**European Elections monitor**

# The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) led by outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte easily pulls ahead in the general elections in the Netherlands

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**Results**

The People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the liberal movement led by outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte easily drew ahead in the general elections that took place on 15th March in the Netherlands. The VVD won 21.3% of the vote and took 33 of the 150 seats available in the Second Chamber (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*), in other words 8 less than in the previous elections on 12th September 2012).

In spite of the victory by the head of government's party, the outgoing government coalition suffered defeat, notably due to the collapse of the its other member, the social democrats of the Labour Party (PvdA), led by Lodewijk Asscher, which won 5.7% of the vote and 9 seats (-29). "*A dramatic loss*" stressed the latter.

The slow death of social democracy is a strong trend across all of Europe.

Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) did not do as well as it might have hoped and did not succeed in making a spectacular breakthrough although its leader presented the result achieved by his party (13.1% of the vote and 20 seats, + 5) as a victory. "*The Freedom Party is not a Trump style revolutionary force. Even though its result is not insignificant, people have remained on the side of sensible politicians,*" indicated Geerten Waling, a researcher in political history at the University of Leiden. "*Geert Wilders' true victory lies in the fact that other parties modelled themselves on his discourse,*" analyses Stefan de Vries, the correspondent in France for the channel RTL4.

The other lesson to be learnt from this general election is the ground won by the pro-European parties: Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), a centre-right party led by Sybrand van Haersma Buma, won 12.5% of the vote and 19 seats (+ 6); Democrats 66 (D66), led by Alexander Pechtold, won 12% of the vote and 19 seats (+ 7) and finally the Green Left (GL), a movement which has become the leading movement on the government left and is well positioned in terms of forming the future government. The ecologists won 8.9% of the vote and won 14 seats (+ 10).

In all thirteen parties will be represented in the next parliament, i.e. two more than in the previous legislature. "*The Netherlands have a multi and extremely diversified party tradition: religious, secular, Christian, Protestant, left, right. But the thing that has changed over the last two decades is that the dominant parties have lost a great deal of influence and are now secondary movements. The political landscape is much more fragmented,*" analyses Eddy Habben Jansen, Diretor of Prodemos, a Dutch non-profit organisation providing information to citizens on democracy.

The Socialist Party (SP) led by Emile Roemer won 9.2% of the vote and also 14 seats (- 1). The Christian Union (CU), led by Gert-Jan Segers, won 3.4% of the vote and 5 seats (=) ; the Animals Party (PvdD), led by Marianne Thieme, 3.1% of the vote and 5 seats (+ 3); 50PLUS, a party created to defend the interests of the retired and led by Henk Krol, 3.1% of the vote and 4 seats (+ 2); The Political Reformed Party (SGP), led by Kees van der Staaij, 2.1% of the vote and 3 seats (=). Finally two new parties will be making their debut in the Tweede Kamer: Denk, a party founded in 2015 by two former Labour MPs Tunahan Kuzu and Selçuk Öztürk, who defend the rights of the minorities, won 2% of the vote and three MPs and the Forum for Democracy (FvD) led by Eurosceptic Thierry Baudet which won 1.8% of the vote and 2 seats.

Eight Dutch citizens in ten turned out to vote. The turnout totalled 80.4% i.e. 5.8 points more than in the previous general elections on 12th September 2012.

**The Results of the General Elections of 15th March 2017 in the Netherlands**

Turnout: 80.4%

| Politicial Parties | % of the votes won | Number of seats won |
|---|---|---|
| **People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)** | 21.30 | 33 |
| **Freedom Party (PVV)** | 13.10 | 20 |
| **Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA))** | 12.50 | 19 |
| **Democrats 66 (D66)** | 12 | 19 |
| **Socialist Party (SP)** | 9.20 | 14 |
| **Green Left (GL)** | 8.90 | 14 |
| **Labour Party (PvdA)** | 5.70 | 9 |
| **Christian Union (CU)** | 3.40 | 5 |
| **Animals Party (PvdD)** | 3.10 | 5 |
| **50PLUS** | 3.10 | 4 |
| **Political Reformed Party (SGP)** | 2.10 | 3 |
| **Denk** | 2 | 3 |
| **Forum for Democracy (FvD)** | 1.80 | 2 |
| **Others** | 1.80 | 0 |

Source : https://lfverkiezingen.appspot.com/nos/widget/main.html

"*Our message to the Netherlands, the conversations we have had with the electorate about how we shall maintain our goals for the next few years so that the country remains stable, safe and prosperous, this message was heard. The country gave us this result and we are particularly grateful to it. But it is also an evening for all of Europe, I have spoken with quite a few of my European counterparts. It is also an evening when the Netherlands, after the Brexit, after the American elections, brought dubious populism to a halt. Now it is especially important that over the next few weeks we come together to form a stable government so that this country can be led sensibly for the next four years. I will do everything I can,*" declared Mark Rutte.

Over the last few days of the electoral campaign the outgoing Prime Minister positioned himself as the defender of his country and of its values as he prevented the Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister, Mevlüt Cavusoglu, from entering the Netherlands. The latter hoped to take part in a rally in the Netherlands organised in support of his president of the Republic Recep Tayyip Erdogan just weeks before the referendum organised by the latter in Turkey (16th April next). Moreover another Turkish minister, who entered the country via Germany was taken back to the border. This undeniably played in favour of the VVD.

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker (European People's Party, EPP) congratulated Mark Rutte on his victory: "*a vote for Europe, a vote against the extremists,*" tweeted his spokesperson, Margaritis Schinas.

In all likelihood Mark Rutte will be appointed for his third term as head of government. The support of at

least three other political parties will be necessary for him to achieve a majority in Parliament (76 out of 150). Negotiations might therefore be long and take several weeks, even months.

The leader of the Second Chamber, Khadija Arib (PvdA), will now meet with the leaders of the different parties to appoint an "explorer" who is traditionally a representative of the biggest party, who will assess which coalition has the greatest chances of succeeding. On his/her advice the new MPs will appoint the "informers", i.e. the members of the parties in question, who together will draft a government project and put forward a "government maker" in the Second Chamber. Generally this person then becomes Prime Minister of the new government.

The Christian Democratic Appeal and the Democrats66 are natural partners for the liberals in the VVD but another party will undoubtedly be required to achieve an absolute majority in the Second Chamber which is set at 76 seats. This might be the Christian Union, the Political Reformed Party or the Green Left.

"*If possible I would like to co-govern, but if that does not work, we shall support the government when necessary regarding questions that are dear to us,*" declared Geert Wilders, who indicated that he would be a force of "*ferocious opposition*" if he did not enter government.

We should remember that all of the Dutch parties have ruled out collaborating with him.

"*We have seen, I believe, in the last part of the campaign that many parties have tried to adopt some of our positions even though they will not implement them,*" stressed Geert Wilders. "*I believe that our influence has become significant, maybe more important than when we were in power as a silent partner in the government coalition. But again Mr Rutte has not got rid of me and with even more people we shall put up tough opposition against the government and make every single day complicated,*" he added.

Aged 50, Mark Rutte is a history graduate. He started his professional career with Unilever where he took care of Human Resources before becoming 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 the leadership of the VVD which he led to victory in the general elections on 9th June 2010. Four months later Mark Rutte became the first leader of a liberal government of the Netherlands since 1913. He was re-appointed to this post after the general elections on 12th September 2012. The government coalition that he then formed with the Labour Party was the first since 2002 to have served for the entire length of the legislature.

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