

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTION BRIEFING NO 28 THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS, 4 JUNE 2009

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Key points:

- Turnout in the EP elections of 4 June in the Netherlands was 36.6%, falling back below the 2004 level (39.2%). Thus the unprecedented EU debate that the Netherlands saw in 2005 due to the referendum on the EU Constitutional Treaty seems to have had little lasting impact.
- Geert Wilders' Eurosceptic Freedom Party (PVV) achieved an impressive electoral result, which follows up on the previous successes of anti-establishment parties in the Netherlands in the last decade, such as the List Pim Fortuyn (2002) and the Socialist Party (2006), but is the first one to register such a high vote in the EP-elections. The Freedom Party became the second largest party in these elections with 17% of the vote and 4 seats.
- The two most pro-European parties did well; Democrats 66 (D66) and GreenLeft gathered 11.3% and 8.9% of the vote respectively, which gave them three seats each.
- The share of the vote for the parties in government was just 38.9%, compared to 51.7% in the previous general elections of 2006. The Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) took the heaviest blow, reaching an all time low of 12% of the vote, losing four of their seven EP seats.
- The campaign was predominantly framed in the general terms of pro- or against European integration, but most indicators seem to confirm the overall second-order character of the EP elections in the Netherlands; the results mainly reflect the fortunes of the different parties as they stand in the national context.
- The electoral successes of D66 and GreenLeft can be qualified as a successful 'progressive' or 'universalistic' answer to the cultural-nationalist position of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party.

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Political Background and Pre-Election Prospects

The results of the European Parliament elections in the Netherlands, held on the 4th of June, have to be analysed against the background of the turmoil that has characterised Dutch politics in recent years. Most notably, electoral volatility has in the past years risen to unprecedented levels. Certainly, the ‘pillarised’ societal structure of the Netherlands has been steadily eroding since the late 1960s. However, from the advent of the List Pim Fortuyn in 2002 onwards, new, anti-establishment parties have found the way to successfully appeal to large segments of the electorate and have pushed the traditionally dominant parties, the Christian Democrats (CDA), Labour (PvdA) and the Liberals (VVD), onto the defensive. The unprecedented electoral breakthrough of the List Pim Fortuyn in the 2002 national elections was followed by the steady rise of the Socialist Party that established itself as the third party in the Dutch parliament in 2006. The 2006 election furthermore saw the entrance of the Freedom Party of Geert Wilders in the Dutch parliament with 5.9% of the vote. Another manifestation of this trend was the success of ‘Europe Transparent’ in the last European elections in 2004; a party that aimed for more transparent European decision-making and to reveal fraud and corruption within the EU institutions. This party managed to gain two seats in the European Parliament (EP). Importantly, most of the successful new parties in the Netherlands have a strong anti-establishment character, criticising the traditional political establishment for being unresponsive and, in the case of Fortuyn and Wilders, claiming that the established parties ignore thorny social issues such as immigration and integration of, most notably, the Muslim population in Dutch society. This successful anti-establishment appeal poses a particularly great political and electoral challenge for the traditional parties.

Consequently, one of the main questions in the run up to the European elections was how well the parties with a strong anti-establishment character would perform. Since Europe Transparent dissolved after internal struggles, most eyes were directed at Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV). While the party from the former Liberal MP entered parliament in 2006 with nine seats, recent polls suggested that the party could grow on to become the biggest of the Netherlands. Although the populist radical right Freedom Party is best known for its harsh criticism of the existing political elite and its battle against the alleged ‘Islamisation’ of Dutch society, Wilders’ party is also marked by its Eurosceptic position. In view of the low polls of the governing coalition formed by the Labour Party, the Christian Democrats and the smaller Christian Union (CU), it was also interesting to see how other non-traditional mainstream parties would perform. Could parties that did well in the previous general elections in autumn 2006, such as the Eurosceptic Socialist Party (SP) and the single-issue driven Party for the Animals (PvdD), improve their electoral results? Furthermore, would the Democrats ’66 (D66) be able to translate their popularity in the polls into seats? The latter party historically focused on the need for institutional reform of the Dutch political system, but it has become popular again more recently due to its consistent opposition against the intolerant political ideology of the Freedom Party.

