



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **From eurorealism to europhilia? The 2021 Dutch elections and the new approach of the Netherlands in EU politics**

Otjes, S.P.

### **Citation**

Otjes, S. P. (2022). From eurorealism to europhilia?: The 2021 Dutch elections and the new approach of the Netherlands in EU politics. *Journal Of Common Market Studies*, 60, 60-75. doi:10.1111/jcms.13390

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC 4.0 license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3515646>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# From Eurorealism to Europhilia? The 2021 Dutch Elections and the New Approach of the Netherlands in EU Politics

SIMON OTJES

Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands

## Introduction

In the last decade, the Netherlands has been the voice of fiscal conservatism in the European Union. This was in line with the Dutch self-perceived national interest as a net payer and creditor country and with the position of the largest Dutch government party, the Liberal Party (VVD). This conservative-liberal party has been in government since 2010 in various different coalitions. Since 2017, the centre-right, Eurorealist Rutte III-government also consisted of the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), the social-liberal Democrats 66 (D66) and the Christian-social ChristianUnion (CU).

In 2021, the Netherlands held elections: these allowed the sitting government to continue and, after extremely long coalition formation talks, it did. The elections, however, shifted the balance of power within the coalition towards the Eurofederalist D66. The central question of this contribution is *how the elections and the ensuing coalition formation have affected and will affect the position of the Netherlands in the European game of coalition building*.

This article has the following structure. Firstly, I describe the position of the Netherlands in the coalition politics of the Council of the European Union. Then, I turn towards the elections, the campaign, the results and the importance of EU integration for voting behaviour. Next, I discuss the coalition formation process, the coalition agreement and the distribution of offices. Finally, I discuss what the EU position of the Dutch government may be in the coming years.

## I. Position of the Netherlands in Europe before 2021

EU politics is all about coalition building. Under Qualified Majority Voting (QMV), majority building in the Council of the European Union depends on countries coordinating positions and voting as a bloc. For a long time, The Hague was oriented towards London and Berlin. The United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands shared an Atlanticist orientation and a vision of the EU as a free trade zone. In the Council, the Netherlands often voted the same as the United Kingdom (UK) (van Roozendaal et al., 2012). Ahead of Council meetings the Netherlands coordinated with the UK and other fiscally conservative, pro-trade, Northern Member States (Rood, 2018). The Netherlands also coordinates closely with Germany, in particular on issues related to the euro, as the Netherlands shares the German orientation towards fiscal discipline (Sie Dhian Ho et al., 2018). Crucially, in the political economy of the Eurozone, both the Netherlands

and Germany have a structural large surplus in the current account (Rojas-Romagosa & Van der Horst, 2015).

When the UK left the European Union, the Netherlands had to reorient itself (Sie Dhian Ho et al., 2018). It had to construct new coalitions, in particular to balance the Franco-German axis. The Netherlands focused on the formation of the New Hanseatic League, of Northern, fiscally conservative states (Korteweg, 2018).<sup>1</sup> They opposed the formation of a Eurozone budget and instead believed that it should be national governments who should be responsible for keeping the EU's economy robust, which in their perspective required fiscal discipline.

During the Covid19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis, the Netherlands operated in the Frugal Four<sup>2</sup> and coordinated with the similarly fiscally conservative German government. They opposed debt mutualization and emphasized the need for structural reforms. VVD Prime Minister Mark Rutte's tough negotiation style earned him the nickname 'Dr No' (Van Wiel, 2020). The Minister of Finance, Wopke Hoekstra, of the CDA, had a similar style. Iratxe García, a Spanish Socialist MEP described his behaviour during these negotiations as 'offensive, ignorant and arrogant' (Walker & Schaart, 2020). Despite close coordination with other fiscally conservative countries, the Netherlands had to accept many exceptional decisions during the Covid19 crisis, such as the European Commission issuing their own bonds and suspension of budgetary rules.

## II. Election Campaign

In 2021, the Netherlands held regularly planned elections. The centre-right government of liberals and Christian-democrats fell two months before the elections over a childcare allowance scandal. The tax service had overzealously pursued minor infractions by citizens who received this allowance, singling out people with double nationalities (Otjes & Voerman, 2022).

Covid19 was a blanket that covered the campaign (Otjes, 2021b). As Covid19 restrictions prevented parties from campaigning in person, the campaign was fought over social and traditional media. It focused on three televised debates (Otjes & Voerman, 2022). The central question in these concerned leadership. The popularity of Prime Minister Rutte had increased during the Covid19 period due to what Van der Meer et al. (2020) characterized as a 'rally 'round the flag effect'. This leadership was, however, challenged from within his government by Hoekstra, who stepped in a few months before the election as leader of the CDA and by Sigrid Kaag, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation and newly elected leader of D66.

Rutte, who had been prime-minister for nearly a decade, is seen as a competent manager who has the ability to bring diverse coalitions together. Hoekstra played the role of stern Minister of Finance with gusto. Kaag promised 'New Leadership', emphasizing integrity, that her leadership would be more value-driven and that one of these values was an international orientation. As a multilingual former diplomat, Kaag had caught the imagination of the Dutch public when she had briefly served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2018. The possibility of a female Prime Minister attracted progressive voters

<sup>1</sup> A coalition of the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

<sup>2</sup> A coalition of the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Austria.

(Otjes, 2021c). In the last days of the campaign, Kaag's challenge became more credible, while Hoekstra's never really came off the ground.

