



POST POLL QUOTES

Prime minister and **CDA** leader **Jan Peter Balkenende** was welcomed by supporters with chants of 'Four more years (in English). 'It is extremely satisfying that our efforts over the last four years have been rewarded.'

A jubilant **Socialist Party** leader **Jan Marijnissen** said that this was a historic day for his party, which only entered parliament 12 years ago. 'Holland has chosen a more human and socialist direction.'

Geert Wilders, leader of anti-immigration party **PVV**, set to take nine seats, promised that his party would make 'an end to the increasing growth of Islam in the Netherlands'.

VVD finance minister **Gerrit Zalm** said the poor showing for his party was 'certainly a blow... very sad.. it's a bad day for the VVD.'

André Rouvoet, leader of orthodox Christian party **ChristenUnie**, on target to take seven seats, categorically ruled out an alliance involving the anti-immigration **PVV**.

Wouter Bos, leader of the **Labour party (PvdA)** admitted the results were disappointing but added: 'The country has voted massively against the cold and unfeeling Netherlands of the CDA and VVD.'

Marianne Thieme, leader of animal rights party **Partij van de Dieren**, a new entrant into parliament: 'We are the only party that dares to say that a radical change is needed... We must not treat animals as old rubbish.'

Femke Halsema, leader of **GroenLinks** said 'the results are confusing'.

A disappointed **Marco Pastors**, leader of Pim Fortuyn splinter party **EénNL**: 'We would not have bothered [with setting up a party] fore one seat.'

CDA tops poll but next coalition is a puzzle

As forecast, the Christian Democrats emerged as the biggest party in Wednesday's general election with 41 seats. But the real winner in terms of votes was the Socialist Party. After 97% of the votes had been counted, the SP had increased its seats from nine to 26 in the 150-seat lower house of parliament, taking votes from its left-wing allies Labour (PvdA) and GroenLinks. Both Geert Wilders' anti-immigration PVV and pro-animal Partij van de Dieren looked set to enter parliament for the first time, with nine and two seats respectively. The free-market Liberal party (VVD) saw its vote crumble from 28 to 22, its lowest result since World War Two. A NOS poll said that the party would have taken 28 rather than 21 seats if its hardline integration minister Rita Verdonk had been chosen as party leader rather than Mark Rutte. Labour also did badly. Despite holding on to second place, it lost 10 seats and finished on 32 seats.



Coalition not easy

The results mean it will be difficult to form a distinctive right or left-wing coalition. The current Christian Democrat/Liberal coalition has failed to take a majority of the 150 parliamentary seats. The same applies to a left-wing government made up of Labour the Socialist Party and GroenLinks. 'The results are complicated,' CDA prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende said. He admitted it would not be easy to translate the results into a workable cabinet. 'We haven't ruled out any party [as a coalition partner], not even the Socialists,' the CDA's leader in parliament, Maxime Verhagen, said. A coalition made up of the CDA and VVD would be the most desirable new government, according to an NOS poll. A left-leaning PvdA/SP/GroenLinks coalition was second favourite.

CDA 41 (44)
PvdA 32 (42)
VVD 22 (28)
SP 26 (9)
GroenLinks 7 (8)

ChristenUnie 6 (3)
PVV 9
SGP 2
Partij van de Dieren 2
D66 3 (6)

Election round-up

- The Wadden Sea island of Schiermonnikoog was the first to declare its results, just 10 minutes after the polls closed.
- Turnout was around 80%, in line with 2003.
- Most people voted by computer. In 34 districts, including Amsterdam, voters used the traditional red pencil because computers were declared too easy to hack into.
- Labour leader Wouter Bos took the wrong voting card to his local polling station in Amsterdam-Noord. Watched by a posse of journalists, Bos had no choice but to return home and pick up the right document to vote.
- Some 30,000 of the 600,000 Dutch nationals who live abroad voted.
- Fortuyn, the party originally founded by the murdered right-winger Pim Fortuyn lost all its seats.

What happens next?

With the votes counted and speculation beginning about which parties can form a workable coalition, the actual process of forming a new government can begin.

- With a majority government requiring at least 76 of the 150 seats in parliament, forming a coalition can be a tricky business. It is a process which takes months. The longest cabinet formation took 208 days, the shortest just 10.

- While the coalition talks are ongoing, the new MPs take their seats and the former cabinet remains in office on a decommissioned basis - meaning it minds the shop and does not take controversial decisions.

- On Thursday and Friday, Queen Beatrix will consult the party leaders, her own advisors and other senior politicians and appoint an *informateur* - the person charged with putting together a tentative coalition. The *informateur* sounds out the party leaders about potential coalitions and reports back to the queen.

- Once a potential coalition has been identified, the queen names a *formateur*.

- The *formateur* (usually the next prime minister) does the nitty gritty job of putting together a coalition agreement, or *regeerakkoord*, in which the broad lines of new government policy are set down.

Life after parliament

Sitting MPs and ministers who are out of a job following the election are entitled to generous unemployment benefit packages. MPs are entitled to 80% of their salary of €86,125.55 for the first year and 70% for up to a maximum of six years. If they find a new job, they are still entitled to a top-up.