


EU-27 WATCH



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On the project

Due to the new treaty provisions of the Lisbon Treaty and the economic crises the enlarged EU of 27 member states is on the search for a new modus operandi while also continuing membership talks with candidate countries. The EU-27 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these and more issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 27 member states and the four candidate countries give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

The reports focus on a **reporting period from December 2009 until May 2010**. This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March and April 2010. Most of the 31 reports were delivered in May 2010. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-27 Watch website: www.EU-27Watch.org.

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Netherlands**Political climate and national elections**

Arnout Mijs*

An important development in Dutch politics is the fall of the government on 20 February 2010 as a result of divergent opinions in the government on the extension of the Dutch Afghanistan mission. Elections took place on 9 June 2010. During the debate the focus shifted from immigration towards the economy, because of the recent developments. Only the anti-immigration party of Geerts Wilders, the Party for Freedom (PVV), held on to the former topic. Budgetary savings on all possible policy fields were fiercely debated and supported by strong evidence on the need for budget cuts provided by the Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Planning (CPB). In the respective programmes of the political parties, foreign policy played only a marginal role. In political debates foreign politics were hardly discussed, although this is not uncommon in Dutch parliamentary elections.¹ There was one recurrent issue in the political programmes of the majority of the parties on foreign politics. They stated that if they are elected part of the next government, they will strive to reduce the Dutch contribution to the EU.² This accounts amongst others for the Liberal Conservative party (VVD), the Labour Party (PvdA), the Socialist Party (SP), and the PVV.

The results of the elections testify for a rather complex and dispersed picture of the political landscape in the Netherlands. There are seven parties with 10 or more seats. The focus on economics has been one of the main reasons why the VVD led by Mark Rutte came in first with 31 out of 150 seats in parliament. The VVD became the biggest party in parliamentary elections for the first time in its history. The party was followed by the PvdA of former mayor of Amsterdam Job Cohen with 30 seats. The PvdA lost three seats, much less than expected in the year preceding the elections. Besides Rutte, another major winner was Geert Wilders' PVV, who came in third with 24 seats (before 9). The biggest losers were the Christian Democrats (CDA) who lost almost half of their seats (from 41 to 21).

At the time of writing, the formation of a new government is ongoing. Three options seem most likely. The first option is a right wing government with the VVD, PVV and the Christian Democrats (CDA). The CDA is the party of disengaging Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende, who resigned as party leader after the 20 seat loss. This is also the reason they are hesitant to step into a right wing government, besides the fact that the party is divided on whether they want to rule with the PVV.³ The second option is a neither-right-nor-left coalition formed by the VVD, PvdA, the Liberal Democrats (D66), and the Greens (GroenLinks). Until eight years ago the VVD, PvdA, and D66 also ruled the Netherlands, but now they need an extra party for a majority in parliament. The third, less likely, option is a cabinet in which VVD, PvdA and CDA join forces, although difficult in the light of earlier tensions between the PvdA and the CDA in the previous government. Either way negotiations will be tough, since the VVD is in favour of a hard-hitting economic reform policy whilst the other parties, especially PvdA, want to spread the budget-cuts over a longer period.⁴ Parties seem moreover lukewarm with regard to cooperation with the PVV, because of its strong positions and because of its lack of seats in the Parliaments' Upper House. Either way it will be a major first challenge for the new and young Prime Minister Mark Rutte, and it is not even certain that he will take up this position.

¹ M. Grevelink/J. Rood: Het Nederlands buitenlands beleid in de verkiezingen: een analyse, Online publication, Instituut Clingendael, Den Haag, 2 June 2010.

² See the websites of the different political parties, available at: www.cda.nl; www.pvda.nl; www.vvd.nl; www.d66.nl; www.groenlinks.nl; www.Sp.nl; www.pvv.nl; www.cu.nl; www.sgp.nl (last access: 22 June 2010); Gera Arts/Marko Bos: Het Europa-gehalte van de Nederlandse verkiezingsprogramma's, *Internationale Spectator*, 64(6), p. 328-331.

³ NRC Handelsblad: CDA wil nog niet praten met VVD en PVV, 16 June 2010.

⁴ NRC Handelsblad: Cohen: Wij zitten aan lage kant met bezuinigingen, 26 June 2010.

Questionnaire for EU-27 Watch, No. 9

Reporting period December 2009 until May 2010 – Deadline for country reports 21 May

All questions refer to the position/assessment of your country's government, opposition, political parties, civil society organisations, pressure groups, press/media, and public opinion. Please name sources wherever possible!

1. Implementation of the Lisbon Treaty

On the 1 December 2009 the EU-reform ended with the entering into force of the Lisbon Treaty. However, the new treaty provisions still have to be implemented. Some procedures and conditions have to be determined. In other cases, procedures, power relations, and decision-making mechanisms will change due to the new provisions.

- How is the work of the new President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, assessed in your country? Which changes to the role of the rotating council presidency are expected?
- How is the work of the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, assessed in your country? Please take into particular consideration both her role within the European Commission and her relationship to the Council of the European Union.
- On 25 March 2010 a "Proposal for a Council Decision establishing the organisation and functioning of the European External Action Service" was presented. How is this concept perceived in your country? Which alternatives are discussed?
- On 31 March 2010 the European Commission presented a proposal defining the rules and procedures for the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI). What are the expectations for the ECI in your country? What are the various positions concerning the rules and procedures?

2. Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Commission has given its opinion on Iceland's application for EU-membership and a decision from the Council is expected before the end of June. Croatia seems to have settled its border dispute with Slovenia. Against this background:

- Which countries does your country expect to become members of the European Union in the next enlargement round? What are the opinions in your country on the membership of these countries?
- How are the membership perspectives of those countries discussed, which are not expected to become a member in the next enlargement round?

The Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean were the last major projects dealing with the European neighbourhood:

- How are these projects assessed in your country?

3. European economic policy and the financial and economic crisis

The European Council agreed on 25/26 March on the key elements of the Europe 2020 strategy, the successor of the Lisbon strategy. While not being on the formal agenda the economic and financial situation in Greece was discussed. The European Council agreed on a finance package combining bilateral loans from the eurozone and financing through the International Monetary Fund.

- How is the finance package for Greece assessed in your country? Are there any opinions on the process, how the agreement on the package was reached?
- Which lessons should be drawn from the Greek case for a reform of the Stability and Growth Pact?
- How is the idea of "a strong coordination of economic policies in Europe" perceived in your country? What concepts of an European economic governance are discussed in your country and which role do they assign to the Euro group?
- How is the Europe 2020 strategy discussed in your country? What are the priorities for the Europe 2020 strategy from your country's perspective?

4. Climate and energy policy

The climate conference in Copenhagen took note of the Copenhagen Accord but did not reach a binding agreement. The next conference of the parties (COP 16 & CMP 6) will take place at the end of November 2010.

- How is the Copenhagen conference assessed in your country? Please take into consideration the negotiation strategy of European Union and the results of the conference.
- Does the European Union need to change its own energy and climate policy in order to give a new impulse to the international negotiations?
- Is a global agreement within the UNFCCC the best strategy to fight climate change? If not, which alternative strategy should the European Union follow?
- What is your country's position on financing mitigation and adaptation efforts in developing countries?

5. Current issues and discourses in your country

Which other topics and discourses are highly salient in your country but not covered by this questionnaire?