



## **ELECTION BRIEFING NO 3 EUROPE AND THE DUTCH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF MAY 2002**

**Robert Harmsen**  
**Institute of European Studies**  
**The Queen's University of Belfast**  
**E-mail [r.harmsen@qub.ac.uk](mailto:r.harmsen@qub.ac.uk)**

### **Key points:**

- A dramatic 'populist surge', as the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF) becomes the second largest party in the country.
- A surprising victory for the Christian Democrats, who top the poll and appear set to play the leading role in a new Centre-Right government.
- A crushing defeat for all three parties (Labour, Liberals, and Democrats '66) in the outgoing 'Purple Coalition' Government.
- The confirmation of a more critical stance by the established Dutch governmental parties towards European integration.
- The emergence, with the LPF, of a potentially significant Dutch Euroscepticism.
- The strong likelihood of a hard-line Dutch negotiating position on the need for pre-enlargement EU budget reform.

On 15 May 2002 voters in the Netherlands went to the polls, bringing to a close the most dramatic electoral campaign in modern Dutch political history. The rapid rise to prominence and assassination of the maverick right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn clearly and tragically marked this campaign out from the ordinary run of Dutch elections. Fortuyn had, initially, provided a focal point for an unexpectedly widespread sense of disconnection between the nation's political elite and the concerns of ordinary voters, as well as bringing into more critical focus the relatively unquestioned choices which underpin the so-called 'Polder Model'. With his death came an even greater sense of disquiet. While there is every reason to believe that the country's political system will find the means to absorb and to adjust to the new demands which have been placed upon it, the comfortable certainty that 'It couldn't happen here' has, in manifold ways, been unsettled.

**Table 1.**  
**Dutch Second Chamber Election Results, 2002 and 1998**

Party	Seats 2002 (/150)	% Vote 2002	Seats 1998 (/150)	% Vote 1998
CDA	43	27.9	29	18.3
LPF	26	17.0	--	--
VVD	24	15.5	38	24.7
PvdA	23	15.1	45	29.0
GL	10	7.0	11	7.3
SP	9	5.9	5	3.5
D'66	7	5.1	14	9.0
CU	4	2.5	5	3.3
SGP	2	1.7	3	1.8
LN	2	1.6	--	--

Party Index

CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal
LPF	Pim Fortuyn List
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Liberal)
PvdA	Labour Party
GL	Green-Left
SP	Socialist Party
D'66	Democrats '66
CU	Christian Union
SGP	Political Reformed Party
LN	Liveable Netherlands

## The Results

The results, in the first instance, show a crushing defeat for each of the three parties in the outgoing 'Purple Coalition' which had governed the Netherlands since 1994. In recognition of the scale of the defeat, both Labour leader Ad Melkert (who had succeeded outgoing Prime Minister Wim Kok) and VVD leader Hans Dijkstal resigned immediately after the election. For the Labour Party, the result was, by a wide measure, its worst of the post-World War II period. In the case of the VVD, the 2002 election essentially erased its gains of the previous decade - taking the party's level of support back to (slightly above) its 1989 level. The election also confirmed the continuing decline of the Democrats '66, which now appear to have returned to the status of a minor party in Dutch politics.

The unexpected winner of the elections was the Christian Democratic Party. The party's prospects for the 2002 election initially looked quite inauspicious, having gone through a rather messy leadership row in September 2001 (which ultimately saw Jan Peter Balkenende replace Jaap de Hoop Schaeffer at the head of the party's electoral list). Throughout much of the present campaign, the party appeared to be roughly level-pegging with its 1998 electoral result. The party's result on election day, a gain 14 seats and just under 10% of the vote relative to 1998, was thus a major surprise. In part, it appears to have been the main beneficiary of late vote swings attributable to voters looking for a 'safe' choice in the aftermath of the dramatic events of 6 May (*NRC Handelsblad*, 12 May 2002).

The electoral 'earthquake' headlined in the Dutch press was, however, that caused by the entry into parliament of the Pim Fortuyn List. Fortuyn's assassination appears, in aggregate, not to have affected the level of support for the party. On election day, the party won 26 seats and 17% of the vote, in keeping with that which the polls had been predicting prior to 6 May. This result, even against the background of the increasingly volatility of Dutch politics in recent years, unquestionably represents a seismic shift.

Turning to the smaller parties, both the Calvinist parties and Green-Left, though anticipating gains, actually saw their parliamentary representation slightly reduced. Only the staunchly left-wing Socialist Party was able to pick up seats, increasing its parliamentary representation from 5 to 9 members.

The Socialist gains (largely from the PvdA) apart, the overall trend of the election was that of a clear move to the right by Dutch voters. It now remains for this result to be translated into the formation of a new government. At the time of writing, discussions are taking place under the auspices of a CDA *informateur*, Piet Hein Donner, with a view to putting a new cabinet in place as quickly as possible. Given the result, it is clear that the CDA will assume the leading role in the new government, with Jan Peter Balkenende very likely becoming Prime Minister. Negotiations are now moving forward on the basis that the CDA will be joined the LPF and the VVD in a majority government of the Centre-Right.