Substantive issues never played a major role in the campaign, not even the childcare allowance scandal. Certainly, 'Europe' did not play a large role in the campaign. This led some pundits to launch an online campaign '#EUElephant'. In their view, EU integration was the elephant in the room: very important, but not discussed (Bokestijn, 2021; Bokestijn et al., 2021). In particular the future of the euro would be a major theme. A key question was whether the crisis measures would have a lasting character – namely whether the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) that had been waived in the crisis, would return and whether the recovery fund which issues common debt would have a permanent nature (Otjes, 2021c).

### III. Election Results

The elections were both the most and the least exceptional Dutch elections in years: electoral volatility was the lowest in more than 30 years. The government retained its majority, for the first time in nearly 20 years. It actually expanded its majority which had last happened nearly a quarter of a century ago. Yet there were 17 parliamentary party groups (PPGs) in the lower house, the most fractionalized parliament in Dutch political history (Otjes & Voerman, 2022). Despite the EU not playing a major role in the campaign, the electoral victors were those most outspoken opponents and advocates of EU integration as can be seen in Table 1.

The VVD was the largest party in the Dutch parliament. It got 34 out 150 seats, mainly due to the popularity of Rutte. This party favours individual freedom and responsibility on moral, economic and environmental matters and a restrictive migration policy. On European integration, it believes the Dutch national interest, often defined in economic terms, should be central. The party describes this course as 'Eurorealist' (Harryvan & Van der Harst, 2015, p. 275). It is particularly hostile to a 'transfer union', where rich countries would sustain poorer countries. Recently, the VVD has become more pro-European. In particular, it sees the EU as a way to address the issue of migration. A stricter EU migration policy should prevent asylum seekers from coming to the Netherlands. Instead they should be sheltered in countries close to the conflict regions they originate from: in the example of the current Syrian crisis, asylum seekers should be sheltered in Turkey. The VVD belongs to the right-wing of the European liberal family, Renew Europe, together with the German FDP.

D66 became the second largest party with 24 seats, up from 19. This rivalled the best result of the party. It mixes left-wing and right-wing positions on the economy, for instance advocating education investment and pension liberalization. It combines this with progressive positions on migration, environmental and moral questions. The party is Eurofederalist: it favours the Netherlands integrating into a European federation where national vetoes are replaced by democratic decision-making. For D66, Europe is the only way to address global challenges such as climate change. It favoured a eurozone budget and Eurobonds long before the Covid19 crisis (Vollaard & Voerman, 2015, p. 166), although its 2021 manifesto was not very outspoken on this. D66 is at the centre of Renew Europe, together with the French LREM.

Table 1: Election Results

| <i>Abb.</i> | <i>English name</i>         | <i>EP Group</i>      | <i>Ideology</i>             | <i>EU stance<sup>c</sup></i> | <i>2017<sup>c</sup></i> | <i>2021<sup>c</sup></i> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| VVD         | Liberal Party               | Renew                | Conservative-liberal        | Eurorealist (5.1)            | 33                      | 34                      |
| D66         | Democrats 66                | Renew                | Social-liberal              | Eurofederalist (6.9)         | 19                      | 24                      |
| PVV         | Freedom Party               | I&D                  | Radical right-wing populist | Hard Eurosceptic (1.3)       | 20                      | 17                      |
| CDA         | Christian-Democratic Appeal | EPP                  | Christian-democratic        | Eurorealist (5.3)            | 19                      | 15                      |
| SP          | Socialist Party             | GUE-NGL <sup>a</sup> | Left-wing populist          | Soft Eurosceptic (2.8)       | 14                      | 9                       |
| PvdA        | Labour Party                | S&D                  | Social-democratic           | Pro-European (5.9)           | 9                       | 9                       |
| GL          | GreenLeft                   | G-EFA                | New left                    | Pro-European (6.5)           | 14                      | 8                       |
| FvD         | Forum for Democracy         | ECR                  | Radical right-wing populist | Hard Eurosceptic (1.1)       | 2                       | 8                       |
| PvdD        | Party for the Animals       | GUE-NGL              | Deep green                  | Soft Eurosceptic (2.6)       | 5                       | 6                       |
| CU          | ChristianUnion              | EPP                  | Christian-social            | Eurorealist (4.0)            | 5                       | 5                       |
| Volt        |                             | G-EFA                | Social-liberal              | Eurofederalist (N/A)         | 0                       | 3                       |
| JA21        | Correct Answer 21           | ECR                  | Radical right-wing populist | Soft Eurosceptic (N/A)       | 0                       | 3                       |
| SGP         | Political Reformed Party    | ECR                  | Christian-conservative      | Soft Eurosceptic (2.9)       | 3                       | 3                       |
| DENK        | Think/Equal <sup>b</sup>    | -                    | Multiculturalist            | Eurorealist (4.7)            | 3                       | 3                       |
| 50PLUS      |                             | EPP <sup>a</sup>     | Pensioners' interest        | Eurorealist (3.9)            | 4                       | 1                       |
| BBB         | Farmer-Citizens-Movement    | -                    | Rural interest              | Soft Eurosceptic (N/A)       | 0                       | 1                       |
| BIJ1        | As1                         | -                    | Intersectional feminist     | Pro-European (N/A)           | 0                       | 1                       |

<sup>a</sup>No longer in the EP, but in this group historically.

<sup>b</sup>Think in Dutch and Equal in Turkish.

