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# Elections in the Netherlands - a long way to the future government, but also some tightening of migrant laws



The elections in the Netherlands next Wednesday will resolve only a small part of the dilemmas surrounding the future government, given that the biggest competitors are almost equal, and, at the same time, none of them has the prospect of winning a majority on their own.

The Dutch will not disregard the hundred-year-old political tradition on November 22 because elections will lead to the formation of a coalition government, at least a three-member one.

However, whoever is in a position to form the government will initiate a new political era in the Netherlands because the previous one has already ended with the departure of the current Prime Minister, Mark Rutte.

His 13 years as prime minister make him the longest-serving prime minister and a politician who has shown a rare ability to create consensus in the complex Dutch political scene.

Rutte has given up ambitions to lead a future government, even though his centre-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) has a strong chance of being part of the ruling bloc again.

Mark Rutte leaves behind a broad national consensus on the most significant foreign policy issues. The next government will keep the Netherlands among Ukraine's most active Euro-Atlantic allies, regardless of its structure and political platform.

## Unquestionable stability of foreign policy

Every candidate running for the presidency of the next administration is firmly in favour of strengthening EU cohesion and expanding its influence globally, particularly regarding technology and the environment.

All of them are committed to the Atlantic alliance, including meeting the NATO criteria

of allocating 2% of GDP for defence purposes.

Even though a traditional leader in advocating free global trade, the Netherlands has also established a consensus regarding protecting vital industries as one of the global leaders in technology and semiconductor production.

The elections next Wednesday are not risky for any aspect of shared EU and NATO policies, particularly for the alliance with the US and the UK on global issues regarding China or the Middle East, for example.

This stability in the principal directions of Dutch foreign policy will remain a rare case among European countries even after November 22, regardless of the election results.

## Migrant issue at the centre of the election

However, the last week of the campaign confirms that the issue of migrants and everything related to their acceptance will be the principal point for voters, even though a consensus regarding the state's attitude towards the immigration of foreigners has been rapidly forming.

Even under the new government, whoever forms it, the Netherlands will probably follow the widespread European trend of tightening migration and asylum policy, the degree of which will depend on the structure of the government.

At least 2 of the 3 principal contenders for forming the government (Mark Rutte's liberals VVD and the newly founded centrist New Social Contract (NSC) movement) have been announcing restrictions regarding the relatively liberal regime of accepting refugees and asylum.

Dilan Yeşilgöz-Zegerius, who took over the leadership of the VVD after the departure of Rutte, is herself a migrant, having come to the Netherlands as a child with her family from

Turkey.

But that will not be a reason for her to implement stricter immigration and asylum policies. She said the Netherlands has much more favourable migrant laws than many in Europe, making it more attractive.

It is significant that “we take the decisions to make sure that true refugees have a safe place,” said one of the candidates for the future prime minister.

One of her biggest rivals from the NSC movement, former Christian Democrat Pieter Omtzigt, advocates tightening regulations, including setting a limit of 50,000 migrants a year, including asylum seekers, students and economic migrants.

Even the leader of the left-green coalition PvdA, the heavyweight of Dutch and European politics, Frans Timmermans, said at the beginning of the campaign that he favoured “strict, but fair” migration legislation.

## Continuation of the trend of stricter migrant policy

Many parties, including the NSC, advocate that the treatment and benefits of migrants be defined according to their motive for leaving the country, whether fleeing war, being politically persecuted, or simply moving for better economic conditions.

Not counting the thousands of refugees from Ukraine, about 400,000 migrants came to the Netherlands last year. Their case is politicised primarily in the context of social housing, so many in the Netherlands see migrants as privileged in that respect.

Such a position goes hand in hand with the extreme right, whose leader, Geert Wilders, would like to completely stop the entry of migrants and opting out of all European and global agreements related to the reception of migrants.

His Freedom Party (PVV) is by far the strongest, with 10-12% support in surveys, right behind the favoured trio – the centrist movement NSC, the ruling liberals and the left-green coalition of Frans Timmermans, who individually have around 20% support.

After November 22, it is possible that one of the front-runners, except the Left-Greens, will extend an invitation to Wilders’ far-right party to join in the coalition-building process.

The fragmentation of Dutch politics, where about 20 parties will have prospects of entering the parliament, will require significant compromises when forming the government.

However, it is definite that after November 22, the Netherlands will also be affected by the wave of tightening migrant laws, which has already swept over some of the most influential European countries – Italy, the UK, and recently Germany.