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On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: www.EU-28Watch.org.

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Netherlands

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1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament Elections

Chris Koppe

Limited role for EU-wide front runner and varied opinions on the future of Europe

In the Netherlands, the European elections were held on Thursday, 22nd of May 2014. Compared to the previous elections in 2009, where ten political parties were involved, the number of political parties providing a list with potential candidates almost doubled to nineteen, nine of which had not previously been represented in the European Parliament. This increase seems to coincide with a general trend in Dutch politics, the proliferation of single-issue parties such as the Party for the Animals and 50Plus (de Ouderen partij).

Key Topic Nr. 1: The Future Process of European Integration

During the electoral campaign several topics were debated. However, one issue in particular stood out, that of the future role of the European Union. The electoral debate centred round this subject and all nineteen election programmes held different views on how the EU should move forward. Vehemently advocating that the Netherlands should leave the EU were Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) and Artikel50. These parties believe that it is not in the interest of the Netherlands to remain in the European Union. Opposed to this idea of exiting the EU, the Democrats 66 (D66), who are traditionally known for their pro-Europe stance, advocated a pro-Europe view with further and deeper European integration. Between these two polar opposite positions, other election programmes expressed more nuanced views on the progress of European integration. For example, the Socialist Party (SP) campaigned with the slogan 'Federal State NO, Collaboration YES', while GreenLeft advocated that the EU should be more sustainable, invest in green technology and that the EU should focus on more solidarity. The Christian Democrats (CDA) maintained that the EU should be strong when needed and that the EU's economy should be fair, which could only be achieved by putting the individual at the heart of the economy. The Liberals (VVD) campaigned with the slogan 'Europe where needed'. The Liberals hold the belief that the future of the European economy should be given top priority.

Other Key Topics

Other key topics discussed were the economy (the need for budget control and the need to create jobs), the need for more democracy and transparency in the EU, upcoming threats and challenges such as our energy supply, the protection of fundamental rights and the treatment of refugees and immigrants in the EU. In addition, specific subjects were raised by single-interest parties. For example, the three predominant issues of the political party 50PLUS were (1) to hold an Advisory Referendum in which citizens are consulted about the direction the EU should take (2) for there to be no EU interference with regard to pensions (3) rather than talking *about* older people, it is necessary that the European Union should talk *with* older people.

EU-wide frontrunners and the role they played

A new characteristic of these European elections was the introduction of the EU-wide frontrunners, or Spitzenkandidaten. The idea behind this was to raise awareness about the elections and to

personalise European politics. Moreover, through the creation of the Spitzenkandidaten, a direct link is established between the European elections and the (forthcoming) position of President of the European Commission. Secondly, the creation of the Spitzenkandidaten aims to clarify the relationship between national politics and European politics for the EU citizens. However, the EU-wide frontrunners played little or no role at all during the electoral campaign in the Netherlands. There was one general debate on the 28 April 2014 at the University of Maastricht, broadcast by Euro-News, in which four frontrunners appeared. Moreover, on a national level, only national candidates were given exposure on the political parties' websites and pamphlets. In addition, it was only the national candidates who were invited to the country's debate organised by the Dutch broadcaster NOS on the eve of the elections. Given the lack of attention that the EU-wide frontrunners received in the Dutch media, one might even question whether Dutch citizens understood that they would not only vote for their candidate for the European Parliament, but also for the new President of the European Commission.

Links:

- The election programmes can be consulted on 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.christenunie.nl ; www.sgp.nl; www.partijvoordedieren.nl; <http://www.artikel50.nl/> ; (last accessed 5 August 2014).
- Europolitcs.info, 'European elections: First practice run on Euronews', by Sophie Mosca, 29 April 2014, online available via: <http://europolitcs.info/eu-governance/european-elections-first-practice-run-euronews> Last Accessed: 5 August 2014.

Euroscepticism fosters a push for EU reform

Being one of the founding countries of the European Union, the Netherlands has long been a strong, if somewhat critical, supporter of the European Union. However, in the last few years the Dutch view on the European Union has altered as a result of the economic crisis, unwanted EU regulation, the fear of losing sovereignty to a European super-state and the negative side effects of the free movement of persons on the Dutch labour market. Consequently, the Netherlands has become more eurosceptic in the last few years. With regard to the European elections, euroscepticism did play a role during the electoral campaign and manifested itself in various ways.