Where these domestic political developments were undoubtedly important for the results in these elections, the results may also say something about the general public opinion towards European integration. Importantly, the EP elections formed, so to speak, the first test for 'Europe' in the Netherlands after the 2005 Constitutional Treaty referendum, which led to the popular rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by a majority of 61.5% at a turn-out of 63.3%, but also to a first, unprecedented national debate on the EU. Despite initial announcements of a nation-wide follow-up debate on 'Europe', this debate never took place. In addition, while the government claimed that the new Treaty of Lisbon fully met the objections the Dutch electorate had had against the Constitutional Treaty, it decided that there was no need to subject the new Treaty to a referendum.

For various reasons, the turnout in the European elections is of particular interest. In 1999 the turnout for these elections reached an all-time low in the Netherlands with 30.0%, although it came up again in 2004 when 39.2% of the electorate cast a vote. One question is whether the Constitutional Treaty referendum has had a lasting effect on popular engagement with EU affairs. Furthermore, parties have diverging interests in the level of turnout. Anti-establishment parties such as the Freedom Party and, arguably, the Socialist Party tend to have an interest in a high turnout since their following tends to take a limited interest in European parliament elections. Alternatively, parties with a loyal electoral base such as the Christian Democrats, Christian Union and the Orthodox Christian SGP - the latter two parties allied for the European elections - do comparatively well with a low turnout. The same applies to parties such as the GreenLeft Party and D66 who profit from a generally highly educated following that normally finds its way to the ballot box.

From the outset it was clear that, as ever with European Parliament elections, the results of the individual parties would be based on a mixture between their perceived performance and stance on domestic issues and their positioning with regard to European integration. Present developments in Dutch politics make it even more difficult to conclude whether the election results support the notion that European elections are second-order elections. It is hard to distinguish between first and second order effects since under the present conditions of Dutch politics the two point in the same direction: a move from established, pro-integration parties to Eurosceptic anti-establishment parties.

Campaign

At the end of March a news report revealed that only one out of five Dutch voters was aware of the upcoming European elections (NOS, 27 March). The campaign slowly began to start in April. Notably, three party-lists were led by national parliamentarians: the Christian Democrats put forward their most experienced but publicly rather unknown MP Wim van de Camp, the Liberals selected their prominent foreign affairs spokesman in parliament, Hans van Baalen, while the number one on the European list of the Freedom Party was the estate-agent come politician Barry Madlener. Labour and D66 put forward incumbent MEPs to lead their party lists: Thijs Berman and Sophie in 't Veld. Where these party-list leaders were quite unknown to the wider Dutch public, the names

of the European leaders of the other parties in the Dutch parliament must have been even more unfamiliar to the voters. Christian Union-SGP put forward civil servant Peter van Dalen, GreenLeft selected local politician from Amsterdam Judith Sargentini, the Socialist Party opted for Dennis de Jong, another civil servant, and the Party for the Animals selected party official Natasja Oerlemans. Besides the parties represented in the Dutch parliament, eight other party lists competed, such as the Dutch branch of Libertas, the Newropeans and Europe Inexpensive! & Durable (*Europa Voordelig! & Duurzaam*). Many of them were characterised by a slightly Eurosceptical position and aimed for more transparency and democracy in European-level decision making. However, the visibility of these parties in the campaign was rather low.

The media in the Netherlands have often been accused of displaying too little interest in EU affairs in general and in the EP elections in particular. It would be hard to level such accusations this time around. Interestingly, the media gave more attention to the European elections than ever before. Compared to the elections five years ago, the newspapers clearly covered the campaign to a greater extent (see figure 1). Also public television made considerable effort on the EP-elections: two major TV debates and a few special shows dedicated to the EP elections were broadcast, and current affairs programmes also spent considerable attention on the upcoming elections.

