

Victory for the pro-European parties in the General Elections in the Netherlands

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Results

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the liberal party led by outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte came first in the general elections on 12th September in the Netherlands. The party won 26.5% of the vote, the highest score in its history and won 41 seats (+10 than in the previous elections that took place on 9th June 2010). *"It is an exceptional victory because he is the leader of the biggest party in office. There are many European countries in which the leaders lost the elections as this crisis rages,"* analyses Andre Krouwel, a political expert at the Free University of Amsterdam. The liberals took a slight lead over the Labour Party (PvdA) led by Diederik Samsom, which won 24.7% of the vote and 39 seats (+9).

At first the electoral campaign, which focused on the crisis, turned to the advantage of the most radical opposition forces, and those most hostile to the European Union (Socialist Party and the Freedom Party). Over the last few days however the situation developed further and the pro-European forces recovered ground. Together the Liberals and Labour rallied 80 seats, i.e. an absolute majority in the States General, the lower chamber in the Dutch Parliament.

The populist parties suffered a clear rebuttal. On the right the Freedom Party (PVV) won 10.1% of the vote, taking 15 seats (-9). *"Our battle is necessary now more than ever in the Netherlands. The problems will just grow and the best years of the Freedom Party are yet to come,"* declared its leader, Geert Wilders. The Socialist Party, a far left movement led by Emile Roemer won 9.6% of the vote and 15 seats (=), well below the score which the polls had forecast just a few weeks ago.

The Christian Democratic Appel (CDA) has recorded its lowest score ever: 8.5% of the vote and 13 seats (- 8). Its leader Sybrand van Haersma Buma had anticipated this defeat just a few days before the election indicating that the recovery of his party, which has been declining constantly in the ballot box over the last ten years, will take several years. The Democrats 66 (D66) led by Alexander Pechtold won 7.9% of the vote and 12 seats (+ 2). Finally the Green Left (GL), an ecologist party led by Jolande Sap clearly lost ground. It won 2.3% of the vote and 3 seats (- 7).

Turnout was slightly less than that recorded in the last general elections on 9th June 2010 (-1.6 point) totalling 73.8%.

And so the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) did not suffer its cohabitation with Geert Wilders' Freedom Party nor from the crisis. The liberal party (VVD), which showed greater firmness regarding the States in the south of Europe during the electoral campaign (*"We shall continue to work closely with German and Finland to counter the euro crisis. Greece and the other must keep their promises or we shall no longer help them,"* declared Mark Rutte on September 12th), is still the most capable of leading the Netherlands and to command respect within the Union.

"Tomorrow we shall start work: a stable government has to be formed as quickly as possible in the Netherlands and I shall work with you so that the Netherlands emerges stronger from the crisis," declared the outgoing Prime Minister as the results were announced.

Reminder of the general election results of 9th June 2010 in the Netherlands

Turnout: 75.4%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats won
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	2 467 148	26.5	41
Labour Party (PvdA)	2 304 882	24.7	39
Freedom Party (PVV)	940 364	10.1	15
Socialist Party (SP)	899 319	9.6	15
Christian Democratic Appel (CDA)	796 208	8.5	13
Democrats 66 (D66)	735 949	7.9	12
Christian Union (CU)	291 883	3.1	5
Green Left (GL)	214 749	2.3	3
Political Reform Party (SGP)	196 187	2.1	3
Animals Party (PvdD)	178 699	1.9	2
50 Plus	175 323	0.2	0
Others	70 066	2.5	0

Source: Daily Volkstrant (<http://verkiezingen.volkskrant.nl/uitslag/resultaten.html>)

Labour leader Diederik Samsom won his wager of saving his party and finally came out ahead of the Socialist Party that had been forecast winner in the general elections for a long time. Before the vote he said he would relinquish his seat as MP only for the post of Prime Minister. However on Wednesday evening he maintained, *"The Netherlands needs a stable government as soon as possible. We want to participate as long as the results tonight are faithfully represented in the new government's programme."* *"Many doubted that the Netherlands would move over from populism to honesty in such a short time by acknowledging the difficult moments and choices that are necessary. We owe it to the electorate to work together. This country does not need polarisation but cohesion for the next five years. No divisions, but unity,"* he added. *"Totally unknown until a few weeks ago the new Labour leader revealed himself to be brilliant in the debate. He played on this "normality" as did French President François Hollande. He said 'Look at France ! It will be hard, but it is like that that we have to proceed,'"* stressed André Krouwel.

Mark Rutte is due to retain his post as Prime Minister, a position that traditionally goes to the leader of the party that wins the election. We should note that Queen Beatrix, who until now appointed the "agent" - the person responsible to work towards the formation of the government after the general elections - was recently deprived of this competence which is now the responsibility of the Estates General.

Aged 45, Mark Rutte is a history graduate. He started his professional career with Unilever, where he was responsible for Human Resources before becoming the Secretary of State for Employment and Social Security in 2002 in the government led by Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA). In 2004, he was appointed Secretary of State for Vocational Training and Higher Education. In 2006 he took over as leader of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, which he led to victory in the general elections on 9th June 2010. Four months later, Mark Rutte became the first liberal head of government since 1913.

Before the election Diederik Samsom and Mark Rutte had ruled out the party of a violet coalition

(the name given to the union of liberals and labour) but Wednesday's results make their rapprochement and association in government almost inevitable "The union of the liberals and labour is probable at the cost of concessions regarding their electoral programmes. The Dutch want stability. The violet coalition was very effective from 1994 to 2002. In times of crisis it is more

difficult but maybe this is the only way to impose major structural reform," stresses Andre Krouwel.

The liberals and labour do differ however over their view of Europe: the former support continuing the austerity policy and the latter criticise the austerity set by Brussels. In any case on 12th September the Dutch said a clear "yes" to Europe.

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