<sup>c</sup>Seats out of 150; EU stance Numbers refer to the CHES dataset (Polk et al., 2017)

The other two government parties, CDA and CU, did not expand their seats. The CDA slipped from 19 to 15 seats. It takes centre-right positions on economic, environmental, moral and migration matters. The party stands in between the VVD and D66 on EU integration, although on eurozone issues, it stands closer to the VVD. In the Christian-democratic EPP, the CDA is close to the German CDU. The final coalition party CU maintained its five seats. This party mixes left-wing positions on economic matters, refugees and the environment with conservative views on labour migrants and moral matters such as abortion. The CU is least committed to the euro and has proposed that weaker economies leave the eurozone, in line with the party's Eurosceptic past (Vollaard & Voerman, 2015, p. 127). This Eurosceptic past is also visible in the fact that until 2019, it was a member of the ECR, which it has since left for the EPP.

To the left of the government, there are seven parties: the social-democratic Labour Party (PvdA), the left-populist Socialist Party (SP), the GreenLeft (GL), the deep green Party for the Animals (PvdD), the pensioners' party 50PLUS, the multicultural DENK

and the intersectional-feminist BIJ1. These parties fell from 49 to 37 seats this election, a historical low point. The left is divided between the pro-European PvdA and GL, and the soft-Eurosceptic SP and PvdD (Vollaard & Voerman, 2015). The pensioners' party 50PLUS, the parties DENK and BIJ1, which tend to do well with migrant communities (Otjes & Spierings, 2021), have less outspoken positions on Europe. 50PLUS opposes a transfer union, DENK EU bureaucracy and BIJ1 the lack of democracy.

To the right of the government there are Eurosceptic forces: three radical right-wing populist parties, the Freedom Party (PVV), Forum for Democracy (FvD) and JA21 as well as the Political Reformed Party (SGP) and the rural party FarmerCitizenMovement (BBB). The PVV and FvD favour a Nexit (Otjes, 2021a; Vollaard & Voerman, 2015). The PVV lost slightly (from 20 to 17), but FVD went from 2 to 8. It had morphed into an anti-lockdown party. In this process, it had lost its 'moderate' wing, which formed JA21. This party, for instance, is Eurosceptic but does not want the Netherlands to leave the EU (Otjes, 2021b). It shares this profile with the conservative Christian Political Reformed Party. BBB wants the EU to return to its roots as a European economic community.

Finally, there is Volt Netherlands. This is the Dutch branch of a pan-European party which also has a single seat in the European Parliament (for Germany). It won three seats. It describes its own position as 'pro-European, pragmatic and progressive', which is close to D66, but it appears to have carved out its own niche among young and progressive voters (Leruth, 2021).

Despite the fact that Europe did not play a major role in the elections, the two extreme poles of the EU dimension performed well. We can think of an EU dimension that divides voters and parties with different views of the European Union (Mudde, 2012; Ray, 2007; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008). On the one side, there are the hard-Eurosceptics that reject their country's membership of the European Union. On the other side, there are those who favour a fully-fledged European federation. In between, we have soft-Eurosceptics that oppose the current direction of European integration and pro-European parties that favour further European integration. In this election the Eurofederalist parties (D66 and Volt) went from 19 seats to 27 seats. The hard-Eurosceptic parties (PVV and FVD) went from 22 seats to 25 seats. The polarization on the EU dimension is clearly visible.

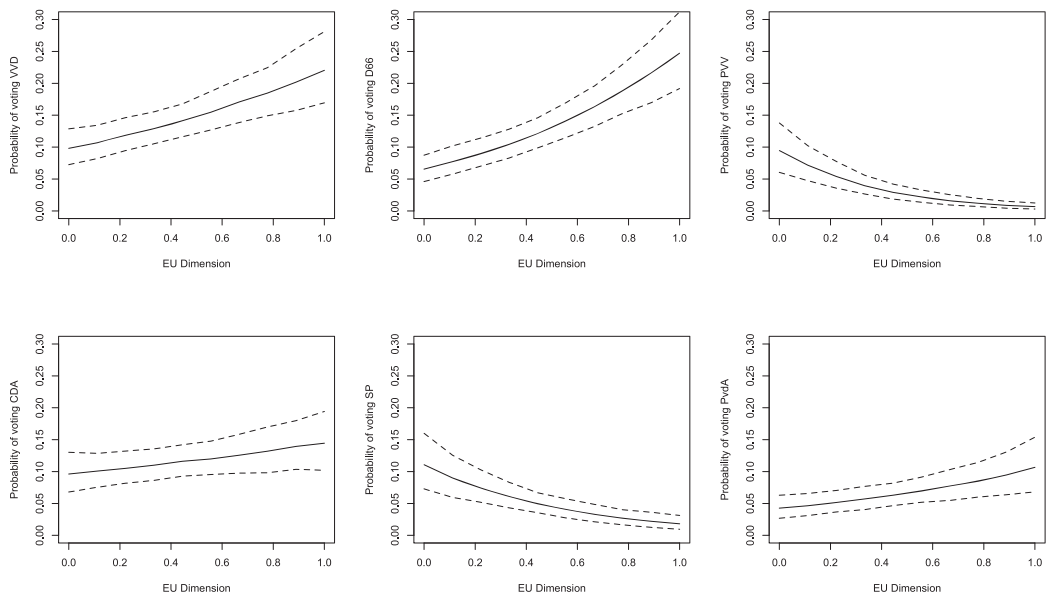
There are specific reasons that led to this outcome (for example the appeal of Kaag as D66 leader and the choice of FVD to campaign as anti-lockdown party). But from a more distant perspective, it may be that in the absence of a substantial debate between the economic left and economic right, voters have expressed a deeper underlying division between cosmopolitans and patriots. The importance of this division has grown in the past years (De Vries, 2018).