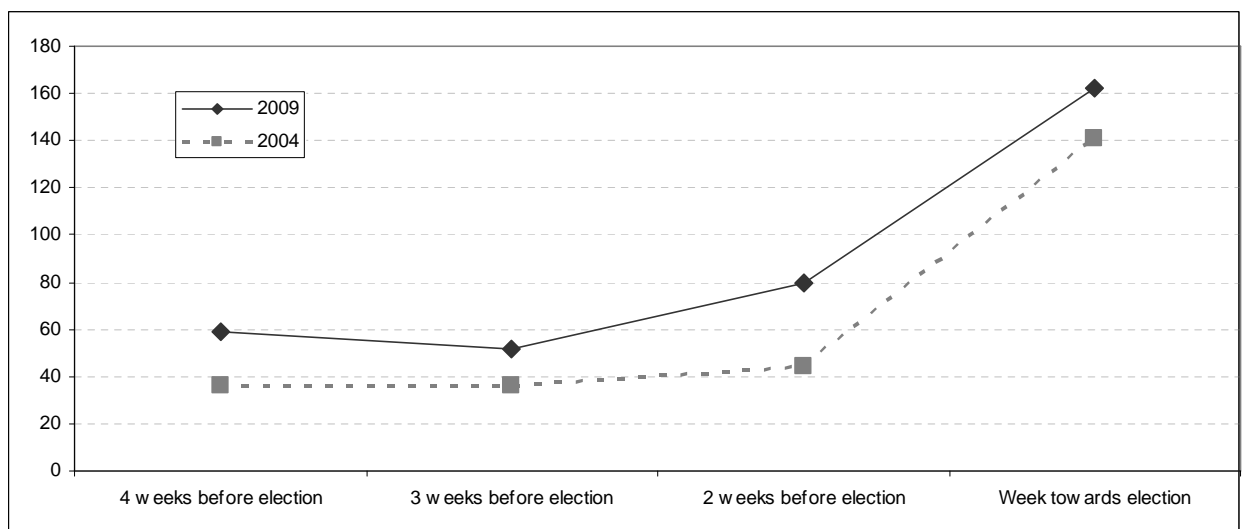


Figure 1: Number of newspaper articles containing the words 'European' and 'elections' in the final four weeks before the elections in four daily newspapers (*Telegraaf, NRC Handelsblad, Volkskrant and Trouw*).

However, opinion polls indicated that the media's effort met with little response as the Dutch audience was quite reluctant to consume all this coverage. One research report estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 viewers flicked to another channel when the major Dutch news programme brought an item related to the European elections, while even the sight of the European flag alone was enough to persuade some viewers to cease

watching (NOS, 29 May). Furthermore, the episode of a popular Dutch late night talk show, 'Pauw & Witteman', dedicated to a TV debate between the European party leaders received the lowest rating of the three seasons that the show has been running. Thus, despite the increase in media attention, the Dutch electorate continued to remain rather uninterested in the European elections, or even in the issue of European integration in general.

Looking at the contents of the campaign and the main lines of division between the parties, it appears that the campaign was predominantly framed in the general terms of pro- or against European integration, a frame that recurred in various more concrete themes such as the power shift to Brussels, EU regulation and red tape, the costs and efficiency of the EU and EU enlargement. Accordingly, the parties allowed themselves to be lined up quite clearly on the various issues along this dimension. The most pro-integration parties in this regard were D66 and GreenLeft. D66 campaigned with the unambiguous and, arguably, rather courageous slogan 'Europe? Yes', while GreenLeft proposed a 'European Green Deal', in order to address both the economic and the climate crises on the European level.