A clear example of euroscepticism was the involvement of Geert Wilder's Party for Freedom (PVV) and the political party named Article 50. Both parties strongly advocated that the Netherlands should leave the European Union. Geert Wilders pushed the eurosceptic agenda even further by seeking a European alliance with other eurosceptic parties, eventually to form a eurosceptic block in the European Parliament. Besides these two political parties, one could argue in general that the debate on the future of the European Union itself is a clear example of euroscepticism. Currently, there is only one political party that is clearly pro-Europe, namely Democrats 66 (D66), while the other parties seek some sort of reform of the European Union. Finally, the fact that media coverage during the campaign focused primarily on euroscepticism highlights its relevance.

Links:

- EurActiv.com, 'Eurosceptic tug-of-war expected in next EU Parliament', 6 December 2013. Online available via: <http://www.euractiv.com/eu-elections-2014/eurosceptics-compete-efd-groups-news-532158> Accessed on: 29 July 2014.

Low voter turnout suggests ambivalence towards EU

The total turnout of the European election in the Netherlands was 37%, comparatively less than the EU average of 43.09%, a variation of 6%. On the other hand, when comparing the turnout of 2014 to the turnout of 36.8% in 2009, one must acknowledge that this aspect remains unchanged. This could be considered surprising, since there was a deep concern that the ballot was going to be a fiasco.

Explaining the turnout

Nevertheless, a percentage of 37 means that 63% of the Dutch population stayed at home. According to two Dutch surveys that have been carried out, this can be contributed to the notion that Dutch citizens do not have an interest in the EU whatsoever. 25% of the people asked even expressed a strong resentment against the European Union. So why did 37% of the Dutch population cast their vote on Thursday 22 May 2014? Two explanations can be found. First of all, a fair number of Dutch citizens still believe that the Netherlands is better off by staying in the European Union rather than withdrawing from the European Union. Secondly, some political parties, such as the Christian Democrats, have a loyal constituency who backed up their party's candidates, therefore allowing them to profit most from the low turnout.

Outcome

Twenty-six seats in the European Parliament were to be divided in the Netherlands. The division of these twenty-six seats is as follows:

Christian Democrats (CDA): 5

Democrats 66 (D66): 4

Party for Freedom (PVV): 4

Labour Party (PvdA): 3

People's Party for Freedom and democracy (VVD): 3

The Socialist Party (SP): 2

GreenLeft (GroenLinks): 2

Coalition ChristianUnion (CU)/ Reformed Political Party (SGP): 2

Party for the Animals (PvdD): 1

Explanation

The outcome of the electoral campaign is interesting for three main reasons. First, the Christian Democrats obtained five seats despite the fact that they have lost a number of voters at the national and municipal levels. Secondly, when compared to the elections in 2009, the loss of one seat for Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom is particularly interesting when a political landslide was predicted in the European Union in an attempt to create a European alliance of euroscepticism in the European Parliament. Finally, the number of voters that choose Democrats 66, a pro-Europe party, is significant since the expectations were that the Dutch voters were going to vote in great number for eurosceptic parties, as was the case in France. Based on the final outcome of the European elections, one can assume that the Netherlands is perhaps not as eurosceptic as the eurosceptic parties wish us to believe.

Links:

- Results-elections2014.eu, 'Turnout', online available via: <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html> Last access: 5 August 2014.
- Results-elections2014.eu, 'Results', online available via: <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/country-results-nl-2014.html#table02> Last accessed 5 August 2014.

2. Power relations in the EU

Chris Koppe

Germany, reluctant hegemon

Before one can answer the question of how the Netherlands perceive Germany's role in the EU, another question needs to be answered first, namely: what is Germany's role in the EU? There are two perspectives from which one can answer this. The first is from the European- and world-markets who perceive Germany's role in the EU as leader of the twenty-eight EU Member States. According to them, Germany has not been affected by the economic crisis as badly as the other EU Member States. Moreover, Germany has a strong political leader and a strong and healthy economy. As a result, the expectations towards Germany are immense. They believe, or rather expect, that Germany is able to solve the economic crisis, create stability in the Eurozone, bring about a European banking union and take a leading role in the development of a EU common foreign and security policy. Hence, Germany must take on the role of leader within the European Union.

Germany, on the other hand, does not have the ambition to take on a leadership role in the European Union. Germany's perspective about its role in the European Union is one that takes responsibility, one that is aware of its historical and cultural background, and its power. Moreover, Germany believes that common themes, like creating economic financial stability and safety in the European Union, is to be achieved jointly, rather than realising these aims by imposing them on other EU countries as the leader of the European Union. Hence, Germany's view on its own role in the EU is 'A European Germany rather than a German Europe'.

