

## The Netherlands

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Table 1. Cabinet composition of Balkenende II

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For the composition of Balkenende II on 1 January 2006, see Lucardie & Voerman (2006: 1201; 2004: 1088).

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*Changes during 2006:*

Minister for Institutional Reform and Relations with the Dutch Antilles/*Minister van Bestuurlijke Vernieuwing en Koninkrijksrelaties*: Alexander Pechtold (1965 male, D66) resigned and was replaced by Atzo Nicolai (1960 male, VVD) on 3 July

Minister of Economic Affairs/*Minister van Economische Zaken*: Laurens Jan Brinkhorst (1937 male, D66) resigned and was replaced by Joop Wijn (1969 male, CDA) on 3 July\*

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Note: \* Joop Wijn did not replace Laurens Jan Brinkhorst as Deputy Prime Minister, as this function is assigned only to party leaders or ranking party members.

## Election report

While parliamentary elections were not expected before May 2007, tensions had already been increasing within the governing coalition in 2005. In December 2005, the cabinet decided to contribute 1,100 soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, in spite of opposition from the smallest party in the coalition – Democrats 66 (*Democraten 66*, D66). However, Boris Dittrich, the parliamentary party leader, failed to persuade D66's ministers to resign. As a result, the coalition survived, but Dittrich resigned as party leader on 3 February 2006.

Municipal elections, held on 7 March, indicated that all three governing parties were losing support. The Christian Democratic Appeal (*Christen Democratisch Appèl*, CDA) lost about 300 of its 2,155 seats and was no longer the largest party at the local level. The main winners were the Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) and the Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*, SP). The leader of the Liberal Party (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD), Jozias van Aartsen, resigned as he felt responsible for the electoral losses of his party.

Table 2. Elections for the *Tweede Kamer* (lower house)

Date of election:	22 November 2006			
Total number of seats:	150			
Electorate:	12,264,503			
Total votes cast:	9,854,998 (80.35%)			
Total valid votes:	9,838,683 (99.83%)			
Party	Number and percentage of votes	Percentage change since 2003	Number and percentage of seats	Change since 2003
<i>Christen Democratisch Appèl</i> – Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)	2,608,573 (26.5)	-2.1	41 (27.3)	-3
<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> – Labour Party (PvdA)	2,085,077 (21.2)	-6.0	33 (22.0)	-9
<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i> – Liberal Party (VVD)	1,443,312 (14.7)	-3.2	22 (14.7)	-6
<i>Socialistische Partij</i> – Socialist Party (SP)	1,630,803 (16.6)	+10.3	25 (16.7)	+16
<i>Fortuyn</i> /Fortuyn	20,956 (0.2)	-5.4	0 (0.0)	-8
<i>GroenLinks</i> – Green Left (GL)	453,054 (4.6)	-0.5	7 (4.7)	-1
<i>Democraten 66</i> – Democrats 66 (D66)	193,232 (2.0)	-2.1	3 (2.0)	-3
<i>ChristenUnie</i> – Christian Union (CU)	390,969 (4.0)	+1.9	6 (4.0)	+3
<i>Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i> – Political Reformed Party (SGP)	153,266 (1.6)	+0.1	2 (1.3)	0
<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> /Groep Wilders – Freedom Party/Group Wilders (PVV)	579,490 (5.9)	+5.9	9 (6.0)	+9
<i>Partij voor de Dieren</i> – Animal Rights Party (PvdD)	179,988 (1.8)	+1.8	2 (1.3)	+2
Others	99,963 (1.0)	-0.3	0 (0.0)	0

