



POST POLL QUOTES

Geert Wilders told reporters on Thursday morning that keeping the state pension age at 65 is no longer the key issue for coalition negotiations, despite his pre-election pledge. 'It is important but not a reason to wreck a cabinet,' he was quoted as saying.

Femke Halsema was one of the first party leaders to react to the exit poll prognosis, saying it was a 'fantastic and unbelievable victory' for GroenLinks.

Boris van der Ham, number two on the candidate list for the Liberal democrats D66, said: 'The winner is Alexander Pechtold, D66 is back on the map'.

The Liberal and Labour leaders Mark Rutte and Job Cohen have to sit down together and start working on forming a stable coalition, **Bernard Wientjes**, head of the VNO-NCW employers organisation, said on Radio 1. But the fact that the biggest party in the country has just 20% support is not good for stability, he added.

And **Agnes Jongerius**, leader of the country's biggest trade union FNV, said she too believed Rutte and Cohen should 'take the lead'. The results show the Netherlands has not 'voted en masse for cold-hearted cost cutting'.

The election result will have a limited impact on Dutch government bonds, according to analyst **Wilson Chin** of ING Debt Strategy & Research on the Dow Jones site. With at least three parties needed for a coalition, no major changes in the budget are expected, he said.

VVD tops poll but next coalition is a puzzle

The Dutch political climate shifted to the right on Wednesday with major gains for Geert Wilders' anti-Islam PVV party and the VVD Liberals in the general election. By Thursday morning, the right-wing Liberals had inched one seat ahead of Labour (PvdA) to 31 seats - a gain of nine for the VVD and a loss of three for the PvdA. Support for the Christian Democrats was slashed from 41 to 21 seats, leading to the immediate resignation of party leader and outgoing prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende. In an emotional address on Wednesday night, Balkenende thanked party workers and supporters for the trust they have shown him in his eight years as prime minister. Wednesday's results are 'very, very disappointing' and 'clear'. 'I have to take responsibility,' he said. Meanwhile, VVD leader Mark Rutte told a cheering crowd of supporters that it was 'a fantastic evening'. 'We are the party for everyone who wants to make something of their lives,' Rutte said, before congratulating first Geert Wilders' PVV and then the other winning parties. Labour leader Job Cohen told supporters he would do all he could to make sure the Netherlands continues to be a social and decent country. A jubilant PVV leader Geert Wilders told Nos tv he hopes the party will be able to join a coalition government. 'We are the big winner and they cannot ignore us. We want to be taken seriously,' he said.



The results after 98% have been counted:

VVD 31 (22)	20.06%	GroenLinks 10 (7)	6.6%
PvdA 30 (33)	20%	D66 10 (3)	6.6%
PVV 24 (9)	16%	ChristenUnie 5 (6)	3.3%
CDA 21 (41)	14%	SGP 2 (2)	1.3%
SP 15 (25)	10%	PvdD 2 (2)	1.3%

Parties meet to discuss tactics

Party leaders met their new MPs and key aides on Thursday morning to discuss tactics for forming a new cabinet. Victorious Liberal leader Mark Rutte declined to say much to reporters. 'Everything I do say will make it more difficult to form a coalition,' he said. Labour

leader Job Cohen was equally reluctant to comment, but pointed out that the Liberals and PVV are the big winners. Queen Beatrix will begin consulting her advisors on Thursday afternoon so that the cabinet formation process can begin. The state pension age, mortgage tax relief and healthcare cuts are likely to be central to the coalition talks.

The results in detail

Verdonk out

Rita Verdonk, who fought a leadership contest with the VVD's Mark Rutte after the party's poor performance in 2006, is out of national politics after her Trots op Nederland movement failed to take a seat.

Big cities

Labour party leader Job Cohen took 35% of the vote in Amsterdam, where he was mayor until taking over the PvdA campaign in the spring. In Rotterdam, Labour took 26.7% of the vote, well ahead of the PVV with 19.4%. In Utrecht, Labour took 24.3% with the VVD second on 18.5%. In The Hague, Labour won 24.4% of the vote with the VVD second with 21.6%. In the local elections, the PVV was second in the political capital.

First to declare

The first voting area to declare its results was the wealthy commuter village of Rozendaal, near Arnhem, where the VVD took 43% of the vote.

Turnout

Turnout on the Wadden Sea island of Schiermonnikoog was 123%, as thousands of holidaymakers cast their vote alongside island dwellers. On the island of Vlieland, the turnout was 116%. Nationwide, turnout was 74%, the lowest figures since 1998.

Limburg

One in four people in Limburg voted for the PVV. Wilders comes from the province.

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Look left or right?

Liberal leader Mark Rutte, who now seems set to be the next Dutch prime minister, said towards the end of the election campaign that he wanted a new coalition in place by July 1. But the reality is, putting together the stable government the Netherlands needs from this fragmented political landscape is going to be a tricky job. Firstly, what does he do about the PVV? Wilders was triumphant on Wednesday night and said the party is ready to join a government. But Rutte made it quite clear he believes in tough economic reform and has accused Wilders of being left-wing on the economy. And even if they could compromise on the finances, is the VVD prepared to link itself to a party that wants to ban the Koran and charge Muslim women a tax to wear a headscarf with all the political damage that will entail? Then again, forming a right-wing government with the PVV will also require the backing of the CDA, which has just been given a massive hangover by voters. With support almost halved, will the CDA feel it has any right to prop up a government involving Wilders - just to cling on to power? After all, even though PVV support has soared, it still only has the support of 16% of voters. Labour, with 20%, might have lost three seats, but it is still the second biggest party in the country and has more claim on being number two in a coalition than the PVV. But throughout the campaign, Rutte emphasised the 'yawning divide' between the VVD and Labour - 'historically wide', he called it. So what does he do now? Mark Rutte took the VVD to victory but that was the easy bit. Now he has some very tricky negotiations to go through to turn that victory into a premiership. A July 1 deadline seems very far away.

Political landscape never so splintered

Although the final results came too late for the morning papers, they all headline on the hammering the Christian Democrats were given in Wednesday's general election. 'CDA crushed,' screams the Telegraaf, above a photograph of outgoing prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende with his eyes closed and his lips clamped shut. It is a 'dramatic end' to eight years at the top, the paper says. In its editorial, the Telegraaf stresses the difficulty of forming a new government, despite Rutte's ambitions to have finalised a cabinet by July 1. 'The Netherlands cannot allow itself a long cabinet formation period,' the paper points out. 'The economic crisis is still with us and important decisions need to be taken.' 'Divided Netherlands' is the headline on NRC Next's front page story, accompanied by photos of the four main party leaders. 'Never was the voters' message so diffuse. It will be impossible to form a stable coalition with three parties,' the paper says. Trouw says the voter has saddled politicians with an impossible task, pointing out the opinion polls again failed to forecast the volume of support for the PVV. The party is now so big that it cannot be ignored in the early cabinet formation stages, when the parties get to know each other and the political horse-trading begins. The Volkskrant, with a photo of Mark Rutte smiling at his supporters on the front page, says the PVV and VVD have been rewarded for their clear political style and strong polarisation. But the collapse of the CDA has limited the coalition options considerably, the paper says.



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WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- 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. It is a process which usually 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 caretaker basis.