The position of the Labour Party and the Christian Democrats has traditionally been rather pro-European but both parties, with the general Eurosceptical mood of the Dutch electorate in mind, were cautious not to praise the European project too fervently. Labour had a notable internal debate about the scope for more Eurosceptical positions in its election campaign. Eventually, however, its programme turned out to be distinctively integration-oriented and more Eurosceptical candidates such as Jacques Monasch and René Cuperus failed to win prominent positions on the party list. Nevertheless, in the campaign the Labour Party did not voice an overly enthusiastic opinion on European integration, with Berman often underlining the need for a more social Europe. The Christian Democrats also followed a rather cautious course with Van de Camp trying to appeal to Eurosceptics by stressing the need for financial cuts within the EU institutions and for fighting red tape from Brussels. Also, Van de Camp admitted that the enlargement of the EU with Romania and Bulgaria had come too soon.

More on the Eurosceptical side of the spectrum were the Liberals and Christian Union-SGP. Liberal leader Van Baalen literally used the term 'Eurocritical' to describe the position of his party, while often stressing that the Liberal Party would protect the Dutch interest in Brussels. Also Van Baalen emphasised the need for a pause in enlargement, at least until 2014, and repeatedly stated that he would remain living in The Hague, to stay in close touch with his national constituency. The Liberals also underlined the positive effect European integration has had on the Dutch economy. The Christian Union-SGP alliance was a bit more critical, stressing that Europe should not become a super-state and that Turkey should not become a member of the EU because the country is not part of Europe geographically.

The two parties most critical of European integration were the Socialist Party and the Freedom Party. The Socialist Party campaigned with the slogan 'the Netherlands wants less Brussels', while Dennis de Jong, in accordance with the party's left-wing

economic ideology, claimed that Brussels was in the hands of a neo-liberal lobby (Volkskrant, May 15, p.3). At the same time, however, De Jong stressed that his party was not as Eurosceptic as the Freedom Party, whom he referred to as 'Europhobe'. In his words, the Socialist Party sees the advantages of cooperation on issues as the environment, security, immigration and the economic crisis (which seems quite a large range of policy areas for a party that wants 'less Brussels'). In any case, it leaves no doubt that the most Eurosceptic party was Wilders' Freedom Party, which took a blatantly anti-integration stance. According to the Freedom Party, the Dutch, rather than Brussels, should decide again over their own laws, while the money spent on Brussels would be better invested in the Netherlands itself. Furthermore, Turkey should never become a member of the EU, because the Turkish Islamic culture is incompatible with Western values and because the immigration of a large number of Turkish workers to the Netherlands would be highly undesirable. Moreover, during the campaign the Freedom Party even questioned the need for the European Parliament, as all decision making should be preserved for the national parliament.

Although the parties could thus be placed on a pro- versus anti-European integration scale, it was not always easy to differentiate between the parties' positions. While D66 and the Freedom Party adopted rather outspoken positions on the extremes, in the middle the differences between the main parties were often difficult to decipher. All of the mainstream parties underlined that their position towards European integration was essentially a constructive one but at the same time they were eager to disassociate themselves from any all too Euro-zealous sentiments. With their moderate pro-European stances the Christian Democrats, the Labour Party, and even the Liberal Party, came across quite similarly. As described, even the Eurosceptic Socialist Party favoured European cooperation in vital policy areas. This lack of differentiation was reinforced by the fact that the debate generally lacked a clear substantive focus and failed to shift to issues where the EU and the EP can actually make a substantive difference.

One of the few notable efforts by the Labour Party to distinguish itself from the Christian Democrats was when national party leader Wouter Bos argued that something needed to be done about the level of European agriculture subsidies, a policy which the Christian Democrats have always supported. Concrete examples of positive effects of European integration from the pro-Europe camp were scarce as well, the most notable example being the cheaper cross border mobile phone calls due to pressure from the European Commission. All things considered, the largest Dutch newspaper might have been right to state that the European party leaders did nothing but 'invigorating apathy' with regard to the European elections (Telegraaf 30 May, p.11).

