

## WP 5 – Civil Society and the Public Sphere

# **Euroscepticism in the European Parliament Elections of June 2009 Country Report: The Netherlands**

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## **Introduction**

Euroscepticism in the Netherlands might be seen as a strange and recent phenomenon. After all, the country was a ‘founding father’ of the European Union (EU) as one of the original six member states. Furthermore, as a trading nation with one of the biggest harbours in the world, it has profited enormously from the removal of borders and the internal market project. In september 1991, when the Netherlands held the EU presidency, the Netherlands proposed a treaty reform that was so federal in outlook, that only Belgium supported it. After this diplomatic blunder in what among diplomatic circles came to be known as ‘black Monday’, the Dutch presidency had to revert to an earlier proposal which would eventually become the Maastricht Treaty.

Although this image of a very pro-European country persists both within and outside the Netherlands, some commentators recently have argued that the current wind of Euroscepticism is rather the norm, than the exception (Aarts and van der Kolk 2005; Vollaard and Boer 2005). In other words, the Netherlands is not strangely Eurosceptic now, it was rather strangely pro-European in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In fact, the current political climate of ‘mild’ Euroscepticism much resembles the atmosphere of the early 1950s up to the mid 1970s.

This country report sets out to map Euroscepticism as it currently features in the Netherlands. The main emphasis is on Eurosceptic discourse and narratives. It looks at how political entrepreneurs have used some of the major recent events in European integration to shape the current Dutch discourse on European integration. Throughout this report, there will be attention for historical precedents to current Euroscepticism as well as contextual factors that affected its current prominence.

# Euroscepticism in Politics

The most important 'performers' of discourse on European integration in the Netherlands are all party actors. That is to say, party leaders on both the right and left of the political spectrum, whether in office or in opposition have been driving forces in recent developments in Dutch discourse on European integration and narratives of Euroscepticism (Aarts and van der Kolk 2005; Vollaard and Boer 2005). Unlike *the Sun* in the UK and *Kronenzeitung* in Austria, the Netherlands has no pro-active Eurosceptic press. Dutch tabloids follow Eurosceptic arguments made by politicians, but can hardly be seen as campaigning themselves. Unlike the *ATTAC* in France and *nei-til-EU* in Norway, there is also no structurally well-organized Eurosceptic civil society in the Netherlands either. During the referendum campaign on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, Mr. Willem Bos created a movement for the no-campaign but this did not play a key role in the campaign and dissolved soon after the referendum. The main societal actors – trade unions, employers' associations, farmers associations and churches – all came out in favour of the Constitutional Treaty. Nor has the Netherlands strong extra-parliamentary state institutions playing a critical role, like the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* in Germany or President Vaclav Klaus in the Czech Republic. To understand discourse on European integration and Eurosceptic narratives in the Netherlands, we therefore have to focus primarily on political parties (Harmsen 2008; Voerman 2005).

## 'New' Euroscepticism

Ironically, the recent Eurosceptical political discourse in the Netherlands was first funneled by Frits Bolkestein in the mid 1990s, who would later become EU Commissioner and in that function proposed a piece of legislation known as the Bolkestein – or Service – Directive, that is generally considered a further step in integration. In the mid 1990s however, Bolkestein was party leader of the liberal-conservative VVD party. He began challenging European integration, as he argued legislation from Brussels formed a burden on Dutch companies. Besides Euroscepticism, Bolkestein also raised the issue of muslim immigration and integration in the Netherlands. Although in retrospect, his position appears very mild and modest, he was at the time strongly attacked from both within and outside the VVD party as these 'nationalist' ideas were a complete taboo in Dutch political discourse, directly associated with neo-nazism (Voerman 2005). However, Bolkestein did lay the groundwork for a stronger Eurosceptic voice of the VVD party, that would be particularly pronounced at targeting the Dutch net contribution to the EU budget (in 1999 and 2005) and the row over the Growth and Stability Pact in 2003. In both cases, it was Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm who presented a fierce defence of national interest narrative in which he pitted the Netherlands against the European Commission, Germany and, particularly, France. It is important to notice, that the VVD's Euroscepticism fitted clearly with its ideology. As a market liberal party, it opposed the EU's turn towards market regulation in the 1990s in the form of social and environmental policy. The defense of a monetarist policy concerning the Euro and an attack on the French 'dirigist' culture of political economy also neatly fitted into VVD ideology.

