.0%	5	38.5%	79	52.6%
B. Composition of Rutte II cabinet on 1 January 2014						
See previous editions of the <i>Political Data Yearbook</i> for the Netherlands (Otjes & Voerman 2013) or www.politicaldatayearbook.com						
C. Changes in composition of Rutte II cabinet during 2014						
Minister of Foreign Affairs: Frans Timmermans (1961 male, PvdA) resigned on 17 October; replaced by Bert Koenders (1958 male, PvdA) on 1 November						
D. Party/gender composition on 31 December 2014						
There was no change during 2014 apart from PvdA losing two seats in parliament, reducing its parliamentary share to 24.0% and the government's share to 51.3%						

Note: ^aAs the government lacked a majority in the upper house it was in effect a minority coalition.
Source: PDC (2015).

The conflicts within the pensioners' party 50Plus, which had become manifest in 2013 with the resignation of party leader Henk Krol, continued in 2014. On 28 May, Norbert Klein, the chair of the parliamentary group who had succeeded Krol in this function, expelled Martine Baay-Timmermans, the other MP, because of a personal conflict. The 50Plus party executive, however, supported Baay-Timmermans. Anticipating expulsion, Klein cancelled his membership of 50Plus. In December, he presented his own party, the *Vrijzinnige Partij* (Free-thinking Party). When Baay-Timmermans fell ill and took sick leave in September 2014, Krol returned as MP to replace her temporarily, with the consent of the party executive. After his resignation in October 2013, Krol was soon accepted in grace again by the leadership of 50Plus; in spring 2014, he was nominated as a candidate for the European elections at the bottom of the list, hoping that his popularity would enable him to attract votes. On 31 December, Baay-Timmermans resigned, making way for Krol to formally succeed her.

On 13 November, the PvdA parliamentary party expelled Tunuhan Kuzu and Selçuk Öztürk. These two MPs with Turkish origins had refused to fully support the integration policies of the Minister of Social Affairs, their party colleague Lodewijk Asscher, who wanted to monitor Turkish organisations which supposedly hindered the integration of citizens with a Turkish background. Kuzu and Öztürk retained their seats in the lower house. As a result, the size of the coalition decreased from 79 to 77 seats (out of 150 seats) in the lower house.

Upper house

The public debate about the role and function of the indirectly elected upper house or senate in the Dutch parliamentary system continued in 2014. At the request of the lower

Table 3. Party and gender composition of the lower chamber (*Tweede Kamer*) of the parliament (*Staten-Generaal der Nederlanden*) in the Netherlands in 2014

Party	1 January 2014				31 December 2014			
	All		Women		All		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Liberal Party (VVD)	41	27.3%	15	36.6%	41	27.3%	14	34.1%
Labour Party (PvdA)	38	25.3%	20	52.6%	36	24.0%	19	52.8%
Party for Freedom (PVV)	14	9.3%	3	21.4%	12	8.0%	3	33.3%
Socialist Party (SP)	15	10.0%	4	26.7%	15	10.0%	5	33.3%
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	13	8.7%	4	30.8%	13	8.7%	4	30.8%
Democrats 66 (D66)	12	8.0%	5	41.7%	12	8.0%	5	41.7%
ChristianUnion (CU)	5	3.3%	2	40.0%	5	3.3%	2	40.0%
GreenLeft (GL)	4	2.7%	2	50.0%	4	2.7%	2	50.0%
Political Reformed Party (SGP)	3	2.0%	0	0.0%	3	2.0%	0	0.0%
Party for the Animals (PvdD)	2	1.3%	2	100.0%	2	1.3%	2	100.0%
50Plus	2	1.3%	1	50.0%	1	0.7%	0	0.0%
Group Bontes-Van Klaveren/ <i>Groep Bontes-Van Klaveren</i> (Bontes)	1	0.7%	0	0.0%	2 ^a	1.3%	0	0.0%
Group Van Vliet/ <i>Groep Van Vliet</i> (Van Vliet)	–	–	–	–	1 ^b	0.7%	0	0.0%
Group Kuzu-Öztürk/ <i>Groep Kuzu-Öztürk</i> (Kuzu)	–	–	–	–	2 ^c	1.3%	0	0.0%
Group Klein/ <i>Groep Klein</i> (Klein)	–	–	–	–	1 ^d	0.7%	0	0.0%
Totals	150	100.0%	58	38.7%	150	100.0%	56	37.3%

Note: ^aBoth MPs previously belonged to PVV.

^bFrom PVV.

^cExpelled from PvdA.

^dFrom 50Plus.

Source: PDC (2015).

house (made in 2013), the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations presented an international comparison of bicameral systems in September 2014. Disappointed by the fact that the report was technical and did not provide any views of the cabinet, the chair of the parliamentary group of the Liberal Party in the upper house advocated the establishment of a state commission that would review the functioning of Dutch parliamentary democracy. Prime Minister Mark Rutte adopted this proposal. The composition and tasks of the commission would be determined after consultation with the chairs of the parliamentary groups in both houses – which was not realised in 2014.