Table 3. Cabinet composition of Balkenende III

<i>A. The party composition of Balkenende III:</i>		
Date of investiture: 7 July 2006*		
Party	Number and percentage of parliamentary seats	Number and percentage of cabinet posts
CDA	44 (29.3)	9 (56.3)
VVD	28 (18.7)	7 (43.7)
<i>B. Cabinet members of Balkenende III:</i>		
Prime Minister, Minister of General Affairs/ <i>Minister-President, Minister van Algemene Zaken</i> : Jan Peter Balkenende (1956 male, CDA)		
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance/ <i>Vice-Minister-President, Minister van Financiën</i> : Gerrit Zalm (1952 male, VVD)		
Minister of Foreign Affairs/ <i>Minister van Buitenlandse Zaken</i> : Ben Bot (1937 male, CDA)		
Minister for Development Cooperation/ <i>Minister voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking</i> : Agnes van Ardenne (1950 female, CDA)		
Minister of Justice/ <i>Minister van Justitie</i> : Piet Hein Donner (1948 male, CDA) <i>resigned</i> and was <i>replaced</i> by Ernst Hirsch Ballin (1950 male, CDA) on 21–22 September		
Minister for Foreigners and Integration/ <i>Minister voor Vreemdelingenzaken en Integratie</i> : Rita Verdonk (1955 female, VVD) became Minister for Integration, Prevention, Youth Protection and Rehabilitation/ <i>Minister voor Integratie, Preventie, Jeugdbescherming en Reclassering</i> on 14 December		
Minister of Home Affairs and Relations with the Dutch Antilles/ <i>Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties</i> : Johan Remkes (1951 male, VVD)		
Minister for Institutional Reform and Relations with the Dutch Antilles/ <i>Minister voor Bestuurlijke Vernieuwing en Koninkrijksrelaties</i> : Atzo Nicolai (1960 male, VVD)		
Minister of Education, Culture and Science/ <i>Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap</i> : Maria van der Hoeven (1949 female, CDA)		
Minister of Defence/ <i>Minister van Defensie</i> : Henk Kamp (1952 male, VVD)		
Minister of Housing, Planning and Environment Management/ <i>Minister van Volkshuisvesting, Ruimtelijke Ordening en Milieubeheer</i> : Sybilla Dekker (1942 female, VVD) <i>resigned</i> and was <i>replaced</i> by Pieter Winsemius (1942 male, VVD) on 21–22 September		
Minister of Transport and Public Works/ <i>Minister van Verkeer en Waterstaat</i> : Karla Peijs (1944 female, CDA)		
Minister of Economic Affairs/ <i>Minister van Economische Zaken</i> : Joop Wijn (1969 male, CDA)		
Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality/ <i>Minister van Landbouw, Natuur en Voedselkwaliteit</i> : Cees Veerman (1949 male, CDA)		
Minister of Social Affairs and Employment/ <i>Minister van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid</i> : Aart-Jan de Geus (1955 male, CDA)		
Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport/ <i>Minister van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport</i> : Hans Hoogervorst (1956 male, VVD)		

Note: \* Dutch cabinets do not face a formal investiture; on 7 July 2006, two new ministers were appointed to the ‘caretaker cabinet’ Balkenende III, to replace the D66 ministers that resigned on 30 June, while the others continued in their function.

In May, a rather unusual event brought about the fall of the coalition Government. A television programme about the life of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, born in Somalia and elected to the Dutch parliament (for the VVD) in 2003, raised doubts about the way she had obtained refugee status and (subsequently) Dutch citizenship in the 1990s. Responding to questions asked in Parliament, the Minister for Foreigners and Integration, Rita Verdonk (also VVD), concluded that the MP did not have Dutch citizenship. Hirsi Ali announced the next day that she would give up her parliamentary seat and leave the Netherlands (in any event, she had been invited to work for a think-tank in the United States). However, a majority in the Dutch lower house urged the Minister to make sure Hirsi Ali could retain or regain her Dutch citizenship. Verdonk complied, but only after Hirsi Ali signed a statement admitting she had given inaccurate information to the Minister. When it became clear that she had done so under pressure (from the Minister), Verdonk was criticized in the strongest terms by most opposition parties as well as by D66. For the Democrats who had often disapproved of Verdonk's conservative policies, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. The newly elected leader of the Democratic parliamentary party, Lousewies van der Laan, declared her party could no longer support the cabinet. This time, D66's ministers resigned. As the cabinet now lacked a majority in Parliament, the Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende (CDA), tendered the resignation of his cabinet to the Queen on 30 June 2006. Elections for the *Tweede Kamer* (the lower house) were held on 22 November 2006. In the run-up to the elections, Balkenende led a minority cabinet supported by CDA and VVD while preparing for the elections and defending the budget in Parliament. Alexander Pechtold led D66 in the election campaign, after defeating Van der Laan in a membership vote.

