



Country Issue: The Netherlands



## The Relaunch of Europe

Mapping Member States' Reform Interests

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## About the authors

Carmen Gerstenmeyer, Julia Klein, Julian Plottka, Jana Schubert, Amelie Tittel, all IEP.  
David Bokhorst, PhD Candidate, ENLIGHTEN – Horizon 2020, Political Economy and Transnational Governance, University of Amsterdam.

Institut für Europäische Politik (Institute for European Politics, IEP) is one of the leading foreign and European policy research centres in the Federal Republic of Germany dedicated to the study of European integration.

Further information on the project can be found here:

[www.relaunch-europe.eu](http://www.relaunch-europe.eu)

## Responsible for this publication in the FES

Dr. Dominika Biegón, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).  
Arne Schildberg, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

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# THE RELAUNCH OF EUROPE

## MAPPING MEMBER STATES' REFORM INTERESTS

*The Relaunch of Europe. Mapping Member States' Reform Interests (RelaunchEU)* is a project conducted by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) that surveys the implementation prospects for twelve concrete reform proposals. It covers the policy areas of Social Union, Economic and Monetary Union and Defence Union as well as asylum and migration policy and the EU's institutional set-up. Furthermore, it analyses the support for flexible integration and the positioning towards the five scenarios presented in the European Commission's »White Paper on the Future of Europe« of spring 2017. It covers the positions of national governments and of relevant progressive political parties, which received a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the previous European or national elections.<sup>1</sup>

The study follows two main objectives: (1) It demonstrates the scope of action for prompt reforms of the EU in the selected policy areas while also taking into account which member states would, under certain conditions, be willing to implement the specific proposals. (2) It empirically determines which member states could belong to an avant-garde group willing to deepen integration.

Researchers from think tanks and research institutions in the member states of the EU-27 compiled information to determine the position of governments and progressive political parties towards the twelve reform proposals. This qualitative analysis reflects the country experts' views and is based on documents such as coalition agreements, government or party programmes, position papers, press releases, interviews, op-ed pieces, and official documents. It presents a snapshot of the discussions within the governments and parties. In order to keep the country issues short, internal debates and deviating opinions cannot be covered in detail. Positions are subject to change, especially following elections and the formation of new governments. The snapshot was taken at the end of September 2017. More recent developments could not be included. Notable exceptions are the country issues of Austria and Germany, which were updated following the latest coalition negotiations.

The study's results are published in English on the website [www.relaunch-europe.eu](http://www.relaunch-europe.eu). It presents maps for every actor and reform proposal, 27 country issues and an analytical paper. The paper compares the positions of all actors in all member states of the EU-27 on the twelve concrete reform proposals and presents five flagship-projects, which bear the chance for a relaunch of Europe.