In the early 2000s, however, the VVD party lost ownership of the Eurosceptic agenda to the fringe parties on both the extreme left and the extreme right. On the far right, populist leader Pim Fortuyn managed to singlehandedly upset the entire political order in the Netherlands in 2002. In a turbulent election campaign, Fortuyn advanced a very broad populist agenda. Major themes in his campaign included the failed policies on immigration and integration of Muslim minorities, general dissatisfaction with the ruling elite in The Hague, major steps in European integration without popular consent (i.e. enlargement, the euro), and inefficiencies and waiting lists in the health care sector. Although Fortuyn was murdered just days before the election, and his party – the LPF – subsequently fell into disarray, his populist agenda has been taken over by Mrs. Rita Verdonk and Mr. Geert Wilders, both former VVD party members. None of these new

populists, however, advocate leaving the European Union altogether. Rather, they recognise the need for economic integration and are in favour of the internal market project. What they advocate is a return to a more intergovernmental Europe in which the European Commission and European Court get substantially less powers and the European Parliament is abolished and all decisions should be made unanimously by the member states. Also, any form of political integration should be reversed, particularly agreements on foreign policy and justice and home affairs.

On the far left, the socialist party SP has also developed a populist Eurosceptic rhetoric. They argue that European integration is a capitalist, neo-liberal project in which only the interests of big business are served. They have argued against the presence of 'Polish plumbers' on the Dutch labour market, both because of the negative influence on the wages and job opportunities of 'Dutch plumbers' as well as on grounds of exploitation of employees from the new member states themselves and on grounds of negative effects for the economies Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries. Additionally, their criticism has targeted the Services Directive (proposed by Dutch VVD Euro-Commissioner Bolkestein) and interference of the European Commission in the Dutch housing market (conducted by Dutch VVD Euro-Commissioner Kroes). The fact that the two most recent Dutch Commissioners have both come from the liberal VVD party and held 'economic' posts (Internal Market and Competition respectively) may well have facilitated such Euroscepticism from the far left, as it added a domestic partisan dimension.

### **'Old' Euroscepticism**

Such recent forms of Euroscepticism that have their roots in the 1990s but only came to full fruition in the Dutch political landscape after the Fortuyn revolution of 2002, clearly dominate Eurosceptic discourse in the Netherlands currently, but there are also older strands in Eurosceptic discourse. The communist strand of Euroscepticism is now obsolete, but the traditional protestant Euroscepticism keeps a stable – though small – societal base. Here, we have to remember that up to the 1970s, the Netherlands was a highly pluralist – or consociational – society (Andeweg 2000; Lijphart 1976). Traditionally, Dutch society was divided into four pillars: catholic, protestant, liberal and socialist. Each pillar had its own political parties, newspapers, sports associations, schools, trade unions, broadcasting companies and even universities. As a member of any one of these pillars, Dutch citizens would hardly have any contact with persons or ideas from other pillars (Lijphart 1976). Deviations between the pillars were kept in shape by politicians who would combine polarizing rhetoric in public with a willingness to compromise behind closed doors.