Now that the two perspectives on Germany's role in the EU have been outlined, the question remains: how does the Netherlands perceive Germany's role in the European Union?

In the Netherlands, Germany's role in the process of further European integration has been, and will be, decisive and exemplary. To demonstrate, on 9 May 2011 the President of the Dutch Senate gave his appraisal to Germany and the role Germany played in the European cooperation. Moreover, over the last few years the relationship between the Dutch PM (Mark Rutte) and Germany has become stronger. Both countries seem to share similar values on how to secure economic and financial stability in the Eurozone. Furthermore, the Netherlands and Germany work together closely within international forums, such as the European Union, to secure safety and economic stability. Overall, the Dutch perspective on Germany's role in the European Union is positive and received well. Such an outlook is not entirely surprising, since the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and Germany are strong and intensive. Maintaining this cordial relationship is vital for the Dutch economy, since Germany is by far our most important business market. Nevertheless, the historical fear of Germany getting too strong, imposing its will upon other countries, seems always to linger in the background.

Links:

- Government of the Netherlands, 'Relations the Netherlands –', online available via: <http://www.government.nl/issues/international-relations/germany> Accessed 30 July 2014.

Partners in austerity for now

In 2012 the austerity vs. growth debate in the Netherlands reached a climax after the resignation of the minority government (cabinet Rutte I) with the support in parliament of Geert Wilder's Party for Freedom, and a new cabinet had to be formed. In the meantime, five political parties (VVD, CDA, D66, GL en CU) reached an agreement known as the Spring Agreement (Lenteakkoord) on 26 April 2012, which primarily included austerity plans.

The upcoming elections in 2012 forced political parties to state their budget plans.

The election programmes demonstrated that there was a general agreement to cut costs, but a disagreement on how to economize and when to execute these austerity programmes. Political parties, like the Democrats 66 and the Socialist Party, were of the opinion not to cut down too

drastically; otherwise these austerity plans could bring the risk of more economic damage. The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) on the other hand was a supporter of severe austerity plans, while placing themselves in between, the Christian Democrats and GreenLeft proposed a mixture of investments and budget cuts. In addition, contrary to the majority that presented austerity plans, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom promised tax reductions.

On 12th September 2012 Dutch citizens cast their vote for a new coalition. The Dutch voters choose either VVD (Liberals) or PvdA (Social Democrats). Eventually, a new cabinet was formed composed of Liberals and Social Democrats. According to the coalition agreement the newly formed coalition 'reflects our search for the best of both worlds'. Based on this agreement, the new coalition has primarily executed an austerity agenda in the last few years, which is being met by political opposition.

Preferred options at the European level?

In the coalition agreement of the current Dutch government there is a separate chapter on the relationship between the Netherlands and the European Union. In this chapter the Dutch government provides an overview of all the points they wish to achieve at European level. One of these agenda points is to ensure that EU Member States will be economically and financially stronger. To realise this objective a European banking union must be established, the position of the Euro-Commissioner must be strengthened and the budget of the EU cannot expand while national budgets needs to make cutbacks. Furthermore, the Netherlands must invest in the proper functioning of the Internal Market and create jobs.

Links:

- Coalition agreement, 'Building Bridges', under Getting the Netherlands out of the crisis: solid, sound and socially responsible, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Labour Party (PvdA), 29 October 2012, on line available via: <http://www.government.nl/government/coalition-agreement> accessed 1 August 2014.

The Netherlands and UK, odd bed fellows

The debate on a possible UK exit (Brexit) has led to various assessments in the Netherlands on this matter.

First of all, the formal stance of the Dutch government is that the UK should stay in the European Union. The debate over a possible Brexit clarified once again, the position of the Dutch government in relation to the UK with regard to European cooperation. Concerning the euro crisis, budget control, the efficiency of the EU and transparency, the Netherlands and the UK share similar concerns, making them allies that need each other to reform the EU from within. Moreover, in view of the increasing power of Germany, the UK provides a strong counterbalance. The position of the Netherlands, staying in the centre between Germany, France and the UK, is crucial for the Netherlands since it allows the Netherlands to seek alliances where needed and find protection to counterbalance views that are not in line with the Dutch view on European cooperation.

Secondly, when David Cameron promised to hold an in-or-out referendum concerning the UK's participation in the European Union, it allowed euro-sceptic parties like Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom to take on Cameron's proposal and argued that the Netherlands should also hold a ballot. However, at the beginning of this year, the Dutch House of Representatives decided that this would not happen.