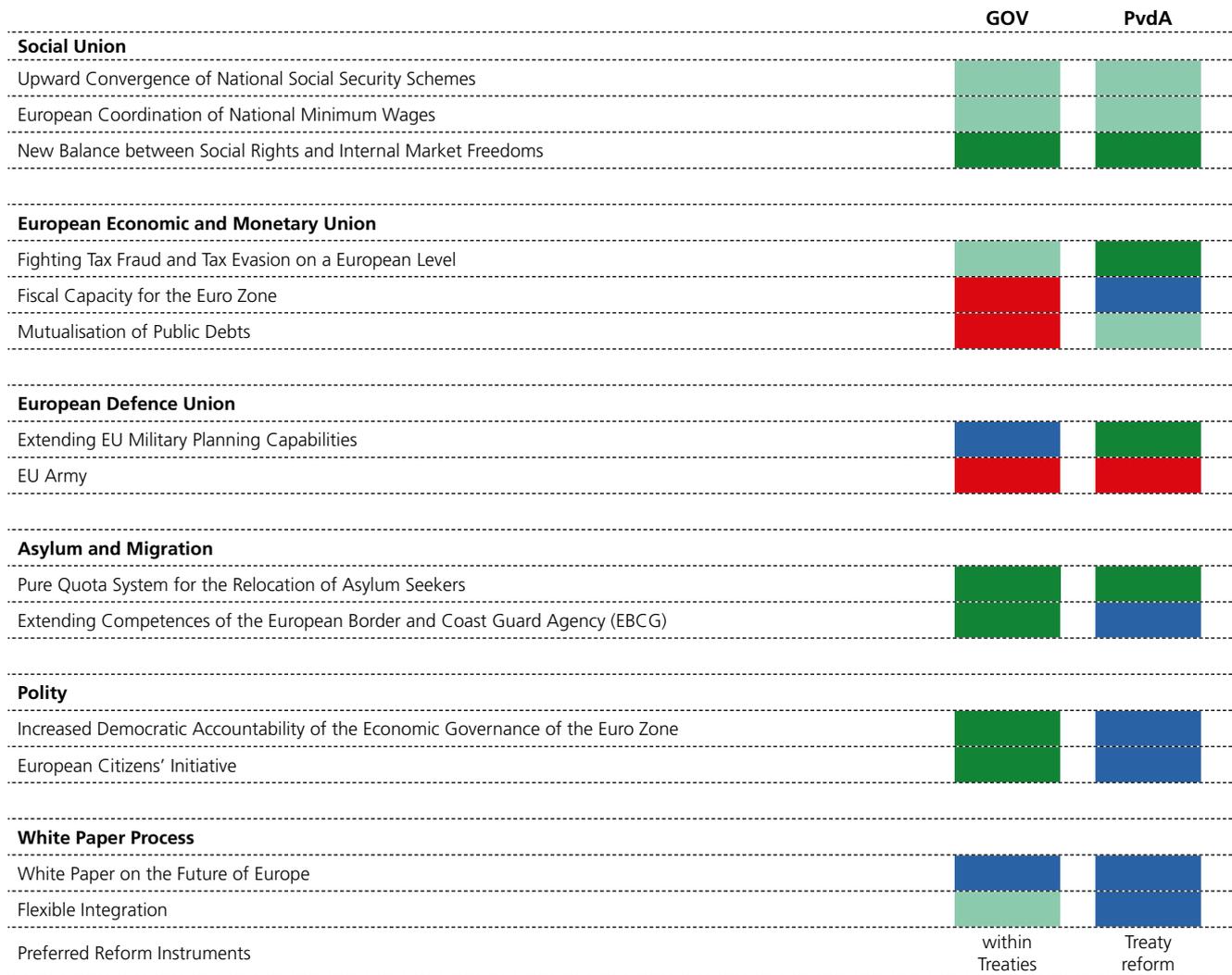
<sup>1</sup> If a party fulfills this criterion, but is not a relevant actor in the national public debate anymore, it was deleted from the sample based on the judgement of the projects' country expert.

# THE NETHERLANDS

The 2017 elections resulted in lengthy coalition talks. Eventually, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, VVD), which had received the largest share of votes (21.3%), formed a coalition with Democrats

66 (*Democraten 66*, D66), the Christian Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appèl*, CDA) and the Christian Union (*ChristenUnie*, CU). The progressive Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*, PvdA) received 5.7% and is in opposition.

## Support of the Dutch Government and the PvdA for Deepening EU Integration



**Legend**

- support for
- support under conditions
- against
- neutral

- GOV** National Government
- PvdA** Partij van de Arbeid

- 1 – Scenario 1: »Carrying on«
- 2 – Scenario 2: »Nothing but the single market«
- 3 – Scenario 3: »Those who want more do more«
- 4 – Scenario 4: »Doing less more efficiently«
- 5 – Scenario 5: »Doing much more together«

## SOCIAL UNION

The Dutch government and the PvdA are in favour of **upward convergence of national social security schemes**, but they are against directly enforceable standards. Any reform should not lead to a complete transfer of competence to the EU level, as both actors consider social policy to be a national competence. The government would use the exchange of best practices to improve the functioning of labour markets and social security systems. It also supports the Commission proposal on the Pillar of Social Rights and argues for a review of the *acquis* on social issues. The PvdA supports coordination in the areas of pensions, gender equality, unemployment insurance and accessibility of health care and education. However, the choice of instruments for reaching high quality social provisions should remain a national competence. While the Dutch government backs the principle of »equal pay for equal work« and wants to prevent race-to-the-bottom dynamics in wage formation, a proposal by the PvdA for a European relative wage floor is firmly rejected. Wage formation is considered to be a national competence and binding norms thus unacceptable. The government supports a **European coordination of national minimum wages** through an intergovernmental approach using soft law (open method of coordination), like an exchange of best-practices or recommendations within the European Semester. But member states should remain responsible for determining the effects of the minimum wage on employment and social cohesion. The PvdA supports a system of relative minimum wages, excluding transfers of competences to the EU. It can be assumed that the Dutch government would oppose a new **balance between social rights and internal market freedoms** requiring a treaty reform, since it would make another, likely painful, referendum for ratification necessary. Nevertheless, the government is strongly in favour of reforming the posted workers' directive along the Commission's proposed line. According to the PvdA, social rights should no longer be secondary to economic freedoms. To restore the balance, the party argues, a social progress protocol should be added to the EU treaties to protect citizens against negative effects of the four freedoms. Furthermore, the party leader is one of the drivers of the debate on reforming the posted workers' directive.

## EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

The Dutch government's position on **fighting tax fraud and tax evasion on a European level** is somewhat ambiguous: supportive of cooperation to combat tax evasion but cautious on more far-reaching initiatives. It supports increasing transparency, e. g. via the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) country-by-country reporting. It was one of the driving forces behind the tax-avoidance directive during the Dutch Council Presidency. It supports information exchange on letterbox companies but given the massive trust sector in the Netherlands, the government would not support a ban

on them. Concerning a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) or Common Corporate Tax Base (CCTB), the government supports the basic idea, but prefers the route taken by the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project and country-by-country reporting. It calls on the Commission to continue working on tax loopholes and coordination but does not see the necessity of advancing further towards a common tax base as recently proposed by the Commission. Following a negative subsidiarity assessment by the government, the Dutch parliament issued a reasoned opinion stating why it considers the proposal to not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. The Dutch Labour Party is generally in favour of more and binding action against tax evasion. It supports country-by-country reporting, the introduction of a CCCTB and wants more action taken against letterbox companies. The government vehemently opposes a **fiscal capacity for the euro zone**, in line with a motion passed by a majority in the Dutch parliament. It argues that a stabilisation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) should be primarily achieved by measures funded from national budgets. Flexible economies and well-functioning capital markets are considered to be better instruments for absorbing shocks. The PvdA neither supported the motion in parliament against a fiscal capacity, nor published any position on the question. The party is open to the idea of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) being used in a more preventive manner in the future. Furthermore, it supports the idea that member states, willing to achieve sustainable public finances, are given more time to reach their budgetary objectives. The government also categorically rejects proposals on a **mutualisation of public debts**. While the previous, also VVD-led government assessed the Eurobond proposals as too costly for the Netherlands, the current government does not even address the topic. The PvdA is more supportive: While the topic is not addressed in the 2017 national election platform, the manifesto for the 2014 European election stated that the introduction of Eurobonds could be possible in the future. Such bonds should only cover public debts of up to 60 % of the national gross domestic product. However, the Banking Union would have to be completed and national economies would need to converge, before Eurobonds are issued.

## EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION

The Dutch government supports the relatively small Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) as it has been established within the current EU structure in 2017. With regard to **extending EU military planning capabilities**, the government refers to the upcoming evaluation of the MPCC in 2018 and has not taken a position as of yet. The PvdA does not have a specific position on the MPCC, but the party generally argues in favour of the establishment of common headquarters to plan and conduct short and efficient operations. The government favours a deepened coordination in European defence, but opposes any plan that would transfer sovereignty in military affairs to the supranational level, including an **EU army** under common command. The

government welcomed that the Commission's »Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence« does not include a scenario proposing a transfer of sovereignty to the EU level. Not mentioning the idea of an EU army, the PvdA's election manifesto for the national elections in 2017 clearly expressed support for intensified cooperation and coordination on defence in the EU. For cooperation in defence and security, regional clusters should be created. However, coordination should serve the purpose of preserving the strategic capacities of the EU member states as a whole. The clear reference to coordination indicates that the PvdA most likely opposes a unified structure like a common army.

## ASYLUM AND MIGRATION

Both the PvdA and the government support a **pure quota system for the relocation of asylum seekers**. The PvdA is in favour of a resettlement scheme and suggests that member states failing to comply with their binding obligations should face cuts to their financial support from the EU budget. The Dutch government is also in favour of binding commitments for the relocation of asylum seekers and calls for a fair distribution taking the absorption capacity of member states into account. It further demands the modernisation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) in order to harmonise national asylum systems across the EU, increase the efficiency of processing asylum applications and reduce secondary migration. In principle, however, the responsibility for implementing the common asylum policies should remain with national authorities. The European Asylum Support Office should be turned into a new agency funded by the EU budget. It should supervise the implementation of asylum policies by the member states and intervene only when necessary. In cases of intervention, the agency should closely consult with the Council of the EU. The Dutch government also holds the opinion that the control of external borders shall generally remain a national competence, too. However, it favours **extending competences of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)** to allow its intervention if a member state deliberately does not address shortcomings in its border controls. Such an intervention should be authorised by a qualified majority in the Council to ensure democratic control of the EBCG deployment. The PvdA on the other hand has not yet formulated a specific position on the EBCG.