The protestant pillar has always been the most Eurosceptic of the four (Vollaard 2006), although Euroscepticism could also be found in the socialist and liberal pillars. Although there were four pillars in Dutch society, the socialist and liberal pillars also consisted predominantly of protestants, susceptible to anti-Catholic narratives. The Eurosceptic discourse of the protestants in the 1950s and 1960s was directly targeted at Catholic predominance within the EU (Vollaard 2006). The other five founding fathers were led by Catholic politicians and all the early political entrepreneurs of European integration – Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Paul-Henri Spaak and Alcide de Gasperi – were Catholics. As such, it wasn't hard for Dutch protestants to see and portray European integration as a papal plot; only the most recent in a long historical chain of attempts to keep or bring the Netherlands under the influence of Rome, dating all the way back to the reformation and the 80 years war of independence against Catholic Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century (Vollaard 2005). Catholics have always – more or less explicitly – accepted some form of supranational authority over the nation-state in the form of the Pope. Contrary to this, the Westphalian system of independent and sovereign nation states might be seen as fitting the protestant political agenda exceptionally well.

Politically, protestantism and (moderate) nationalism have gone well together in the Netherlands, since the protestant rebellion against the Catholic Spanish king kick-started the Dutch independent nation state and 'golden age' from 1568 onwards (Vollaard 2005, 2006). In fact, Dutch protestant political leaders stalled the initial steps of integration considerably and they were amongst the fiercest defenders of the intergovernmental aspects of the European Coal and Steel Community among the six original member states. As opposed to the grand federalism of the European Political and Defense Communities, the success of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 was partially located in its ability to win over the 'entrepreneurial' Dutch protestants with solid intergovernmental institutions and arguments of pragmatic efficiency and economic opportunities (Milward 2000: 173ff).

The mainstream protestant political parties merged with their Catholic counter part in 1981 to form the christian-democratic CDA party. This party has had a clear pro-European agenda and discourse from the start. However, more orthodox protestant parties with a clear Eurosceptic agenda keep a stable amount of about 3 per cent of the electoral votes and seats in parliament. The SGP party has always been in opposition, but the ChristenUnie is now in government for the first time in its history (and the history of its pre-decessors: RPF and GPV). Both parties campaigned against the Constitutional Treaty in the 2005 referendum and have a shared delegation in the European Parliament, which is (was) a member of the Eurosceptic Independence and Democracy group. Ironically, they are (were) in this European party group together with such ultra-catholic parties as the Polish League of Families, sharing a common Eurosceptic agenda.

## **Reactions to New Euroscepticism**

The three traditional mainstream parties: the social-democratic PvdA, christian-democratic CDA and liberal-conservative VVD have toughened their positions on Europe and other issues following the electoral success of the new populist parties. Rather than calling themselves simply 'pro-European', they now refer to themselves as 'Eurocritical' and have no problem calling for a strong defense of the 'national interest' within the EU (De Wilde 2009; Van Kessel and Crum 2009). In light of this, they argue for less interference by 'Brussels' in terms of rules and regulations, lower financial contributions to the EU budget and criticise some of the institutionalized inefficiencies of the European Union such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the European Parliament's seat in Strasbourg. However, they are not in favour of systematically reversing either the level or scope of integration. Painfully obvious, these three parties are having trouble presenting a coherent position on European integration that is easily communicated to the electorate. It is therefore not surprising to find them largely silent on issues of European integration (Mair 2001; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Whether this also plays a role in the decline of their electoral appeal – for instance in the European Parliament elections of 2009 – remains to be researched.

What is perhaps more interesting from a political science perspective and exceptional in comparison to other EU member states, is the rise of a pro-European opposition. Or, perhaps more accurately, the rise of an anti-anti-European opposition. As a response to the electoral success of openly Eurosceptic parties and the wavering response of mainstream parties, new opportunities have arisen for pro-European fringe parties. Eurosceptic discourse is now much more pronounced and sophisticated in Dutch politics than it was ten years ago. Having reached a certain state of consolidation, these narratives have in turn created opportunities for counter-narratives. One party to take up this challenge is the green party GroenLinks. To differentiate themselves from other contenders on the left side of the spectrum – the socialist SP and social-democratic PvdA – GroenLinks presents a pro-European discourse, from a critical starting point. They agree with the SP and PvdA that the EU is not social enough, that big business has too much influence in EU decision-making and that the national welfare state is compromised as a result of European integration. In addition, they take from social-liberalism the

