



## Stability key

'This was a festival for democracy today... It was also an evening where the Netherlands, after Brexit and the American elections, has said 'whoa' to the wrong sort of populism. Now it's important to bring our country together and form a stable government,' said VVD leader and prime minister Mark Rutte in his victory speech.

## Willing to rule

'Rutte is far from rid of me,' said Geert Wilders after the initial votes were in. 'I want to be part of government but if that doesn't happen, we still have more MPs in a growing party.'

## Bitter evening

'This is a bitter evening for the Labour party,' said Labour leader Lodewijk Asscher. 'The result is unbelievably disappointing. A lot of voters have chosen to give their trust to another party, and we have to respect that.'

## 'Fantastic result'

'We led an extraordinary campaign, and I'm very happy with the result. I think more young people than ever went to the polls. We won more seats than we've ever had in the parliament. It's a historic evening,' said GroenLinks leader Jesse Klaver.

## Rise to the challenge

CDA leader Sybrand Buma says that a major task awaits. 'The Netherlands has concerns, and the Dutch want an answer to these concerns. The CDA will rise up to the challenge. We will answer the great trust that the Netherlands has placed in us.'

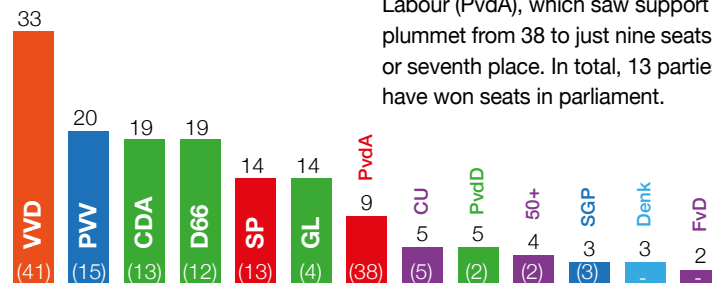
## Four parties needed for a new Dutch government



VVD leader Mark Rutte prepares to address supporters. Photo Phil Nijhuis /HH

Prime minister Mark Rutte claimed victory in the Dutch general election on Wednesday night and with 33 seats in the 150 seat lower house of parliament, is set to begin a third term as prime minister. Nevertheless, the highly-fragmented nature of the results means four parties will be needed to form a new coalition government with majority support in parliament. If the VVD presses ahead to try and form a government with the CDA and D66, ChristenUnie would a logical partner, commentators said on Thursday morning. However, the combination would only have a majority of one, and that would make the coalition vulnerable.

The VVD's nearest rival, Geert Wilders and the PVV, polled 20 seats, or 13.3% of the vote, in what is being seen as a major blow to the rise of European populism. Nevertheless, this is an increase on his vote in 2012, when Wilders scored 15 seats. The Christian Democrats and D66 both won 19 seats while the big winner of the night was GroenLinks, whose galvanising leader Jesse Klaver helped propel the party from four to 14 seats. The VVD may remain the biggest party, but its support is down eight seats on 2012, reflecting some voter unhappiness at the performance of the current coalition. The big blow, however, was to coalition partner Labour (PvdA), which saw support plummet from 38 to just nine seats, or seventh place. In total, 13 parties have won seats in parliament.



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Big cities

The decline of the Labour party is particularly marked in its strong-hold big cities. In Amsterdam, for example, GroenLinks is now the biggest party, followed by D66 and the VVD.

### New parties

Denk, the new party formed by two ex-Labour MPs of Turkish origin, has overtaken the PvdA in both Rotterdam and The Hague and is bigger than the PVV in Amsterdam, with 7.5% of the vote. The party has three seats in the new look parliament. The anti-EU Forum voor Democratie, part of the Ukraine referendum campaign, will have two seats.

### PVV strongholds

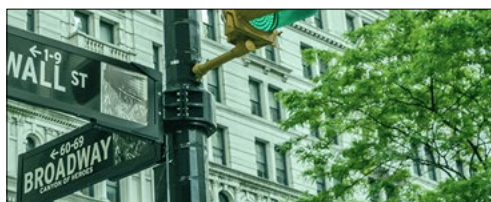
The PVV, which did not make the breakthrough many expected, was the biggest party in a handful of local authority areas, largely in the east of Groningen and Drenthe, and in the south, where Wilders comes from. In particular, the PVV emerged as the biggest party in Maastricht and Venlo.

### Europe relieved

German chancellor Angela Merkel was one of the first foreign leaders to contact Mark Rutte after the vote. 'Germany is looking forward to further close cooperation as friends, neighbours and Europeans,' her spokesman said. Italian premier Paolo Gentiloni said on Twitter: 'The anti-European right has lost in the Netherlands. A communal effort is now needed to change and revitalise the EU.'