Thirdly, the discussion about a possible Brexit highlighted the two political views on the progress of European integration. These two outlooks basically boil down to the political view one has about the European Union itself, as former MEP Lousewies van der Laan points out. Those who prefer a federal Europe believe that the UK's behaviour in the EU would prevent further and deeper integration. After all, the UK is not a member of the Schengen-area, has an opt-out with regard to the areas of freedom,

security and justice, has its own currency rather than being a member of the Eurozone, and intends to withdraw its participation in the fundamental rights discourse. On the other hand, those who do not wish to see a federal Europe and fear a Germany's Europe, find it of crucial importance that the UK remains in the European Union in order to counterbalance the power of Germany, something which France lacks the ability to provide.

Finally, in the assessment of the possibility of the UK leaving the European Union, the question was raised whether the EU would survive a British exit. Some argue that the EU would survive a Brexit, because the UK is not part of the vital areas such as the Eurozone. However, such a view fails to recognise that the UK is part of one of the most vital areas of the European Union, namely the Internal Market. Moreover, such a view does not grasp the notion that the Netherlands and the UK share similar ideas on the economy, transparency, democracy and the Internal Market. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that Cameron does want to stay in the Internal Market, but is in favour of a renegotiation of certain elements of the British EU membership. For the Netherlands it is important that the UK stays within the European Union. As such, the Netherlands has an ally for EU reform and, if needed, the UK's power to counterbalance that of Germany.

3. The EU's Neighborhood

Chris Koppe

New difficulties arise in Russia-Dutch relations

The bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Russia was established many centuries ago. To tighten this relationship, the Netherlands and Russia agreed to declare the year 2013 as the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year. Both presidents signed a joint intention declaration, in which they confirmed the bilateral relations between the two countries, the content of the programme, their commitment to make this year a success and the frame in which future relations are defined. The three themes on which the Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year focused were: Economy, Culture, Politics and Society. The Dutch/Russia year opened on 8 April 2013 and came to an end in November, with the Dutch Royal Family visiting Russia.

Besides a year full of festivities and the further deepening of bilateral relations, there were unfortunately several incidents that did not culminate in strengthening the ties between the Netherlands and Russia. For example, there was the Russian import restriction on veal meat, the Dolmatov debacle, Russia accepting legal provisions prohibiting non-traditional relations, the Russian potato boycott, the arrest of the captain and crew of the Arctic Sunrise, the arrest of the Russian diplomat Dmitri Borodin by the Dutch authorities and the physical abuse of the Dutch diplomat Onno Elderenbosch in Moscow along with many, many more. Despite these incidents, the formal stance of the Dutch government on the relationship with Russia is nevertheless considered to be healthy. Though, with the recent events in the Ukraine and the downing of a commercial aircraft, the bilateral as well as the political relations via the European Union are further challenged. The Netherlands together with the other 27 EU Member States hold Russia responsible for further destabilising the Eastern region and support the sanctions taken by the EU as a result of the downing of commercial flight MH17, where 298 passengers died, amongst them 196 Dutch citizens. Despite this tragedy, the Netherlands believe that the relationship between the EU and Russia should be maintained, and hope to find a solution to these ongoing challenges.

Links:

- Government.nl, '2013: Dutch-Russian Bilateral Year', 10 November 2009, online available via: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/betrekkingen-met-nederland/rusland> Last accessed: 6 August 2014.
- European Union External Action Service, 'EU strengthens sanctions in response to situation in Ukraine', online available via: http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2014/300714_eu_sanctions_on_russia_en.htm Last accessed: 6 August 2014.

Events in Ukraine reinforce the importance of improving the Eastern Neighbour Policy

The EU relations with the Eastern Partnership Countries are vital for the Netherlands. The Netherlands has always been of the opinion that prosperity and stability in the EU neighbouring countries, or the lack thereof, has an influence on the stability and prosperity in the European Union. Therefore, the Netherlands realizes the importance of the EU's Eastern Partnership. Recent examples such as the illegal annexation of Crimea, battles in Lugansk and Donetsk, underscore the importance of EU relations with the Eastern Partnership Countries. The aim of the EU's Eastern Partnership is to realise political association and economic integration between the six countries and the European Union through shared interest and shared values even though no EU membership is offered.