argument that the EU is not democratic enough as decisions are made behind closed doors by officials who are hardly accountable to EU citizens. Their answer to this shared criticism, however, is fundamentally different from that of the SP and PvdA. To restore the social-welfare state and guarantee a more environmentally friendly society, GroenLinks argues in favour of more Europe, rather than less Europe. The EU is thus supposed to have more green and more social policy, although stopping short of a fully fledged EU welfare state. GroenLinks wants a massive 'green deal' in the form of large collective governmental investments in environmentally friendly industries and jobs to help bring European economies out of the financial crisis. They are also in favour of making the Commission directly responsible to the European Parliament, making codecision the standard policy-formulation process and creating direct EU taxes to do away with the cumbersome intergovernmental negotiations surrounding the EU budget. A common foreign policy is welcomed if based on human rights and multilateralism. EU militarism is strongly opposed, although a common procurement policy is advocated in order to collectively save money spent on arms and defense.

Even more clearly pro-European is the liberal-progressive party D66. Their current political leader Mr. Alexander Pechtold has apparently made it his personal mission to become the main political adversary of far-right populist leader Geert Wilders, by radically defending everything Wilders opposes. The campaign slogan for D66 during the 2009 European Parliament elections was simply 'Europe: Yes'. Their main ideologist concerning the EU is former Belgian prime minister Guy Verhofstadt, who is well known for his federalism throughout Europe. This makes D66 the only openly remaining federalist party in the Dutch parliament.

Interestingly, this anti-anti-Europeanism seems to pay off. The main winner in the Netherlands in the 2009 Euro-elections was Geert Wilders' PVV party winning 17 per cent of the vote (increasing from 0 to 4 seats (5 when the Lisbon Treaty is ratified)), but D66 and GroenLinks combined won 20 per cent of the vote (increasing from 3 to 6 seats). All other parties lost, or didn't gain enough votes to gain a seat. This is interesting as the campaign was largely fought on the pro-anti EU dimension of conflict. The 2009 elections thus show a polarization of the EU dimension of conflict in Dutch politics, to which we will shortly return in section 4 below.

## Themes and Narratives in Dutch Euroscepticism

Although to some extent discussed above in the section on politics, we will now turn in more depth to some of the major themes structuring Dutch Euroscepticism as well as some of the recent events in European integration that structured the discourse. Following the analysis of Aarts and Van der Kolk (2006), we pay specific attention to the three E's: the Elite, the Enlargement and the Euro. However, several other themes will also be touched upon.

### The Elite

To understand Dutch Euroscepticism it is important to see it in the context of some other issues that currently structure Dutch politics, especially since populist narratives play such an important role. Since the 1970s, Dutch society has slowly become 'depillarized'. Traditional strong bonds between political parties, civil society and citizens have been weakened. Combined with increased secularisation, rising wealth resulting in smaller families, the dominance of liberal discourse emphasising individualism, and rising influence of mass media, depillarization has resulted in a cleavage between citizens and the elite. In Dutch, this is referred to as: *de kloof tussen burger en politiek* (the gorge between citizen and politics). As Bernard Manin (1997) puts it, Western European

countries – including the Netherlands – can now be characterized as ‘audience democracies’. That is to say, citizens hardly participate in democracy anymore, they merely observe passively. Political parties have lost significant numbers of members, resulting in a turn from the ‘age of mass parties’ to the ‘age of kartel parties’ (Katz and Mair 1995). Parties traditionally well rooted in society – especially social democratic parties – are now seen as aloof and elitist by their former supporters. Voters change their preference for parties with increasing frequency and numbers, resulting in nervous politicians unwilling to take unpopular measures or pursue policies that bring results in the long run only. The general popular disenchantment with the political elite must also be seen in light of globalization and international integration, where countries become more and more interdependent and nation states are less and less able to solve societal problems alone. As a result, ‘serious’ political parties are restricted in offering voters substantially different policies, creating the image that they are all similar and that it doesn’t make a difference which of the traditional parties is in power.