## POLITY

For the Dutch government, better involvement of national parliaments, e. g. in the European Semester, and closer coordination between parliaments are priorities for an **increased democratic accountability of the economic governance of the euro zone**. New institutions are not explicitly ruled out, but the government does not see the need for new structures as long as the current ones can be improved. It clearly opposes a euro zone finance minister, believing that the Euro group should fully remain an intergovernmental

body chaired by a national finance minister. Finally, the government believes that a transparent and consistent application of rules by the Commission is crucial for the European Semester. The PvdA does not take a specific position on the issue beyond the need for improved parliamentary cooperation and parliaments' involvement in subsidiarity tests. While the reform of the **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)** plays an extremely marginal role in the government's strategy on the future of the EU, there are nevertheless some technical improvements proposed. The government believes that the ECI procedure is not clear enough for the organisers of an initiative, who should be provided with advice from independent experts. Furthermore, fewer personal information should be requested from signatories and online ID verification improved. The PvdA does not have a position on the reform of the ECI at national level.

## WHITE PAPER PROCESS

The Dutch government has welcomed the »**White Paper on the Future of Europe**« but has not endorsed a single scenario. However, the government has repeatedly stated that the EU should have strong competences in policy areas that are best dealt with at the European level, and fewer competences in others. That suggests a tendency towards scenario 4 »doing less more efficiently«. The PvdA has not yet formulated a position on the white paper. With regard to the future of European integration, the government supports the concept of **flexible integration** if other member states can join later. A further condition is that core values and commitments are upheld by all member states, and a Europe à la carte is ruled out. Thus, the government would like to advance European integration within the treaties. The PvdA has not formulated a position on flexible integration, but it supports treaty reform.

## Legend

### Actors Covered by the Study in each EU Member State

- *National Government*: including its members from one or more political parties, the Head of State or Government, relevant executive ministers and administration.
- *Progressive Parties*: They include all parties that are represented either in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) or that are members of the Party of European Socialists (PES) and have gained a minimum share of 5 % of the votes in the last national or European elections. They also include La République en Marche (REM) in France.

### Concrete Reform Options in Different Policy Areas

#### **Social Union**

1. *Upward Convergence of National Social Security Schemes* to provide Europe-wide protection against social risks and to ensure a decent standard of living for EU citizens.
2. *European Coordination of National Minimum Wages* to ensure a decent income within the EU to prevent in-work poverty, to promote social convergence and to avoid social dumping across the EU.
3. *New Balance of Social Rights and Internal Market Freedoms* to compensate the current precedence of internal market freedoms over national social rights.

#### **European Economic and Monetary Union**

4. *Fighting Tax Fraud and Tax Evasion on a European Level* for a fair allocation of tax burdens among natural and judicial persons.
5. *Fiscal Capacity for the Euro Zone* to provide stabilisation against economic shocks through public expenditure in the euro zone.
6. *Mutualisation of Public Debts* to tackle the problem of a sharp increase in public debts in some member states as a result of the euro zone crisis.

#### **European Defence Union**

7. *Extending EU Military Planning Capabilities* also for executive military missions and operations.
8. *EU Army* establishing a permanent multinational military force under European command.

#### **Asylum and Migration**

9. *Pure Quota System for the Relocation of Asylum Seekers* which would replace the Dublin system.
10. *More Competences for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCG)* expanding the current EBCG tasks in terms of »shared responsibility« between the EBCG and national authorities.

#### **Polity**

11. *Increase Democratic Accountability of the Economic Governance of the Euro Zone* to make its institutions more responsive to EU citizens.
12. *European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)*: revision of the ECI regulation to make the instrument more citizen-friendly and effective in order to strengthen the participative democracy in the EU.

#### **White Paper Process**

13. *The White Paper on the Future of Europe* by the European Commission presents five possible scenarios for the future course of European integration.
14. *Flexible Integration*: limiting the application of certain rules to certain EU member states.
15. *Preferred Reform Instrument*: Treaty reform, reforms inside or outside the Treaties.

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Orders/Contact: [info.ipa@fes.de](mailto:info.ipa@fes.de)

Study conducted by:  
Institut für Europäische Politik  
Bundesallee 23, 10717 Berlin, Germany  
[www.iep-berlin.de/en](http://www.iep-berlin.de/en)

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