On 27 March 2014 the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy adopted the new European Neighbourhood Policy Package. This policy package (including, amongst others, the progress report on Eastern Partnership) was discussed at national level in the Netherlands. The question was: did we achieve the kind of economic and political integration set out by the 2009 Eastern Policy? The Netherlands shares the realistic, though worrying

assessment of the European Neighbourhood Policy Package and proposes a number of recommendations on how to progress further.

Firstly, the EU must give some thought on how to use its ENP policy and the available tools at its disposal to make the ENP more effective. The Netherlands proposes that the EU should conduct an integral policy, in which the context of trade functions as the key for the solution and where an incentive-based approach is favoured. Secondly, the Netherlands believe that the ENP should not pressure the Eastern Countries to make a choice between East and West. Specifically with regard to the Ukraine, the Netherlands share and underscore the views by the EU made in its ENP reports, but wishes to add that the violence against journalists in the Ukraine should receive more attention.

Nonetheless, the Netherlands points out that the relationship between the EU and its neighbouring countries cannot be implemented without a stable relationship with Russia. Russia remains a strategic partner of the European Union and vice versa and both benefit from stability and prosperity at the external border. At this point, the situation becomes complex. On one hand the Netherlands perceives Russia as the entity that creates instability in the Eastern region, while this instability cannot be resolved without the influence of Russia. In this situation, the Netherlands continue to put pressure on Russia, forcing her to cooperate and find a political solution, while on the other hand the Netherlands supports the Ukraine politically, economically and socially.

Links:

- Rijksoverheid.nl, 'Geannoteerde agenda Raad van Buitenlandse Zaken van 22 juli 2014', online available via: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2014/07/09/geannoteerde-agenda-raad-buitenlandse-zaken-van-22-juli-2014.html> Last accessed: 6 August 2014.

Dutch sceptical about Turkey EU membership

On 14 February 2014 the Sixth Turkish-Dutch Bilateral Conference took place in Ankara. During this conference the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that "the Netherlands will be one, once negotiations have finished, who gladly welcome Turkey among the EU member states". This statement led to several questions on the national level. First the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs was asked whether it was wise to make such a claim since the negotiations had not yet begun. How does this statement relate to the arrests of journalists in Turkey? How does it relate to the opening of negotiations and challenges of Chapter 23 (Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights) and Chapter 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security)? Furthermore how does it relate to the situation of Cyprus, the Armenian case, the Rule of Law, Democracy and the recent developments in Turkey relating to corruption? The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs replied to these questions as follows: that his statement fell within the Dutch 'strict and fair'-policy and that he was fully aware of Turkey's shortcomings regarding the Rule of Law and the protection of Human Rights, particularly with reference to the right of freedom of expression and judicial protection. In addition, the Dutch Foreign Minister replied that Chapters 23 and 24 were blocked unilaterally by Cyprus. With regard to the Armenian genocide case, the Dutch FM argued that this matter should be solved bilaterally between Turkey and Armenia. In addition, the recognition of the Armenian genocide by Turkey is not part of the criteria to accede to the EU. However, the Minister of Foreign Affairs emphasised that countries should strive for friendly relationships with neighbouring countries. In that regard, Turkey discussing the Armenian matter would be considered constructive.

Apart from the positive stand of the Dutch government on the accession of Turkey to the EU, some political opponents are strongly against Turkey's membership to the EU, such as MEP Esther de Lange of the Christian Democrats. According to her, Turkey should never join the EU, because it does not respect European values. Nonetheless, she believes that Turkey must be offered an alternative partnership. Turkey itself on the other hand seems to have its own hesitations about whether it will continue the accession procedure, since it possesses its own prejudices.

Links:

- Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'The Sixth Turkish-Dutch Conference was held in Ankara', online available via: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-sixth-turkish_dutch-conference-was-held-in-ankara.en.mfa Last accessed: 6 August 2014.
- Hurriyetdailynews.com, 'Netherlands will welcome Turkey as an EU member State, Dutch FM says', 15 February 2014. Online available via: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/netherlands-will-welcome-turkey-as-an-eu-member-state-dutch-fm-says.aspx?PageID=238&NID=62512&NewsCatID=338> Accessed 2 August 2014.
- Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 'Beantwoording vragen van de leden Segers en Voordewind en Dijkgraaf over de uitspraken van de minister van Buitenlandse Zaken over het EU-lidsmaatschap voor Turkije', 24 maart 2014. Online available via: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/kamerstukken/2014/03/24/beantwoording-kamervragen-over-uitspraken-minister-bz-over-eu-lidmaatschap-turkije.html> Last accessed: 6 August 2014.