#### IV. Voter Motivations

As we see the Eurofederalist and hard Eurosceptic parties winning, the question arises, 'What role did EU integration play in voters' considerations?' To this end we use the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (Jacobs et al., 2021). Voters were asked about a number of policy issues and their vote choice in the elections. We examine the European dimension, while controlling for the economic dimension, the cultural dimension and the moral dimension (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2008; Kriesi et al., 2006), as well as gender,



Figure 1: Voting VVD, D66, PVV, CDA, SP and PvdA (Based on Table A3 in the Appendix)



age and education. All the dimensions are measured using multi-item scales presented in the Appendix. We look at voting for the six largest parties.

The predicted probabilities are presented in Figure 1. The European dimension is most important for understanding why voters vote PVV. If we move from the least to the most Eurosceptic voter, the likelihood to vote PVV increases 15-fold. The SP also attracts Eurosceptic voters. Moving from the least to the most Eurosceptic voter, increases the likelihood to vote SP six times. D66 attracts pro-European voters. If we move from least to the most pro-European voter, the probability of voting for D66 increases four times. The VVD and PvdA also attract pro-European voters. Moving from the least to the most pro-European voter more than doubles the probability of voting VVD and PvdA. Of these six, EU integration did not play a significant role for voting for the CDA. In terms of explanatory power, the EU dimension is in the top two factors for the SP, D66 and PVV.

These numbers appear to indicate that 'Europe' played a role in the minds of the voters. There are parties that attracted Eurosceptic voters (PVV and SP) and parties that attract pro-European voters (D66, PvdA and VVD). What is notable is that these patterns are present, even when controlling for the cultural dimension. This separates those who favour an open, multicultural notion of Dutch identity and those who favour a closed, monocultural notion. The cultural and European dimensions are correlated.<sup>3</sup> The patterns for the VVD is particularly interesting: it attracts people who favour European integration but oppose immigration. Despite a campaign without substance, voters still voted for parties that fit their ideological profiles, including on Europe.

<sup>3</sup>  $r = 0.59$ , significant at the 0.01 per cent level.

## V. Coalition Formation

Elections are only the first step in the Dutch political process. The next step is coalition formation. Here, the preferences of the different parties are transformed into a binding coalition agreement. The previous agreement committed the parties to an austere eurozone course opposing future bailouts, Eurobonds and exceptions to the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP).

Whereas the election campaign was uneventful, the following coalition formation, which lasted almost 300 days, was the opposite. A lot of it falls outside of the scope of this article (see Otjes & Voerman, 2022). What matters is that in the end, there were six parties that, according to *informateur* Mariëtte Hamer, were sufficiently close on policy to form a coalition: VVD, D66, CDA, PvdA, GL and CU. Despite the lack of substantial differences, there were mutual vetoes: VVD and CDA refused to govern with *both* the GL and PvdA. These two however refused to govern *without* each other. D66 refused to govern with *both* the CDA and CU. This led to a deadlock: no majority coalition was possible. After almost 200 days, Kaag gave in. She dropped her veto. This opened the door to the continuation of the sitting coalition (VVD, D66, CDA and CU). On December 15, the parties presented their agreement: *Looking after each other and looking forward to the future*.

## VI. Coalition Agreement

In Dutch politics, the coalition agreement plays an important role. This is not only evident from the level of detail, its length and the time it takes to write it, but also that during the term, the coalition parties treat it as ‘the Bible’ (Holzhacker, 2002; Timmermans & Andeweg, 2000).

EU integration was a significant part of the coalition agreement. About 10 per cent of the proposals in it mentioned the EU directly. The EU is mentioned in three ways: firstly, as a way to avoid making decisions. The meat of the migration paragraph, for instance, which strongly divided VVD and D66, was that government would cooperate with the European Commission on the fundamental revision of the EU migration policy. Similar formulations can be found for climate policy, in particular on aviation. On other issues, the EU was an arena where the government actually had ambitions. This prominently includes EU reform: the coalition agreed to support a new European treaty, which would strengthen the European Parliament, and QMV on foreign policy issues. Finally, the EU is also sometimes mentioned as a constraint, for instance on plans for legalizing the synthetic drugs usually called ‘ecstasy’ (XTC).

I use the method developed by Schermann and Ennser-Jedenastik (2014) to examine the negotiations in greater detail. I restrict the analysis to the policies specifically mentioning the EU. For each proposal in a party manifesto that mentions the EU,<sup>4</sup> I checked to what extent proposals of different parties were identical (for example D66 and CU

<sup>4</sup>Mostly these are single bullet proposals, but when under one bullet parties discussed very different policies (visible by the use of words like ‘additionally’) these were separated.



Table 2: Party Positions on the EU in the Coalition Agreement

| <i>Party</i> | <i>Seats (share)</i> | <i>VVD</i> | <i>D66</i> | <i>CDA</i> | <i>CU</i> | <i>Unique</i> | <i>In CA</i> | <i>Of CA</i> | <i>N</i>         |
|--------------|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| VVD          | 34 (44%)             | -          | 24%        | 31%        | 20%       | 53%           | 23%          | 45%          | 86               |
| D66          | 24 (31%)             | 16%        | -          | 17%        | 25%       | 61%           | 25%          | 75%          | 134              |
| CDA          | 15 (19%)             | 44%        | 37%        | -          | 37%       | 29%           | 40%          | 55%          | 62               |
| CU           | 5 (6%)               | 22%        | 42%        | 29%        | -         | 40%           | 31%          | 57%          | 78               |
| Total        | 78                   |            |            |            |           |               | 28%          |              | 253 <sup>a</sup> |

<sup>a</sup>Excluding overlapping proposals.

committed themselves to a common European minimum profit tax) and whether these proposals end up in the coalition agreement.