Results

As the initial prognoses predicted a turnout of about 40%, this was welcomed by many politicians as reasonably acceptable since it would be above the 39.2% registered in 2004. Eventually, however, turnout came out at 36.8%. Although still higher than the record low in 1999 of 30.0%, this can safely be qualified as a disappointingly low result, certainly when taking the debate into account that was stirred by the referendum on the

Constitutional Treaty in 2005 (which had a turnout of 63.3%) and the increase in media attention for these European elections compared to the coverage five years ago. Also when considering the turnout on the last general elections (80.4%), the turnout of the 4th of June was very meagre. The success that the government has claimed in the negotiations on the Treaty of Lisbon obviously has not resulted in more popular engagement with European affairs.

The big winner of the elections was Geert Wilders' Freedom Party, which became the second largest party in these elections with 17% of the vote and four seats in the European Parliament (see table 1). The number of seats for the Freedom Party may even grow to five if the Lisbon Treaty enters into force that would add an extra EP seat for the Netherlands. While the party gathered 5.9% of the vote in the last general elections in 2006, the leap to 17% demonstrates that Wilders popularity has risen considerably in the past few years. Although Wilders made clear that he would not enter the European Parliament himself, he placed himself on the tenth place on the Freedom Party's European party list. Notably, he gathered 334,846 personal votes, not much less than European party leader Madlener (382,610 votes), and more than enough to be allocated a seat in the EP.

Party	EP2009 Seats	EP2009 %	EP2004% (Seats)	TK2006 %
Christian Democrats (CDA)	5	20.1%	24.4% (7)	26.5%
Labour Party (PvdA)	3	12.0%	23.6% (7)	21.2%
Socialist Party (SP)	2	7.1%	7.0% (2)	16.6%
Liberal Party (VVD)	3	11.4%	13.2% (4)	14.7%
Group Wilders / Freedom Party (PVV)	4	17.0%		5.9%
Christian Union-SGP (CU-SGP)	2	6.8%	5.9% (2)	5.5%
GreenLeft (GL)	3	8.9%	7.4% (2)	4.6%
Democrats 66 (D66)	3	11.3%	4.3% (1)	2.0%
Partij for the Animals (PvdD)	0	3.5%	3.2% (0)	1.8%
Europe Transparent			7.3% (2)	
Other, smaller parties		1.9%	3.7% (0)	1.2%
Total	25	100%	100% (27)	100%

Table 1: Results of the 2009 European Parliament elections in the Netherlands compared with the elections of 2004 (EP) and 2006 (Tweede Kamer).

The other notable winner was D66. The party with the more or less opposite political programme of that pursued by the Freedom Party gathered 11.3% of the vote and three seats. Compared to the last European elections (4.3%) and especially the previous general elections (2%), this was an enormous victory, although not one that came as a complete surprise in view of the positive trend in the polls D66 had recently witnessed. Moreover, great swings in electoral support throughout the decades are rather characteristic of this party. Perhaps slightly more surprising was the strong result of the other pro-European party, GreenLeft, which garnered 8.9% of the vote and three seats as well.

The Labour Party emerged as the main loser from the elections. The results made it clear once more that Labour's position is extremely exposed in the current political climate. The party took a heavy blow, reached an all time low of 12% of the vote, lost four of its seven EP seats and ended up at a significant distance from the Freedom Party. This result was even worse than the disastrous defeat in the general elections of 2002, the elections of the victorious List Pim Fortuyn, where the party managed to gather 15.1% of the vote. Although Labour managed to regain strength in the 2003 general elections (27.3%), the party seems to be stuck in a negative electoral spiral.

The other big coalition party, the Christian Democrats, also saw their vote share and their number of MEPs decline. However, despite a loss of 6.4% compared to the last general elections, the Christian Democrats found solace in the fact that they remain the largest Dutch party in the European Parliament with 20.1% of the vote and five seats; a result that also indicates that the Christian Democrats can count on the support of a sizeable loyal group of supporters that generally finds its way to the ballot box. Junior coalition partner Christian Union, in alliance with the Orthodox Christian SGP, gathered 6.9% of the vote and two seats. The Christian Union thus stabilised but was not able to capitalise on its successful engagement on the No-side in the Constitutional Treaty campaign, also because, being in government since, it had to revise its position and endorse the Treaty of Lisbon. All in all, the share of the vote for the governing Christian Democrat-Labour-Christian Union coalition was just 38.9%, compared to the 51.7% in the general elections of 2006 that brought them into office.