The election campaign started in October and had a personal rather than an ideological character, even if the major parties did differ on issues like social security and fiscal policies, immigration, health care, the public debt and child care. At first, the polls suggested it would be a two horse race between Balkenende and Wouter Bos, the leader of the Labour Party. Until mid-October, the PvdA appeared slightly ahead of the CDA in most polls. In a first radio debate, held on 29 October, the Christian Democratic leader accused Bos of being dishonest about the general (state-funded) old age pension, which, according to the Labour Party, should be taxed like other income sources. The leader of the Labour Party was obviously hurt by this criticism, which would be repeated many times by Christian Democrats as well as Liberals. In a later debate, Bos suggested he might prefer a left-wing coalition with SP and Green Left (*GroenLinks*, GL) to a coalition with the CDA. The Liberal Party leader, Mark Rutte, said that a left-wing coalition would undo the recent economic recovery and plunge the Netherlands into a recession.

Though most party leaders toured the whole country and addressed many meetings, the campaign seemed to be fought mainly on television and the Internet. Apart from party websites, blogs and sites like YouTube, voting guides may have exercised substantial influence on the large number of floating voters. Maybe as a result of all this, turn-out was higher than it had been in the last four parliamentary elections. In spite of the recent economic recovery, the three parties that had governed the country from 2003 till June 2006 lost seats. The CDA, however, managed to limit the loss and remain the largest party in Parliament. It had waged a successful and (by Dutch standards) aggressive campaign, attacking the main opposition party, but also emphasizing the role of Balkenende as Prime Minister, with the Christian Democratic leader regaining some of the popularity he had lost in recent years. The CDA's Liberal coalition partner did not benefit at all from the economic recovery for which it claimed credit.

Moreover, the VVD probably paid a price for the rather competitive leadership race within the party. When Van Aartsen resigned in March, party members could choose between three candidates. Mark Rutte, Deputy Minister (*staatssecretaris*) of Education, defeated Rita Verdonk, the Minister for Foreigners and Integration, by a narrow margin. Rutte enjoyed the support of the party establishment, whereas Verdonk was quite popular with the right-wing of the party – and its voters. She accepted the second position on the party list, yet won more (preferential) votes than Rutte – a unique event in Dutch electoral history. Polls suggested, however, that some supporters of Verdonk and her tough immigration policy had switched from the VVD to the new Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) led by Geert Wilders. Wilders had also been a member of the VVD when he was elected to Parliament in 1998, but left the Liberal caucus in 2004 to sit as an independent (see Lucardie & Voerman 2005: 1128). In 2006, the 'Group Wilders' became the Freedom Party. It combined economic liberalism with populism (criticizing the political elite, advocating referenda and direct elections of public officials) and cultural conservatism: tough on crime and immigration, very critical of Islam and sceptical of European integration. The PVV won not only voters from the VVD, but also from the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), which had simplified its name to 'Fortuyn' and elected a new and unknown leader. The LPF lost all its seats.

One might have expected that the PvdA would benefit from the losses of the coalition parties. In January 2006, polls predicted 53 seats for the Labour Party. Yet in November it obtained only 33 seats. Some commentators attributed the disappointing result to mistakes made by Bos and his campaign team, including confusion about the old age pension issue, and the leader's lack of self-confidence and aggression. Other observers suggested more structural causes such as a growing demand for ideological clarity and/or a sense of

community, combined with euroscepticism. Cosmopolitan and pro-European parties such as the PvdA, but also D66 and Green Left, all lost votes, whereas communitarian and eurosceptical parties won, on the left as well as the right side of the political spectrum. The Socialist Party, which had been founded by Maoists in 1971 as the 'Communist Party of the Netherlands/Marxist-Leninist', but evolved gradually into a left-wing socialist or even social democratic mass party, may have benefited as well from its vigorous (and successful) campaign against the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The Treaty had been opposed also by Wilders and by the Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*, CU). Both did quite well at the parliamentary elections in 2006. Another winner was the Animal Rights Party (*Partij voor de Dieren*, PvdD), which entered Parliament with two seats – probably the first animal rights party to do so in the world. It largely owed its success to the support from many celebrities (mainly writers and actors), but perhaps also to its campaign against the European Constitution. The only eurosceptical party that did not make any progress was the Calvinist Political Reformed Party (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, SGP). It may have lost voters to the Christian Union as a result of its internal conflict about female membership (see Lucardie & Voerman 2006: 1203–1204).

As neither the coalition of CDA and VVD nor the three left-wing parties obtained a majority in Parliament, it was not obvious which parties should govern after the elections. Instead of appointing an *informateur*, as was customary, the Queen first appointed an explorer (*verkenner*). A member of the Council of State (*Raad van State*), Rein-Jan Hoekstra (CDA), explored the chances of a coalition of CDA, PvdA and SP. In December he realized this was not a realistic option, given the political differences between the parties and the Christian Democrats' fear of being outvoted by the two left-wing partners in such a coalition. A better option seemed to be a coalition of CDA, PvdA and Christian Union. On 20 December, the Queen appointed an *informateur*, Herman Wijffels (member of the World Bank Board of Directors and also member of the CDA), to initiate and facilitate negotiations between the three parties.