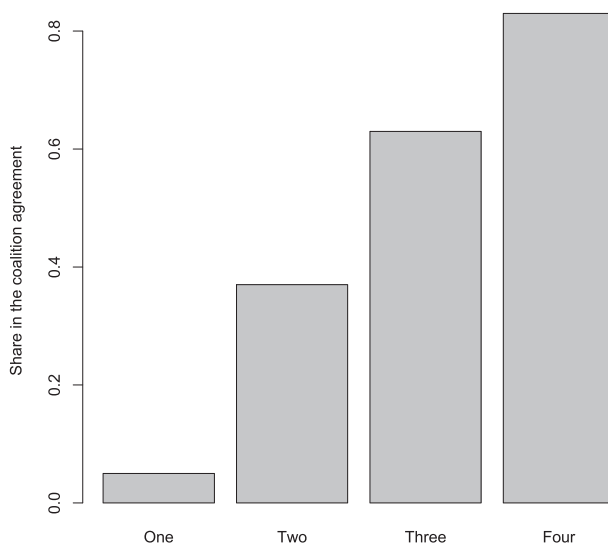
Which parties agree on which policies is already telling (see Table 2). For the VVD, the CDA is their ideal partner. Thirty-one per cent of the VVD's proposals are shared by the CDA. For instance, both parties favour a new European medical research fund. This is even better from the perspective of the CDA: 44 per cent of its proposals return in the VVD manifesto. For D66, the CU is the best partner. From its perspective, there is 25 per cent overlap with CU. Both parties for instance favour European policies to combat tax avoidance. This is even better from the perspective of the CU: 42 per cent.

We can think of success in two ways: what share of proposals made by a party got into the coalition agreement and what share of proposals in the coalition agreement were made by a party. The first is the extent to which a party was successful in getting its (entire) manifesto into the agreement. The second is the extent to which a party got the coalition agreement to match its preferences. Both of these are shown in Table 2. On the EU proposals, the VVD did relatively poorly: it got less than a quarter of its EU proposals into the coalition agreement and less than half of the EU proposals in the agreement were made by the party. The CDA got two in five of its EU proposals into the coalition agreement and more than half of the EU proposals in the agreement are items from in the CDA. It is not strange that the CDA did well: it has the highest overlap with other parties. The CU got one in three EU proposals in the coalition agreement and more than half of the EU proposals in the agreement matched its preferences. D66 has another mix. It made a large number of proposals. Only a quarter of these got in the agreement. But three quarters of the agreement was proposed by D66. Depending on your perspective, either the CDA or D66 was the winner of the negotiations on the EU paragraph. The VVD was the clear loser.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the most important predictor of whether a proposal got into the agreement was how many parties supported it. Five out of six proposals endorsed by all four parties got in. This includes abolishing the veto for sanction decisions.<sup>5</sup> Three out of five proposals favoured by three parties returned in the agreement, including introducing a CO<sub>2</sub> tax for imported goods. One out of three proposals that two parties endorsed ended up in the agreement, including the commitment that the EU would not gain the power to levy more direct taxes. Only one out of 20 proposals that one party endorsed

<sup>5</sup>Only the proposal for a constructive relationship with the UK post-Brexit did not end up in the coalition agreement.

Figure 2: Share of Proposals in the Coalition Agreement by Number of Parties Mentioning It



ended up in the coalition agreement. Still, these are nine proposals, including support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure and West Balkan accession.<sup>6</sup> All in all, having allies is what counts in negotiations (see also Otjes, 2021d).

There are three important caveats. Perhaps, the most important ally was not in The Hague, but in Berlin. The German coalition agreement was adopted three weeks before the Dutch. On many EU issues, the Dutch agreement followed the Germans: support for a new European treaty, a stronger European Parliament, the *Spitzenkandidaten* system, QMV on foreign policy and rule of law conditionality.

The second caveat is about the relevance of the agreement. Famously the 1989 government was installed just two days before the Berlin Wall fell. That meant that its foreign policy paragraphs were no longer relevant. Moreover, given that the Rutte IV government does not have a majority in the Senate which has a full veto on legislation, the coalition agreement is also tentative in nature. Where policies need to be turned into legislation, the coalition agreement is the start of negotiations with the opposition. In this specific case, the government can look to PvdA and GL on its left or JA21 on its right.

The final caveat is that it is easy to put a vague commitment to text. The most important issue from the Dutch perspective is the future of SGP. The coalition agreement now says:

We are committed to sound and prudent macroeconomic policies and necessary reforms by Member States aimed at sustainable debt levels, more economic growth and increased economic convergence. We approach a modernization of the Stability and Growth Pact

<sup>6</sup>None of the proposals made only by the VVD got in, 3 per cent of the CU-only proposals, 5 per cent of the D66-exclusive proposals and 17 per cent of the CDA-only proposals.

constructively, when this is focused on debt sustainability and increased economic convergence. We require effective enforcement [of budgetary rules].

This leaves considerable leeway for interpretation. This will in part be done by the ministers on these portfolios.

## VII. Cabinet Composition

These ministers were installed on 10 January 2022, nearly a year after the Rutte III government had handed in its resignation. As one can see in Figure 3, the cabinet offices were divided proportionally between the parties with the CU getting slightly above a proportional share and VVD getting slightly less (see Browne & Franklin, 1973).