The two largest opposition parties, the Socialist Party and the Liberal Party, did not do very well either, although members of both parties tried hard to act confidently after the results came out. Arguably, the Liberal Party supporters indeed had some reason to feel relieved as the pre-election polls had been far more disastrous than the eventual result. With 11.4% and three seats the party suffered a limited loss compared to the last European and general elections. Next to the Freedom Party, the left-wing Socialist Party was the other most notable Eurosceptic party. The party gathered 7.1% of the vote and two seats, which is about the same result as in the previous European elections. However, in view of the 16.6% of the vote the Socialist Party collected during the last general elections, this result can be perceived as quite poor; the steady rise of the Socialist Party since 1994 seems to have grinded to a halt, at least for the time being. Finally, other minor (Eurosceptic) parties did not do well, although the Party for the Animals only just missed out on a seat with 3.5% of the vote. The party has a slim chance to claim the 26th Dutch EP seat if the Lisbon Treaty comes into force, although the Ministry of the Interior indicated ahead of the elections that this seat is in principle to be allocated among the parties already represented in the EP. All the other parties had even more marginal results, not one of them gaining more than 0.5% of the vote.

Discussion: first-order or second-order elections?

Yet again, the elections in the Netherlands have caused a political earthquake; considerable segments of the electorate swung from one party to another compared to the

last general elections in 2006. If one looks at the results more closely it is apparent that, apart from the Socialist Party, the parties with the most outspoken positions on European integration were most successful; D66 and GreenLeft being the most pro-European, the Freedom Party being the most Eurosceptic. This might be taken as a sign that the voter demands a clear and outspoken line on European integration, and that the population as a whole is strongly polarised on the issue.

However, such a conclusion that takes the result as speaking directly to the issue of European integration seems a bit too hasty. Although further research is required to drill down to the voters' motives in these elections, many elements of the results point at a second-order interpretation in which the results are above all indicative of attitudes towards national politics. After all, the turnout of 36.6% suggests a substantial level of apathy among the Dutch voters towards the European cause. Such a general lack of interest and public involvement points at the secondary importance of European elections in the minds of many voters. This is even more notable if one considers the increased media attention for the elections; even the increased effort of the newspapers and public broadcasters did not inspire people to participate. The political parties themselves were largely responsible for this lack of involvement, by being incapable of moving beyond the rather general pro- or against Europe question in their campaigns.

Another indication that the elections were second-order in the eyes of the electorate is that the governing parties did rather badly by gathering altogether only 39% of the vote, while the opposition parties, the Freedom Party above all, benefited from this. This can be taken as an indication that the EP elections, as second-order elections, were indeed used by many voters to punish the incumbent government and to support protest parties that otherwise hold a more marginal role at the national level.

Overall, most indicators seem to confirm the overall second-order character of the EP elections in the Netherlands. They basically reflect the fortunes of the different parties as they stand in the national context. Indeed, it is questionable whether the governing parties would have done any better if general elections had been held at the same time, considering that also the previous general elections were marked by high levels of electoral volatility, vast losses for traditional mainstream parties and high levels of support for more radical political newcomers. Also, it is far from unlikely that Wilders' Freedom Party, and D66 for that matter, would have done just as well if general elections had been held, taking into account their popularity in opinion polls.