Since European integration is one of those policies Dutch governments – and the mainstream parties CDA, VVD and PvdA in coalitions – have consistently pursued in the last 50 years, it provides a tempting target for new parties trying to challenge the party kartel and gain an electoral niche for themselves. Throughout Dutch Eurosceptic populist discourse, the disenchantment with the elite and the accusation that the elite has lost touch with the voters is palpable.

## **Globalization**

The populist parties and their followers do not just dislike the distance between voters and political elite or the fact that ‘the establishment’ (read: CDA, VVD and PvdA) doesn’t offer them any meaningful choice in terms of substantial policies. They also dislike the direction, or content, of the policies of integration and globalization taken. One may argue that it is especially the losers of integration and globalization that are susceptible to the populist rhetoric (Kriesi et al. 2006). Alternatively, one may see those who long back to (the myths of) the good old days of strong national sovereignty and strong family ties as the ones supporting the populist movement on both the left and the right extreme of the political spectrum (Hooghe et al. 2004; Marks et al. 2002). Eurosceptic narratives are therefore intertwined with anti-elite narratives, anti-globalization narratives, nationalist narratives and anti-immigration/integration narratives.

## **The Euro**

Like Germany, the Netherlands used to pride itself on having a hard currency. Although the Dutch Guilder was in practice systematically devalued against the German Mark whenever the Dutch economy tended to lose competitiveness to its eastern neighbour, the reputation of the Guilder was rock solid, especially within the Netherlands. Thus, the Dutch government sided with Germany to demand a very tough monetarist policy and complete independence of the European Central Bank during the negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty. Although not as touchy a subject as in Germany, inflation was seen as politically completely unacceptable. This made it difficult, but not impossible, to say goodbye to the Guilder and welcome the Euro. What made the transition problematic, however, was the perception that prices increased substantially in the transition. Some of the inflation was real as retailers and caterers increased their prices during the introduction of the Euro, but it was also psychological as prices were simply ‘smaller’ since one Euro was worth approximately 2,2 Guilders. Thus, the perception that ‘you can spend a Euro as easily as a Guilder, but you only earn half as many’ was ingrained in many people’s minds.

VVD Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm capitalized on this sensitivity in 2003 during the political row on the Growth and Stability Pact. The Pact, which was to guarantee against inflation and free riding by member states, opened up possibilities for penalties against member states who didn’t abide by the rules. Infringement procedures on these grounds

had been started against Portugal before. In 2003, however, Germany and France broke the rules of the Pact and argued they should be exempted from penalties. Mr. Zalm fiercely opposed this exemption, arguing that rules are valid for all member states, not just small member states. However, he lost out against Germany and France and the other countries that had been persuaded or threatened into agreement by them. The narrative that 'EU rules only apply to small member states' highly resonated in the Dutch public sphere, which prides itself on being a main supporter and host country to the principle of international rule of law in the tradition of Hugo Grotius. The row surrounding the pact, however, reaked of old Great Power politics reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's 'Concert of Europe' and *realpolitik*, rather than Grotius' ideal. Like in other small member states, the balance of power between big and small member states in the EU is a sensitive issue in the Netherlands.

## Enlargement

The EU's Eastern enlargement of 2004 came as a surprise to most Dutch citizens, despite years of political preparation and discussions ever since the end of the cold war. As there was no referendum or national election structured by the issue of enlargement, a narrative of a 'sudden' enlargement or even a coup d'état by the political establishment entered the discourse on integration. Enlargement was thus 'forced down the throats' of citizens by the political elite. Calls were made to 'limit the damage' by restricting entrance of workers from the new member states to the Dutch labour market, just like in several other member states.

In addition to the threat to the labour market, a narrative of corruption was advanced. Particularly after the accession of Rumania and Bulgaria and several arrests of members of Bulgarian armed mafia on Dutch soil. Not only was enlargement a threat to 'ordinary Dutch workers', it was also a bottomless pit of corruption in which Dutch net contributions to the EU budget would disappear and which would hurt the rule of law and democracy in the EU as a whole.