### **Issues in national politics**

On 21 September 2006, the Minister of Justice, Piet Hein Donner (CDA), and the Minister of Housing, Planning and Environment Management, Sybilla Dekker (VVD), resigned, thereby accepting responsibility for the death of eleven asylum seekers caused by a fire in the detention centre at Schiphol International Airport in the night of 26–27 October 2005. The two ministers were replaced by former colleagues: Ernst Hirsch Ballin (CDA), who had been

Minister of Justice from 1989 to 1994, and Pieter Winsemius (VVD), Minister of Housing, Planning and Environment Management from 1982 to 1986.

The Minister for Foreigners and Integration, Rita Verdonk, was given another portfolio (Integration, Prevention, Youth Protection and Rehabilitation) on 14 December because she refused to implement a motion approved by the newly elected Parliament regarding the asylum seekers who had been waiting for a decision about their status since 2001. A (narrow) majority in Parliament felt this group of about 26,000 people should be allowed to stay in the Netherlands, whereas Verdonk argued that in accordance with the law they should be expelled as soon as possible. At first the Prime Minister supported her, but to break the deadlock between Parliament and cabinet, he accepted a compromise: for the time being, these asylum seekers should not be expelled. The Liberal ministers threatened to resign, but were persuaded to stay on 'in the national interest', though they disagreed openly with the Prime Minister – again a unique occurrence in Dutch political history.

### **Institutional changes**

In December 2005, the Minister for Institutional Reform, Alexander Pechtold (D66), had established a National Convention to investigate various options for renewal of the Dutch political system. The Convention consisted of constitutional lawyers, historians and other experts, and was chaired by Rein-Jan Hoekstra, a member of the Council of State. On 5 October 2006, it presented its final report to Atzo Nicolai (VVD), who had replaced Pechtold as Minister for Institutional Reform. Among the reforms recommended by the Convention were a Constitutional Court and a binding referendum.

Inspired by the 'Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform' in the Canadian province of British Columbia, Pechtold had also established a Citizen Panel whose brief was to design a new electoral system for the Netherlands. In February 2006, 50,000 citizens were selected by lottery. After a first informative meeting, 140 of them were selected (in a weighed ballot) to study all different options. In November, a very large majority of the panel decided the electoral system needed only modest alterations: voters should be able to vote either for an individual candidate (nominated by a party) or for the party as such. The vote for an individual candidate would gain more weight, but proportional representation would be maintained. On 14 December, the Citizen Panel met for the last time and presented its final report to the Minister for Institutional Reform. However, Nicolai showed little sympathy for electoral reforms. Already in September he had withdrawn a bill prepared by his predecessor that would lower the effective threshold for preferential votes. (In the present system, preferential votes [i.e., votes for candidates other than the head of the

party list] are effective only if they exceed 25 per cent of the electoral quotient, which equals roughly 65,000 votes.) Eventually, only one institutional reform was implemented: as of 1 May 2006, 40,000 citizens could put an issue on the agenda of the *Tweede Kamer*, provided the issue had not been discussed in Parliament for the last two years.

### *Party funding*

The Minister of Home Affairs and Relations with the Dutch Antilles, Johan Remkes (VVD), prepared a bill that would limit donations to political parties to €25,000. All donations above €3,000 should be published. However, Parliament did not find time to deal with the bill in 2006. In August 2006, the Council of State confirmed that only parties represented in the lower and/or the upper house of Parliament were entitled to a government subsidy, thus rejecting the claims for subsidies from the Association of Local Political Parties and from Transparent Europe (*Europa Transparant*, ET) – the latter being a party represented in the European Parliament, but not in the Dutch Parliament.

## **Sources and further information**

### *Publications:*

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### *On the Internet:*

- National and local election results (in Dutch): [www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl](http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl)  
 Parliamentary election studies (in English, under construction): [www.bsk.utwente.nl/skon](http://www.bsk.utwente.nl/skon)  
 Information on ministers and MPs (in Dutch): [www.parlement.com](http://www.parlement.com)  
 Information and literature on political parties (mainly in Dutch): [www.dnpp.nl](http://www.dnpp.nl)  
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