One major qualification on this point is of course that the EP turnout was far below that which is normally attained in parliamentary elections. For that reason the results cannot simply be projected to the national level. Indeed, in this respect there are a number of interesting questions. First of all, assuming that anti-establishment parties as the Freedom Party indeed have an interest in a higher turnout, one can wonder how many potential Freedom Party voters there are among the 63.4% of the electorate that did not vote. If the loyal Christian Democrat electorate and typically higher educated GreenLeft and D66 voters are indeed overrepresented in the results due to the low turnout, what does that mean for the potential support of the Freedom Party if the turnout had been on

similar levels as in general elections? Remarkably, this line of reasoning could lead to the tentative conclusion that Wilders' party might do even better in first-order general elections. Secondly, the rather meagre result of the Socialist Party is quite striking: where did the Eurosceptical voters on the left side of the socio-economical spectrum go? Since the Socialist Party has been the only anti-European party on the political left, this suggests that potential SP voters either went to more Euro-supportive parties or travelled all the way to the Freedom Party, which is quite clearly situated on the socio-economic right-wing of the political spectrum. Preliminary analysis points out that many Socialist Party voters indeed took this ideological leap (NOS, 6 June). Thirdly, will voters indeed veer back to established parties when it comes to first-order elections? In particular, to what extent has the exceptionally bad result of the Labour Party been caused by the distinctive second-order character of the EP-elections and will it (automatically) regain votes when it comes again to first-order elections with a higher turnout?

Although the answers to these questions are inevitably speculative, it seems that the established parties cannot be very sure that the voters will indeed return to their traditional party 'nests'. Even if individual new parties such as the List Pim Fortuyn have failed in the past, political newcomers have gained more substantial electoral results than ever before in the past three general elections, and the EP elections have confirmed Wilders' Freedom Party as a tough political opponent for the traditionally dominant political parties. Especially the Liberals and the Labour Party seem to be the main victims of these developments. Whereas the Liberal Party directly suffers from the rising popularity of the populist radical right, the Labour Party is nowadays unable to build a steady electoral base. Although research has shown that former Labour voters did not so much defect to Wilders on 4 June (NOS, 6 June), the potential electorate of the party seems to easily venture to the other left-wing or centre-left parties: the Socialist Party, GreenLeft and, the Phoenix of Dutch party politics, D66.

Conclusions and prospects

The results of the 2009 European Parliament elections in the Netherlands indicate that the Dutch electorate is polarised; both the most Eurosceptic party (Freedom Party) and the two most pro-European parties (D66 and GreenLeft) did well. However, it is highly questionable whether this polarisation is solely, or even to a substantial extent, driven by the issue of European integration. Although the electorates of the pro- and anti-European parties most probably agree with their parties on this issue, the explanation of this polarisation is more likely to be found in other, domestic, issues. One of the most salient issues in the current political debate in the Netherlands is undoubtedly immigration and integration of, predominantly, the Muslim population in the large cities. In this sense, the electoral successes of D66 and GreenLeft can be seen as the 'progressive' or 'universalistic' answer to the cultural-nationalist position of Geert Wilders' Freedom Party. As such, the latest European elections can still be perceived as second-order elections; the results were most likely driven by the domestic political atmosphere. This view is reinforced by the fact that the post-election television debate was held between the leaders of the parliamentary fractions rather than between the European party-list leaders. Notably, in this debate no one showed much interest in European issues. Instead the debate focussed on the implications of the election outcome for national politics and

in particular on the question whether they turned Wilders into a potential partner for future governmental coalitions with other parties.

Thus, whereas the European election results confirm the Eurosceptic position of a substantial part of the Dutch population, the more important conclusion is that they have confirmed the rise of electoral support for Wilders' party and hence have sustained his credibility as a serious political force in the Dutch political landscape. Indeed, in a notable number of localities, the Freedom Party came out as the biggest political party. What is more, many Freedom Party voters do not seem to be ashamed anymore to publicly reveal their support for Wilders' political ideas. The outcome also shows that the established parties remain unsure about how to deal with the populist challenge that has marked Dutch politics over the last years. In this regard, and also taking into account the stunning results of the referendum of 2005 and previous elections, it is quite awkward to find the Christian Democratic Prime Minister Balkenende qualifying the election outcome as a 'wake-up call'. At the same time, the results also show that there is a substantial electoral potential for the parties that dare to openly challenge the political programme of Wilders.

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