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LOOKING FOR AN INTERNATIONAL TAX SPECIALIST IN THE NETHERLANDS?

(BROADSTREET)

## Time for unity

There has been unprecedented international media attention focused on the Netherlands for the general election. Would the Netherlands do the unthinkable and make a far-right populist who wants to close mosques the leader of the biggest party? After last night's results, the answer is clear. Geert Wilders' PVV has made gains, but is still well below its 2010 popularity. Wilders is one of the longest serving MPs in the Dutch parliament and has become part of the furniture. So this vote cannot be seen as a sign that populism has suddenly taken hold.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate Wilders' influence on the other parties - particularly the VVD and CDA, both of which have developed a nice line in semi-Wilders rhetoric. If you don't 'do normal', bugger off, says VVD leader and prime minister Mark Rutte, while CDA leader Sybrand Buma decides on the last day of the campaign to launch an attack on dual nationality that even embroils the Argentine queen.

But now the campaign is over, the posturing can be put on hold. With the dust settling on the results, the real work can begin... putting together a workable coalition to run the country for the next five years. It will be no easy task. Although a right-leaning government made up of four parties looks most likely, there are major divisions between them and it could take months to form a new cabinet. As voters prepare to go the polls in France and Germany, the Netherlands has shown the rest of Europe that a party which only appeals to anti-immigrant sentiment does not have to have the upper hand. Consensus and compromise are now key. The election is over, the foreign press can go home and the Dutch can start working together again.

Robin Pascoe, editor DutchNews.nl

# The Netherlands is 'normal': Dutch papers

A beaming Mark Rutte features on the front page of all the Dutch papers on Thursday morning, with the exception of Trouw, which carries a dejected Lodewijk Asscher.

'The centre wins' the NRC headlines its election result analysis. 'The Netherlands has woken up 'a normal country', in the words of VVD leader Mark Rutte,' the paper writes. There has been no 'populist revolt', only a 'couple of hammer blows'. The NRC detects a clear trend: the centre dominates. 'The Netherlands remains what it has essentially been for decades: many-faceted and largely moderate.' 'The Dutch domino tile hasn't tumbled' the Financieele Dagblad writes in its editorial. It appears most voters weren't led by anger and although Labour was severely punished and the VVD won fewer seats compared to 2012 the 'discontent is much less prevalent than

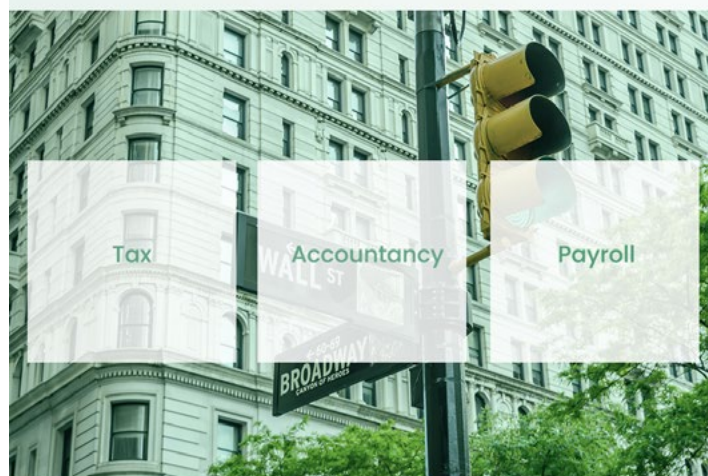


many a pessimist had predicted.' The Netherlands is a right-wing country this morning, with the VVD as the undisputed winner', Trouw's headline reads. Nevertheless, 'the Netherlands has shown itself once again to be a country in which moderation is key. 'Our society is not open to extremism. The PVV and its hostility to the system gained far fe-

wer seats than the polls suggested.' The Telegraaf headlines its editorial 'trust'. Much has been said about the gulf between politicians and the population but the high turnout showed that the Dutch are still closely involved in government. It is now crucial that political leaders do not abuse that trust, the paper concludes.

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## WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

Although the new 150 MPs will not take their seats until next week, behind the scenes the VVD will immediately begin sounding out likely *verkenners* - the person charged with putting together a tentative coalition. The *verkenner*, a senior statement, talks to the party leaders about potential coalitions and will then probably report back to parliament.

Once a potential coalition has been identified, the *verkenner* will appoint 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 the new government's policies are set down. It is a process of political horse-trading which usually takes months and is likely to be particularly protracted this year because so many parties - at least four - are going to be involved. The longest cabinet formation took 208 days, the shortest just 10.