Interestingly, two pro-European narratives surrounding enlargement lost out to this two-pronged Eurosceptic enlargement narrative. First, there was the narrative of restoring peace to Europe after half a century of bitter division. Aside from 'uniting Europe', enlargement would guarantee stability and peace in the new member states. This narrative of peace that had also surrounded the early years of integration has, however, run its course. It was performed largely by elderly Dutch politicians and intellectuals, who were seen by younger people as condescending and out of touch with time. 'Nie wieder Auschwitz' just wasn't considered a valid argument for bringing ten new countries into the EU anno 2004.

The missionary aspect of 'exporting Dutch success' and being a guiding nation (*gidsland*) to bring the poor new member states to happiness and prosperity also didn't fly. All of those arguments were seen as made by the old political elite, who didn't stand to lose anything from enlargement, while the 'common Dutch worker' was forced to pay the bill. Secondly, there was the pro-European trade narrative. Eastern enlargement – and European integration in general – would open up new possibilities for trade. As the Dutch economy is very open, highly reliant on trade via its two big mainports: the Rotterdam harbour and Schiphol airport, the economic opportunities seem obvious. The Netherlands also has a large transport sector. One of the big Dutch transport companies – Van Gend & Loos – played a key role in opening up borders in European integration with the famous arrest of the European Court of Justice in 1962. Around enlargement, there were several stories in the news of Dutch entrepreneurs opening up shop in the new member states, with newly built distribution centres in Hungary and farmers buying land in Poland and the Ukraine. However, these stories were sporadic, largely found in quality press and not necessarily restricted to the EU, as the Ukraine case shows.

## Turkey

The question of whether or not Turkey could become a member state became particularly politicised in 2004 – 2005. Directly after the Eastern enlargement in May 2004, the Dutch EU presidency in the latter half of 2004 made it its primary aim to start accession negotiations with Turkey. The EU reached agreement on this during the December 2004 European Council meeting. With the VVD party ambiguous on the issue, Geert Wilders used the opportunity to split from his former party and start his own one man faction. His PVV party is primarily an anti-islam party, but opposition to Turkish membership fitted neatly into that narrative. Wilders went from 1 to 9 seats in the 2006 general election, became the biggest winner on an equal level with CDA at the 2009 European elections, and is polling the biggest party in the Netherlands for several weeks in a row now with approximately 30 out of 150 seats. Just after major disaster struck South-East Asia at Christmas 2004, Geert Wilders warned against a 'tsunami of muslims' if Turkey would ever become an EU member state.

## Net contributions

Another issue politicised by Gerrit Zalm is the net contribution the Netherlands pays to the EU budget (Petter and Griffiths 2005). Although Germany is the biggest net contributor in absolute terms, the Netherlands pays considerably more per capita. This was already raised by the VVD party as a problem in 1995, then more forcefully brought in spring 1999, and finally led to the Netherlands vetoing an EU budget proposal together with the UK in June 2005 (De Wilde 2009). Zalm's tough rhetoric on the net contributions resonated in Dutch public opinion and was offered by many as a reason to vote no to the Constitutional Treaty in the June 2005 referendum, whose campaign coincided with some of the more intense phases of intergovernmental bargaining on the EU budget (Thomassen 2005).

## Politicization and the Referendum

All these narratives play a role in the Dutch construction on discourse on European integration and particularly become prominent in times when European issues are actually at stake, such as during the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and the European Parliament elections in 2009. Arguably, these European issues were politicised too late for citizens to form educated opinions on Europe (Fossum and Trenz 2006) and debates quickly disappeared once the referendum was over (Van Grinsven et al. 2006), but these episodes of political contestation do function to structure the party system on European issues. In terms of party positions, many now classify the Dutch party system in terms of the yes-side and no-side during the referendum campaign, with the yes parties considered pro-European and the no parties considered Eurosceptic. Whereas the constitutional referendum saw a huge discrepancy between pro-Europeanism in parliament (85 per cent of parliamentarians were in favour of the Constitutional Treaty) and amongst the population (the Treaty was voted down by a majority of 62 per cent of the electorate), this 'gap' has consequently been reduced. The yes side now has 70 per cent of MPs, as both Wilders, the SP and ChristenUnie won in the 2006 general elections. As mentioned before, wide ranging positions on European issues are now reflected in parliament (Pellikaan and Brandsma 2005). However, this does not mean 'Europe' is now a fully politicised issue in the Netherlands. National elections are still fought over other issues (Van Holsteyn 2007; Van Holsteyn and den Ridder 2005). Nevertheless, the political landscape on Europe is now much more crystalized than it was before June 2005.