Institutional changes

Referendum law

In April, the upper house accepted two parliamentary initiatives by MPs from D66, GL and the Labour Party to introduce a consultative and a binding referendum. Both had to be

Table 4. Political party changes in the Netherlands in 2014

Party institutional changes

In Favour of the Netherlands/*VoorNederland* (VNL) was officially registered as a political party on 14 July under the leadership of Joram van Klaveren (1979 male) and Louis Bontes (1956 male). Since October 2013 and April 2014, respectively, Bontes and Van Klaveren had operated as independent MPs after splitting from the PVV

Free-thinking Party/*Vrijzinnige Partij* was officially registered as a political party on 9 December under the leadership of Norbert Klein (1956 male). Since June 2014, Klein had operated as an independent MP after conflicts in 50Plus

Sources: PDC (2014); DNPP (2015).

initiated by citizens; the former concerned proposed legislation, the latter legislation already adopted by parliament. In early 2013 the lower house had agreed to the two legislative proposals. The introduction of the binding referendum required an amendment of the constitution. This could only be adopted with a second reading after the next elections for the lower and upper house. The senate had made two demands: first, the introduction of a turnout threshold for a consultative referendum; and second, the abolition of the existing corrective referendum law when the binding referendum had been accepted. The navette, a bill meant to remedy the referendum bill on these two points, was accepted by the lower house in November; the upper house has to decide in 2015.

Party finance law

On 1 May 2013, a new party finance law had come into force. The law provided for the establishment of a committee of supervision on the finances of political parties, which should provide solicited and unsolicited advice to the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations regarding the implementation of the law. The commission was installed on 27 March 2014; Liesbeth Spies, the former Interior Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (CDA), was appointed chair of the commission.

Issues in national politics

As in 2013, the Dutch government essentially operated like a minority cabinet, striking deals with the opposition parties – this time on healthcare, welfare, student grants and the 2015 budget. The first deal, made public on 3 February, concerned a new law that integrated a number of social security laws. The deal was struck between the coalition and the so-called ‘constructive opposition’ (i.e., D66, SGP and CU). These parties had also brokered three deals in 2013. The new law restricted access to welfare benefits, limited protection for disabled people who were (partially) able to work and decentralised social security to municipalities.

The second agreement between the government parties and the three constructive opposition parties was presented on 17 April and concerned a major reform of healthcare which would be voted on in separate bills. On 17 December, the senate vetoed one of

these bills. The crucial ‘no’ votes did not come from (constructive) opposition parties, but from three Labour senators. This unexpected defeat brought the governing coalition to the brink of a crisis. Both Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport Edith Schippers and the rebel Labour senators were unwilling to compromise. The coalition found a way out: in 2015, the same measure would be proposed again in a slightly different garb. The coalition parties also announced that if the senators voted against the measure again, it would be partially implemented through an executive action. The leaders of the constructive opposition parties and the Speaker of the Senate announced their opposition to such a move. The uneasy compromise between Labour and the Liberals left many issues unresolved.

The third deal was struck between the two government parties, D66 and GL. They agreed to replace the existing system of student grants with a system of student loans. The plans were made public on 27 May. The cabinet had already negotiated the same subject with these four parties in the summer of 2013. This was the first formal agreement between the governing coalition that did not include the CU and SGP.

On 27 August, the government announced that it had come to an agreement with the three constructive opposition parties about a budget for 2015. Unlike the budget deal in 2013, the cabinet negotiated with the three opposition parties before publicising the budget. The budget included some tax cuts and expanded expenditure on defence and foreign aid due to international circumstances.

Not all talks between the government and the opposition were successful. On 20 June, negotiations between the coalition parties GL and D66 concerning a merger of three provinces (North-Holland, Utrecht and Flevoland) into one ‘super-province’ ended without an agreement.

Meanwhile, internal disagreements within the coalition continued to mount. On 1 April, State Secretary for Security and Justice Fred Teeven (VVD) announced that the government would retract a bill to make illegal residence in the Netherlands a criminal offence. There was strong internal resistance within the Labour Party to this bill, and also from the CU.

On 22 December, the Liberal Party in the Senate voted against a government bill that sought to limit the highest wages in the public sector. Supported by the SP, the Labour Party, GL, PVV and 50Plus, the bill achieved a majority in the Senate. Two liberal ministers, however, Minister of Healthcare, Welfare and Sports Edith Schippers and the Minister for Housing and the Central Government Sector Stef Blok, announced that they would postpone implementation of the law for their sectors.

Finally, international affairs were put front and centre of Dutch political debate because of the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 *en route* from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur in the Ukraine on 17 July. A total of 193 of the 298 victims were Dutch citizens, including a Labour Party senator. The Dutch government asked for international support to investigate the cause of the crash. Minister of Foreign Affairs Frans Timmermans gave an impassioned speech on the topic at the UN Security Council on July 22. The Dutch government operated cautiously and wanted to wait for the resolution of the investigation before apportioning blame to anyone. Public support for the cabinet’s handling of the crisis was considerable and general support for the cabinet and the ministers increased.

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