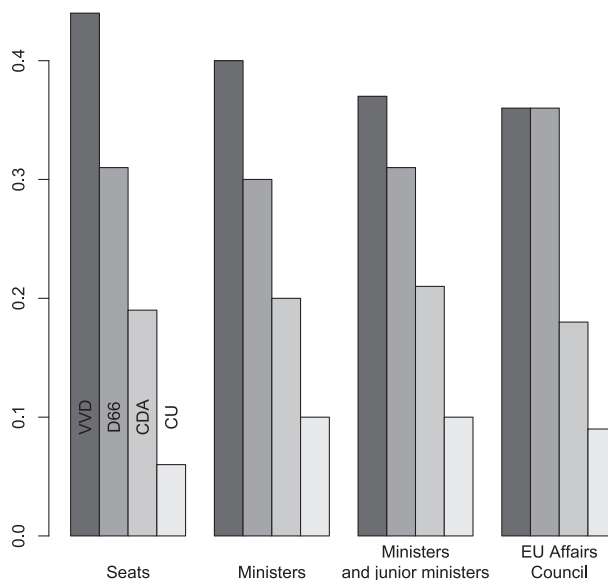
The two most important offices concerning the Dutch position in the EU are the Prime Minister, which remains Rutte, and the Minister of Finance, which is now Kaag. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, which historically has been important in EU affairs, has become less prominent. This position is taken by Hoekstra.

For the EU position of the cabinet, the cabinet composition is less relevant than the composition of the Council for European Affairs. This discusses the cabinet's strategic European agenda and prepares the meetings of the European Council. It consists out of 11 of the 29 cabinet officers. VVD and D66 both have four representatives on this council. All in all, D66 has a strong position on EU issues.

## VIII. Looking Forward to the Future

So, what will be the role of the Netherlands in the European Union? Compared to the last decade, where the Netherlands was the voice for austerity, we can see a clear shift. D66 is

Figure 3: Share of Cabinet Offices



now the second party in the coalition. It has put its finger prints on the coalition agreement, which has a pro-European orientation. On thorny issues that it cannot solve itself, migration and climate, the Netherlands looks to the European Commission for solutions. These are also key issues for the two leading parties. The Netherlands is willing to renegotiate the Stability and Growth pact to allow for greater investments. In general, I would expect the Netherlands to become a more constructive partner in Brussels. D66 also has gotten important positions in the cabinet, in particular the Minister of Finance. This change is not just policy driven. D66 attracts voters with its pro-European profile and, on this issue, Volt has become a competitor. D66 has an interest in keeping the government to a pro-European course, more than VVD or CDA have an interest in a government with a Euro-realist profile.

Already, as Minister of Finance, Kaag has made new coalitions, for instance with the Spanish Socialist finance minister on an SGP reform that allows countries more time to recover from economic downturn (Hensen, 2022). In a speech on 23 February 2022, Kaag signaled the Dutch willingness to re-think the SGP to allow greater room for public investments, in particular to fight climate change. The vague words in the coalition agreement now have to become actions and the new Minister of Finance pursues a different course than her predecessor: with a greater eye towards the needs of Southern Member States and a more constructive and diplomatic tone.

Yet, on the day after Kaag's speech, 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. This war not only cost thousands of Ukrainian and Russian lives, but it also upset the geo-political reality under which the Dutch coalition agreement was written. There are multiple examples of this. For instance, limiting the influx of refugees had been a prime goal of the VVD, as it believed that countries close to a crisis ought to shelter asylum seekers that originate from that crisis instead of the Netherlands. Now a war has broken out on the borders of the European Union and the Netherlands houses Ukrainian refugees. Secondly, in addition to the states of the Western Balkans, Ukraine has applied to become a member of the EU. In the ensuing debate, the Netherlands was hesitant. Yet even on this issue, the Netherlands has not upset the newly formed EU consensus and voted in favour of Ukraine becoming a candidate Member State.

## References

- Boekstijn, A.-J. (2021) 'Europa is de olifant in de Kamer'. *NPORadio1*, <https://www.nporadio1.nl/opinie-commentaar/29897-europa-is-de-olifant-in-de-kamer> (25/2/2021).
- Boekstijn, A.-J., Livestro, J., Schoonis, J., Segers, M. & De Vries, C. (2021) Den Haag moet niet doen alsof er geen EU is. *NRC Handelsblad*. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/03/22/den-haag-moet-niet-doen-alsof-er-geen-eu-is-a4036719> (22/3/2021).
- Browne, E.C. & Franklin, M.N. (1973) 'Aspects of Coalition Payoffs in European Parliamentary Democracies'. *American Political Science Review*, 67(2), 453–469.
- De Vries, C.E. (2018) 'The Cosmopolitan-Parochial Divide: Changing Patterns of Party and Electoral Competition in the Netherlands and Beyond'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(11), 1541–1565.
- Harryvan, A.G. & van der Harst, J. (2015) 'Succes creëert nieuwe verhoudingen: het Nederlands regeringsbeleid en de Europese integratie'. In: Vollaard, H., van der Harst, J. & Voerman, G.