# The Elections of 2009

The European Parliament elections of 2009 featured most of the issues and party politics mentioned above. Although the Euro understandably did not feature in the campaign, the Elite, enlargement, Turkey and the budget all played a role. In fact, it might be considered surprising how 'European' the campaign was. That is to say, in terms of discourse, the campaign was very much about more or less integration (Van Kessel and Crum 2009). D66 campaigned with the simple slogan 'Europe – Yes', GroenLinks argued for a 'European Green Deal' and the SP campaigned because 'The Netherlands wants less Brussels'. Equally interesting is then, that both very pro-European parties (D66 and GroenLinks) and Eurosceptic parties (PVV) clearly won. However, as Van Kessel and Crum (2009) point out, the final results match polling trends in national elections. Thus, parties doing good in national politics also won in these European elections, and vice versa. That, and the historically low turn-out of 36,6 per cent, still point to the fact that these are 'second-order elections' (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004).

Finally, it is interesting to note the discourse effects of having the elections earlier than most other member states. The elections were held between 4 and 7 June 2009, with most countries having elections on Sunday 7 June. However the Dutch elections were on Wednesday 4 June. Although the European Commission demanded otherwise, the Dutch results were published as soon as they were known: largely on Wednesday evening and more definitely on Thursday morning. This opened up the possibility for separate news coverage on the Dutch election on Thursday 8 June and on the European election on Monday 11 June. As a result, the coverage on 8 June in the media was predominantly national, with very little attention for the results in the UK. On 11 June however, the results were clearly reported from a European perspective with articles stressing the loss of social-democratic parties – whether in government or in opposition – throughout Europe on the front page (and prominently on the websites) of all major national newspapers. It would thus be interesting to systematically compare the perspective or 'public sphere' characteristics of member states with early elections – i.e. the Netherlands and the UK – to those holding elections on Sunday 10 June.

## Conclusions

At first glance, many observers may be surprised by Euroscepticism in the Netherlands as it appears to be a very recent phenomenon in a country that has profited so much from integration. Eurosceptic discourse has become very clear in Dutch political culture since the Fortuyn revolution of 2002, but most of these narratives can be traced back to the second half of the 1990s. This report has described several of the major recent Eurosceptic narratives as well as the party political performers of these narratives and of counter narratives.

It seems clear that recent steps in the actual integration process have fed into Eurosceptic discourse, like the Euro, the Eastern enlargement, developments in the EU budget, and the question of Turkish membership. However, to fully understand Dutch Eurosceptism, a broader societal view is required to understand the impact of depillarization, individualism and the resulting 'audience democracy' in which the established political elite has become deeply mistrusted. Furthermore, integration and globalization have created 'losers' in both economic and psychological sense, who are susceptible to populist Eurosceptic rhetoric, providing both the far right and the far left with an electoral platform to advance their Eurosceptic narratives. It would be unlikely that the discourse of populist parties would have received equal attention from the media, had these parties not been so successful in the electoral arena.

Finally, this report has drawn attention to older forms of Euroscepticism. The Netherlands, particularly its protestant majority, has traditionally been more susceptible

to pragmatic arguments of economic benefits of European integration, than to sweeping grand rhetoric of federalist splendour. As such, the period of EU-phoria dominant in the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s in the Netherlands should be seen as the exception, instead of the current (mild) Euroscepticism.

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