## **The European Dimension**

European issues, though not assuming a particularly prominent place, were nevertheless not absent from the 2002 Dutch election campaign. Here, a distinction might usefully be drawn between two strands of debate. On the one hand, the current campaign confirmed a longer-term trend towards the adoption by the established Dutch governmental parties of more critical postures towards European integration. On the other hand, and more dramatically, the emergence of the LPF also marks the first occasion on which a movement running on an unambiguously Eurosceptic platform has been able to become a major force in national politics and (very likely) a part of the governing coalition.

### *A Shifting Consensus*

A reading of the 2002 electoral programmes of the established political parties tends to highlight the maintenance of a broad, pro-federalist consensus amongst the main, established governing parties.<sup>1</sup> Both the CDA and D'66 election manifestoes express explicit support for continued progress towards a 'federal Europe'. The PvdA, if not explicitly referring to a 'federal' political design, nonetheless backs clearly supranational measures, such as an expansion of the European Parliament's budgetary powers and the (eventual) direct election of the Commission President. As in the past, it is only the VVD which strikes a somewhat dissonant note in the integrationist chorus. The VVD programme comes out strongly against any move towards tax harmonisation. Considerable emphasis is also placed on the need for a stricter respect

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<sup>1</sup> The 2002 party programmes may be accessed through the web site of the Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen (University of Groningen) at <http://www.dnpp.nl>

of the subsidiarity principle, as a means of protecting national spheres of competence. It should, however, be underlined that the VVD also shows itself to be sympathetic to the further development of the supranational institutions within their areas of competence.

Moving away from the centre, a somewhat more critical stance towards European integration may be found, though a fundamental opposition to the process appears only in the case of the Socialist Party. On the right, the Christian Union programme expresses concern that the Netherlands should remain 'a recognisable, unified political entity' within the European Union. The programme does not, however, call the integration project itself fundamentally into question. On the left, the Green-Left manifesto is highly critical of a 'Europe of market and money', but sees the remedy to this in a move towards 'more Europe'. Among other measures, the party proposes the adoption of a 'European constitution' (to be ratified in an EU-wide referendum) and the strengthening of social policy co-ordination. Further left, the Socialist Party is an unabashed critic of the integration process. The party openly opposes any further handing over of powers to Brussels and, in its programme, advocates the need to maintain an 'emergency plan' for the restoration of the guilder in the event that monetary union proves not to work.

The overall portrait which emerges from the party programmes for this year's election is thus one of a broad, sustained consensus, seriously questioned only on the far margins of the party system. This picture, however, hides a growing body of more critical opinion which has come to find expression within mainstream political debate. Fuelled particularly by concerns over the country's large net budget contribution, the entrenched '*communautaire* orthodoxy' is gradually giving way to a public questioning of whether the further development of European integration will necessarily serve Dutch national interests.

In the current campaign, these growing doubts found their most prominent expression in an interview given by VVD leader Hans Dijkstal to *De Telegraaf* on 4 May 2002. In this interview, Dijkstal was highly critical of the possible consequences of enlargement for existing member states, stressing the threats which might be posed to the value of the Euro and the maintenance of the stability pact. He also clearly affirmed his view that the Netherlands should be prepared to veto enlargement if adequate reforms to the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds could not be secured prior to the accession of the new member states.

Although Dijkstal's remarks immediately drew a sharply critical response from leading figures in the other established parties, this flurry of criticism was somewhat disingenuous relative to the previous evolution of party positions on the enlargement issue. First, it should be emphasized that Dijkstal's statement, though somewhat more strongly worded than his previous pronouncements on the area, nevertheless did not represent a major, substantive change of policy.<sup>2</sup> The remarks must, moreover, be placed in the context of a growing number of calls being made in Dutch governmental circles for a fundamental, pre-enlargement reform of the EU budget. Not the least, in

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<sup>2</sup> See notably H.F. Dijkstal, 'Staten in verandering, staatkundige verandering' in J.Q.Th. Rood (ed.), *Europa in de Nederlandse Politiek* (The Hague: Instituut Clingendael, 2002), at p. 48. On-line version available at <http://www.clingendael.nl>

January 2002, Dick Benschop, the PvdA State Secretary for European Affairs, gave voice to a Dutch government demand for a fundamental reform of the CAP prior to enlargement (*De Volkskrant*, 29 January 2002). Although carefully avoiding the term 'veto', such reform was cited as a key factor conditioning Dutch support for the accession of new member states. In terms of the likely future direction of policy, it is worth noting that CDA leader Balkenende had also adopted a similar position in a paper which he delivered to the Netherlands Institute for International Affairs ('Clingendael') on 22 November 2001.<sup>3</sup>

### *Pim Fortuyn and Dutch Euroscepticism*

Prior to his rise to political prominence, Pim Fortuyn had already clearly established his strongly Eurosceptic beliefs. Most notably, Fortuyn had published a book in 1997 with the telling title (in translation) of *Soulless Europe: Against a Europe of Technocrats, Bureaucrats, Subsidies and Inevitable Fraud*.<sup>4</sup> As suggested by the title, he attacked European integration as essentially a project created by political and bureaucratic elites as a means to serve their own interests, to the detriment of those of the population at large. Fortuyn characterised the EU as the 'private affair' (*onderonsje*) of those elites, allowing them to escape accountability for their actions behind the mask of policies presented to national electorates as *'faits accomplis'*.