- (Eds.) *Van Aanvallen! naar Verdedigen? De opstelling van Nederland ten Aanzien van de Europese integratie* (Boom), pp. 1945–2015.
- Hensen, C. (2022) 'Nederland en Spanje stellen versoepeling voor van Europese begrotingsregels'. *NRC*. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/04/04/nederland-en-spanje-stellen-versoepeling-voor-van-europese-begrotingsregels-a4107364> (4/4/2022)
- Holzhacker, R. (2002) 'National Parliamentary Scrutiny over EU Issues: Comparing the Goals and Methods of Governing and Opposition Parties'. *European Union Politics*, 3(4), 459–479.
- Irwin, G.A. & Van Holsteyn, J.J. (2008) 'Scientific Progress, Educated Guesses or Speculation? On Some Old Predictions with Respect to Electoral Behaviour in the Netherlands'. *Acta Politica*, 43(2), 180–202.
- Jacobs, K., Lubbers, M., Sipma, T., Spierings, N. & van der Meer, T.W.G. (2021) Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2021 (*DPES/NKO 2021*). Nijmegen: SKON.
- Korteweg, R. (2018) 'Waarom de Hanzen-liga niet genoeg zal zijn'. *Clingendael Spectator*, 72(9).
- Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S. & Frey, T. (2006) 'Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(6), 921–956.
- Leruth, B. (2021) 'After the 2021 Dutch General Election, Can Volt Become a Genuine Pan-European Force?' The Loop. <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/following-the-dutch-general-election-of-2021-can-volt-become-a-genuine-transnational-and-pan-european-force/>
- Mudde, C. (2012) 'The Comparative Study of Party-Based Euroscepticism: the Sussex versus the North Carolina School'. *East European Politics*, 28(2), 193–202.
- Otjes, S. (2021a) 'The Fight on the Right: What Drives Voting for the Dutch Freedom Party and for the Forum for Democracy?' *Acta Politica*, 56(1), 130–162.
- Otjes, S. (2021b) 'Parliamentary Election in the Netherlands, 17 March 2021'. *Electoral Bulletins of the European Union*, 1(1), 180–202.
- Otjes, S. (2021c) 'The EU Elephant: Europe in the 2021 Dutch General Elections'. *Intereconomics*, 56(2), 70–75.
- Otjes, S. (2021d) 'Wie was het meest succesvol aan de onderhandelingsstafel?' *Stuk Rood Vlees* <https://stukroodvlees.nl/wie-was-het-meest-succesvol-aan-de-onderhandelingsstafel/> (20/12/2021)
- Otjes, S. & Spierings, N. (2021) 'Verdeeld succes migrantenpartijen'. *Stuk Rood Vlees*. <https://stukroodvlees.nl/verdeeld-succes-migrantenpartijen/> (22/3/2021).
- Otjes, S. & Voerman, G. (2022) 'The Netherlands: Political Developments and Data in 2021. A Year without Government'. *European Journal of Political Research and Political Data Yearbook*, Published online first.
- Polk, J., Rovny, J., Bakker, R., Edwards, E., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S. et al. (2017) 'Explaining the Salience of Anti-elitism and Reducing Political Corruption for Political Parties in Europe with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data'. *Research & Politics*, 4(1), 205316801668691.
- Ray, L. (2007) 'Mainstream Euroscepticism: Trend or Oxymoron?' *Acta Politica*, 42(2-3), 153–172.
- Rojas-Romagosa, H. & van der Horst, A. (2015) 'Causes and Policy Implications of the Dutch Current Account Surplus'. The Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis Policy Brief.
- Rood, J. (2018) 'Het Europese coalitielandschap in beweging'. *Clingendael Spectator*, 72(3), 153–172.
- Schermann, K. & Ennser-Jedenastik, L. (2014) 'Explaining Coalition-Bargaining Outcomes: Evidence from Austria, 2002–2008'. *Party Politics*, 20(5), 791–801.
- Sie Dhian Ho, M., Hosli, M., Korteweg, A. R., Krop, M., Van Paridon, C. W. A. M., Scout, A. et al. (2018) 'Coalitievorming na de Brexit. Allianties voor een Europese Unie die moderniseert en beschermt'. Advice of the Advisory Council of International Affairs. The Hague.

- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2008) *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism: Volume 1: Case Studies and Country Surveys*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Timmermans, A. & Andeweg, R.B. (2000) 'The Netherlands: Still the Politics of Accommodation?' In: Müller, W.C. & Strom, K. (Eds.) *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 356–398.
- van der Meer, T., Van Steenvoorden, E. & Ouattara, E. (2020) 'Covid19 en de Rally rond de Nederlandse Vlag. Vertrouwen in de politiek en angst voor besmetting ten tijde van de eerste golf (maart-mei 2020)'. *Coronapapers*, <https://coronapapers.nl/nieuws1/nieuws/covid-19-en-de-rally-rond-de-nederlandse-vlag> (23/9/2020).
- Van Roozendaal, P., Hosli, M.O. & Heetman, C. (2012) 'Coalition Formation on Major Policy Dimensions: The Council of the European Union 1998 to 2004'. *Public Choice*, 153(3), 447–467.
- Van Wiel, C. (2020) 'Nu de Britten weg zijn, is Rutte Mr. No'. *NRC Handelsblad*, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/07/22/nu-de-britten-weg-zijn-is-rutte-mr-no-a4006629> (22/6/2020).
- Vollaard, H. & Voerman, G. (2015) 'De Europese Opstelling van Nederlandse Politieke Partijen'. In: Vollaard, H., van der Harst, J. & Voerman, G. (Eds.) *Van Aanvallen! naar Verdedigen? De opstelling van Nederland ten Aanzien van de Europese integratie*. Boom, pp. 1945–2015.
- Walker, A. & Schaart, E. (2020) 'How Wopke Hoekstra Became Europe's Bond Villain'. *Politico* <https://www.politico.eu/article/wopke-hoekstra-netherlands-italy-corona-bonds-fight/> (19/4/2020).



