

General Elections in the Netherlands

9th June 2010

RESULTS

Liberal and Labour run neck and neck in the Dutch general elections in which the populist party led by Geert Wilders takes 3rd place.

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), led by Mark Rutte and the Labour Party (PvdA), led by Job Cohen emerged neck and neck in the general elections that took place in the Netherlands on 9th June. The Liberal Party increased the number of its MPs in the Second Chamber of the States General (Tweede Kamer), the Lower Chamber in Parliament by nine in comparison with the last general elections on 22nd November 2006 taking 31 seats whilst Labour which withstood the test better than forecast lost 2 seats and ended up with 30 MPs.

The Freedom Party (PVV), a far right party led by Geert Wilders won 24 seats (+16). The Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) led by outgoing Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, weary after eight years in power is the loser in this election. *"It is dramatic. The message is quite clear, voters are always right and they have inflicted a severe defeat on us,"* declared outgoing Foreign Minister, Maxime Verhagen (CDA). The outgoing Prime Minister announced that he was retiring from political life. *"The electorate has spoken and the result is clear. In an election there are winners and losers, this is how democracy works. I have announced this evening that I am giving up the leadership of my party immediately. I shall not be a member of the new Lower Chamber of Parliament. The results of these elections are very disappointing, it is a smack in the face,"* he declared.

The far left Socialist Party (SP) came fifth and won 15 seats (-10); the Green Left (GL) 10 seats (+3) ; the Democrats 66, centre left reform liberals won 10 seats (+7) ; the Christian Union (CU) 5 seats (-1) ; the Political Reform Party (SGP), 2 seats (=) and the Animals Party (PvdD), 2 MPs (=). Turnout declined in comparison with the general elections on 22nd November 2006. It rose to 74.5%, i.e. -3.9 points.

"These are quite historic elections: for the first time since 1913 we are probably going to have a Liberal

Minister," declared André Krouwel, a political scientist from the Vrije University in Amsterdam. The latter made a correct forecast when he said that the Liberals were well on their way to leading the country nearly one century after the government coalition led by Pieter Cort van der Linden (1913-1918). *"What an evening! How exciting! For the first time in history it seems that the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy is the biggest party in the Netherlands!"* rejoiced Mark Rutte.

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) has set the goal of bringing the public deficit (which reached 5.3% of the GDP in 2009) down to zero by 2015 by reducing annual State spending by 10% (i.e. 20 billion €). Opposed to any increases in taxes, VVD leader Mark Rutte is advising rather on limiting administrative costs as well as making cuts in social spending. He has also promised to negotiate a government agreement rapidly to present a strong budget by September next (this is due to be approved on 21st September). The Liberals are advising on the introduction of an austerity plan that includes the abolition of unemployment benefits after one year (instead of three at present), bringing the age of retirement up by two years (set at 65 at present) – a measure which most of the political parties agree with – halving of the cooperation budget and finally a reduction in the

Netherlands contribution to the European Union. With regard to taxes the Liberals are planning to phase out inheritance duties long term and maintain major tax rebates for those who purchase a house. Finally with regard to immigration the VVD programme plans to make it obligatory to learn Dutch and to abolish all State aid for foreigners who come to live in the country for a ten year period.

"Grandiose!" exclaimed the Freedom Party leader (PVV), Geert Wilders when the results were announced. *"More security, less crime, less Islam, this is what the Netherlands has chosen,"* he added. Although the PVV has more than doubled its number of seats it only came third and its result is below the popularity rating it enjoyed just a few months ago. Undoubtedly the PVV suffered because of its attitude after the local elections on 3rd March last (when it chose to remain in the opposition in the town council of Almere, where it in fact won the election) thereby casting doubt about its ability to govern and above all because socio-economic issues (public finance, Greek crisis, uncertainty with regard to the euro, pensions – a key subject in a country where most of the population has placed its money in pension funds) took over from immigration and relations with Islam in order of importance in the minds of the Dutch. These developments however benefited the VVD believed to be more credible in terms of the economy, notably with regard to the creation of jobs.

"Geert Wilders could very well win more than 10% of the electorate and that cannot be ignored. But three reasons explain why he will go no further: he is not convincing in economic terms, his party has not taken its responsibilities in any of the places where it won in the recent local elections, its moderate electorate has fled when they considered the country's real interests," analyses sociologist Paul Scheffer. *"We want to govern and we should be prepared to make concessions,"* declared Geert Wilders, saying that he preferred an agreement with the VVD and the CDA of the outgoing Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende.

The voting method – full proportional representation – means that no party can ever govern alone in the Netherlands. The VVD therefore will have to undertake negotiations with other parties to form a government coalition. *"It will be very difficult to form a government with three or four parties, which will have to be taken both from the left and the right. It would be very surprising if we had a government within two months,"* declared pollster Maurice de Hond before the election. *"Although the Labour Party and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy are very close it will not be easy to see who is to form the government. The image of the party which launches the negotiations will be severely affected if the latter do not lead to a government coalition,"* indicated political science professor at the Twente University, Kees Arts.

When asked about his preferences Mark Rutte declared on 7th June in the last TV debate in the electoral campaign that *"he would exclude no party"*. Two ways are open to him: a rightwing government or in spite of their numerous differences a grand coalition with the PvdA which might however choose to stay in the opposition. *"I do not think we are going to work with Geert Wilders. That has always been my position and I have not changed my mind,"* indicated PvdA leader, Job Cohen.

Since the end of the Second World War Dutch politicians have needed three months on average after the elections to form a government. In 1977 the interested parties even took 208 days i.e. 7 months to come to agreement. Mark Rutte said that he wanted the new government coalition to be formed by 1st July next.

General Election Results 9th June 2010 in the Netherlands

Turnout: 74.5%

Political Parties	% of votes won	N° of seats
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	20.4	31
Labour Party (PvdA)	19.6	30
Freedom Party (PVV)	15.5	24
Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	13.7	21
Socialist Party (SP)	9.9	15
Democrats 66 (D66)	6.9	10
Green Left (GL)	6.6	10
Christian Union (CU)	3.3	5
Political Reform Party (SGP)	1.7	2
Animals Party (PvdD)	1.3	2
Others	1.1	0

Source : <http://www.nlverkiezingen.com/TK2010.html>

THE FOUNDATION'S LATEST PUBLICATIONS

European Elections monitor – Poland – Presidential Election of 20th June 2010 (Analysis)

One year after the elections in Iran: the European Union and the Iranian Crisis

European Issue n°172 – 7/06/2010 - Ladan Boroumand

Voluntary Cooperation in Europe - how to provide new impetus to Europe...

Note n°47 - May 2010 - Pierre Fauchon, François Sicard

You can read all of our publications on our site:
www.robert-schuman.eu

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.