In the current campaign, although the European issue did not appear to be a major mobilising theme for the LPF, Fortuyn nevertheless continued to give voice to his Eurosceptic beliefs as part of a broader 'anti-establishment' discourse. Most obviously, in connection with the immigration issue, Fortuyn advocated the renunciation by the Netherlands of the Schengen Accord as a necessary precondition for the integral re-establishment of border controls. Beyond this, he put forward a nine-point plan for a radical reform of both the EU institutional system and the national handling of European policy. These points are as below:<sup>5</sup>

- i. Renegotiation of the size of the Dutch budget contribution, with the population size and prosperity of the country relative to other member states used as the base point.
- ii. Abolition of agricultural subsidies and renationalisation of agricultural policy.
- iii. Abolition of all structural funds.
- iv. A new, time-limited structural fund created for the new member states, allowing them to bring their economies up to the EU level.
- v. The new member states will, for the time being, be excluded from EMU.
- vi. The Netherlands will hold politically binding referenda on the admission of new members, by groups of states.

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<sup>3</sup> J.P. Balkenende, 'Europe is asleep, it's time to awaken her!' in Rood (ed.), *Europa in de Nederlandse Politiek*, op. cit., pp. 27-37.

<sup>4</sup> Pim Fortuyn, *Zielloos Europa: Tegen een Europa van technocraten, bureaucratie, subsidies en onvermijdelijke fraude* (Utrecht: Bruna, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> As set out in Pim Fortuyn, *De Puinhopen van acht jaar Paars: Een genadeloze analyse van de collectieve sector en aanbevelingen voor een krachtig herstelprogramma* (Rotterdam: Karakter, 2002), pp. 180-181. This single-authored book took the place of a traditional party manifesto. An English summary of its principal themes and recommendations, prepared by the LPF, may be found at <http://www.lijst-pimfortuyn.nl/party.php?goto=english>

- vii. The Netherlands would support the holding of an EU 'subsidiarity conference', to review those powers which may be returned to the national level and those which should remain in Brussels.
- viii. The European Parliament will be the subject of a critical review. Fortuyn expressed the personal view that the European Parliament, which 'would be missed as one misses a toothache', could be abolished and replaced by a senate made up of national members of parliament.
- ix. The Dutch Parliament will take a more concentrated interest in EU affairs, holding ministers to binding, limited mandates in EU negotiations.

## **Conclusion and Prospects**

Dutch politics has unmistakably entered a period of turbulence, as the longer term consequences of the 'Fortuyn phenomenon' are worked through both by Fortuyn's heirs in the LPF and by the established political parties. In function of the success or failure of the LPF to establish itself as a permanent fixture on the Dutch political landscape, there may be changes to the overall configuration of the party system and the dynamics of party competition. One of the possible (and possibly more benign) effects of the emergence of a 'populist Right' may be to bring about a somewhat stronger Left/Right polarisation in Dutch politics. The more serious questions to be faced by the established Dutch parties are, however, perhaps rather less those to do with strategic positioning and rather more those to do with the need to revitalise their basic function as representative mediators or transmission belts for public opinion. The campaign revealed an acute sentiment that the 'political class' in The Hague had lost touch with the concerns of ordinary voters. The parties must now find ways to bridge this divide

While the European issue did not figure with particular prominence in the 2002 election campaign, the campaign did reveal that clear changes are afoot as regards Dutch attitudes towards European integration. For the established political parties, the campaign tended to confirm the development of a more critical posture towards European integration. The recent expression of doubts concerning the readiness of the Union to proceed with enlargement marks a further stage in the abandonment by the Dutch political class of what had long been a largely uncritical attitude towards the further progress of European integration. This shift of opinion is likely to be further accelerated by the emergence of the LPF, with its Eurosceptic stance, as a major political force and likely partner in the governmental coalition.

The stage thus appears set for a significant change in the frame of reference of Dutch European policy. While one should be careful not to exaggerate the extent of Dutch Euroscepticism, the converse assumption, that the Netherlands can unproblematically be placed in the 'European federalist' camp, also no longer holds true. Rather, it is likely that a more critical debate on European integration will now develop in the country, with a greater readiness to weigh the costs and benefits of the further development of integration on a case by case basis. Most immediately, this is likely to be reflected in a strong insistence, on the part of a CDA-LPF-VVD government, that the accession criteria for new member states be stringently adhered to in each individual case (*NRC Handelsblad*, 3 June 2002). The Dutch electoral earthquake of 2002 may continue to produce occasional tremors for many years to come.