## Appendix A

Table A.1: Items in Scales, DPES

| #  | Dimension | Item                    | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Cultural  | Development Cooperation | The Netherlands should spend less money on development aid.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2  | Cultural  | Mosques                 | The government should prevent the construction of new mosques in the Netherlands.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 3  | Cultural  | Asylum seekers          | My municipality should provide shelter to asylum seekers if needed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 4  | Cultural  | Death penalty           | It would be good if, for certain crimes, the death penalty would be reintroduced.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 5  | Cultural  | Civic integration       | In the Netherlands some think that foreigners should be able to live in the Netherlands while preserving their own culture. Others think that they should fully adapt to the Dutch culture. Where would you place yourself on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means preservation of own culture for foreigners and 7 means that they should fully adapt?                   |
| 6  | Cultural  | Punishment              | People think differently about the way the government fights crime. Where would you place yourself on a line from 1 to 7 where 1 stands for the idea that government is acting too tough on crime, and 7 stands for the idea that the government should be tougher on crime?                                                                                           |
| 7  | European  | EU Integration          | Some people and parties think that the European unification should go further. Others think that the European unification has already gone too far. How would you yourself on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means that the European unification should go even further and 7 means that the unification has already gone too far?                                        |
| 8  | European  | EU membership           | Do you think the membership of the Netherlands in the EU is in general 'a good thing', 'neither bad nor good', or 'a bad thing'?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 9  | Moral     | Same-sex                | Same-sex couples should have the same right to adopt children as heterosexuals couples                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 10 | Moral     | Euthanasia              | Some people think that euthanasia should always be forbidden. Other people think that euthanasia should be possible if the patient asks for it. Of course, there are also people who have an opinion that lies in between. Where would you place yourself on a line from 1 to 7; 1 meaning euthanasia should be forbidden and 7 meaning euthanasia should be possible? |
| 11 | Economic  | Income differences I    | Some people think that the differences in incomes in our country should be increased. Others think that they should be decreased. Where would you place yourself on a line from 1 to 7, where 1 means differences in income should be increased and 7 means that differences in income should be decreased?                                                            |
| 12 | Economic  | Income differences II   | The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

Table A.2: Descriptives, DPES

| <i>Item</i>            | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Median</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>Min.</i> | <i>Max.</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>H</i> | <i>Items</i> | <i>High</i>                                                          |
|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Voting = VVD           | 0.21        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted VVD                                                            |
| Voting = D66           | 0.18        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted D66                                                            |
| Voting = PVV           | 0.07        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted PVV                                                            |
| Voting = CDA           | 0.10        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted CDA                                                            |
| Voting = SP            | 0.07        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted SP                                                             |
| Voting = PvdA          | 0.07        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,318    | -        | 1            | Voted PvdA                                                           |
| Cultural Dimension     | 0.47        | 0.50          | 0.22      | 0.00        | 1.00        | 2,990    | 0.49     | 6            | Inclusive                                                            |
| European Dimension     | 0.48        | 0.50          | 0.30      | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,716    | 0.73     | 2            | Pro-European                                                         |
| Moral Dimension        | 0.80        | 0.88          | 0.22      | 0.00        | 1.00        | 3,202    | 0.42     | 2            | Progressive                                                          |
| Economic Dimension     | 0.62        | 0.66          | 0.21      | 0.00        | 0.93        | 2,993    | 0.64     | 2            | Left-wing                                                            |
| Education = University | 0.44        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 4,426    | -        | 1            | Degree from a research university or a university of applied science |
| Gender = Male          | 0.52        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 4,837    | -        | 1            | Male                                                                 |
| Age < 30               | 0.17        | -             | -         | 0.00        | 1.00        | 4,805    | -        | 1            | <30                                                                  |

Table A.3: Predictors of Voting for the Six Largest Parties

| Party                  | VVD             | D66             | PVV             | CDA             | SP              | PvdA            |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| European Dimension     | 0.96*** (0.28)  | 1.55*** (0.30)  | -2.82*** (0.49) | 0.46 (0.33)     | -1.93*** (0.46) | 0.98** (0.39)   |
| Cultural Dimension     | -2.45*** (0.42) | 2.31*** (0.46)  | -5.03*** (0.69) | -0.06 (0.49)    | 0.46 (0.65)     | 1.94*** (0.61)  |
| Moral Dimension        | 1.35*** (0.35)  | 1.40*** (0.40)  | 0.09 (0.46)     | -1.78*** (0.32) | 1.38** (0.59)   | 0.80 (0.52)     |
| Economic Dimension     | -4.71*** (0.35) | -0.48 (0.35)    | 0.65 (0.48)     | -1.49*** (0.39) | 4.61*** (0.67)  | 4.06*** (0.59)  |
| Gender = Male          | 0.23* (0.14)    | -0.29* (0.13)   | 0.64*** (0.23)  | -0.01 (0.16)    | 0.08 (0.22)     | -0.09 (0.18)    |
| Age < 30               | -0.63*** (0.21) | -0.22 (0.19)    | -0.24 (0.42)    | -0.94*** (0.32) | -1.11** (0.53)  | -0.87*** (0.33) |
| Education = University | -0.01 (0.14)    | 0.43*** (0.14)  | -0.98*** (0.27) | -0.30* (0.17)   | -0.39 (0.25)    | -0.32 (0.20)    |
| Intercept              | 0.74** (0.35)   | -4.59*** (0.40) | -0.36 (0.53)    | 0.12 (0.36)     | -6.28 (0.71)    | -7.21*** (0.61) |
| AIC                    | 1,468           | 1,516           | 630             | 1,141           | 672             | 892             |

$N = 1784$ ;

$0.1 > *$ ,

$0.05 > **$ ,

$0.01 > ***$