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## **Euroscepticism in the Netherlands**

### 1. Introduction

On 1 June 2005, the Netherlands lost its pro-European image. During the first national referendum in about two-hundred years, 61.5% of Dutch voters rejected the European Constitutional Treaty, on a turnout of 63.3%. The Dutch 'No' vote came as a surprise because it did not correspond with the image of the Netherlands as a pro-European international trading country. This article examines whether Euroscepticism has become a new theme in Dutch politics. There are only a handful of studies on Euroscepticism within Dutch governments, political parties and among Dutch voters since the start of European integration in the 1940s (see, among others, Griffiths, 1990; Harmsen, 2004; Vollaard & Boer, 2005). Partly on the basis of these studies, this article will show that Euroscepticism is not a new phenomenon in the Netherlands (see § 2). The question remains, however, why Euroscepticism was put back on the political agenda only in recent years (see § 3), whether temporarily or not. Strategic revolt against the political establishment and the Dutch net contribution to the European Union are cited as the main reasons. An analysis of the behaviour of voters and political parties, however, shows that these are not the deciding factors. According to Cas Mudde and Petr Kopecký (2005), ideology plays a more important role in determining party attitudes to European integration, and that voters adopt a sceptical attitude to European integration, or reject it, for a variety of reasons (see § 4 and 5). This Euroscepticism and rejection of European integration is, above all, a salutary sign that voters and parties are becoming more involved in European politics. The Dutch rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty, therefore, should not necessarily be regarded as the European Union's crisis of legitimacy (see § 6).

## 2. Euroscepticism has existed in the Netherlands since the start of European integration

Since the start of European integration, the Netherlands has projected an image of being a strong supporter of a single market and a federal Europe. This does not entirely hold true for governments, political parties and voters, however.

### 2.1 Dutch governments and Euroscepticism

Just after the Second World War, international relations were mainly a government preoccupation. The focus of foreign policy was the colonial war in Indonesia and German reparations to the Netherlands. In addition, successive Dutch governments focused on securing American and British military presence in continental Europe, especially when the United States made a move to re-arm West Germany as protection against the Soviet threat. This resulted in the Western Union (1948), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (1949) and continued Dutch calls for British involvement in regional cooperation with the European continent. Dutch governments also worked towards a global trading system in order to abolish trade restrictions in the form of customs duties. Although the Dutch economy was dependent on the export of agricultural products in particular, and on the import of raw material and semi-manufactured goods, Dutch governments were not always totally in favour of the liberalisation of world trade. They wanted, for instance, to impose import quota as a form of retaliation against protectionism (Asbeek Brusse, 1990, p. 70).

Before the Second World War, Germany was the main market for Dutch exports, particularly agricultural products. When German reparations did not seem to be moving fast enough for the Netherlands, Dutch governments began contributing towards Germany's economic recovery. Until then, they had mainly sought cooperation in the Benelux (a partnership with Belgium and Luxembourg) and the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation to secure other export markets (Griffiths, 1990). In sharp contrast to their traditional global focus, Dutch governments set their sights increasingly on a regional customs union and even a common market. This would

provide a better basis for concluding trade agreements with neighbouring countries than just bilateral trade agreements (Griffiths, 1990). Moreover, in this way, they could gain access to German coal and steel, for example, which until then had been under the control of the occupying forces. For this reason, Dutch governments were in favour of the Schuman plan for a coal and steel community with the Benelux, France, Germany and Italy.

The supranational element of the Schuman plan was initially met with total resistance by Dutch governments. Until the Second World War, Dutch governments had, after all, pursued a policy of national independence. Both the social-democratic prime minister, Willem Drees (1948-1958), and the liberal-conservative foreign minister, Dirk Stikker (1948-1952), had reservations about joining a continental and predominantly Catholic union. Eventually, they and their fellow ministers gave in to the establishment of a narrowly defined supranational authority on coal and steel because it was the only way they could force the other member states to comply with the agreements. The Dutch government did ensure, however, that national governments could veto policies of the European Coal and Steel Community through a Council of Ministers (Griffiths, 1990). The Dutch government also initially opposed the creation of a supranational European Defence Community (EDC) for fear of domination by its larger neighbours, France and Germany (Van der Harst, 1990). It was only under extreme pressure from the United States, and bowing to the international balance of power, that the Dutch government accepted the EDC (which, incidentally, never got off the ground due to French parliamentary resistance to its supranational structure).

Only some Dutch ministers pleaded the case for a federal Europe. The agriculture minister, Sicco Mansholt (1945-1958), a social democrat, called for a supranational agricultural cooperation. A supranational committee would, moreover, act as a better counterbalance to protectionist farmers' lobbies in Belgium, France and Germany, in defence of Dutch farmers' agricultural exports (Griffiths, 1990). The independent foreign minister, Jan Willem Beyen (1952-1956), also seemed to be in favour of European supranationalism. But in the creation of the European

Economic Community, Dutch support for a strong supranational European Commission was mainly based on the need to ensure that other member states complied with agreements made (Griffiths, 1990, p. 188-9). Therefore, there was not much support to speak of among Dutch governments for a federal Europe:

“Considering the EDC story, it is remarkable that in the literature on post-war European history, the Netherlands is often mentioned as the champion of European federation. The history of the negotiations on the European Coal and Steel Community, on the European Defence Community and on the European Political Community are witness to the fact that in reality, the opposite was true. The Dutch were prepared to sacrifice small pieces of national sovereignty for the benefit of the country's economic, and more precisely, commercial interests. However, in general, the government's attitude was strongly anti-supranational.” (Van der Harst, 1990, p. 160-1).

Later, too, Dutch support for a supranational structure, in response to the French initiative for a European defence cooperation (the Fouchet plan), was mainly a means for delaying decision-making and curbing France, rather than a goal in itself (Hellema, 2001, p. 221 ff). Similarly, the continued calls for greater democratic openness and enlargement, particularly to include the United Kingdom, were mainly intended to prevent a continental and protectionist pact led by the French and German (Harryvan & Van der Harst, 1994, p. 147). Nevertheless, Dutch governments eventually accepted the two pillars of European integration: the creation of an economic union and the pooling of sovereignty. Fear of Catholic or French dominance, however, often caused Dutch ministers to be pessimistic about European developments. This suggests a tendency towards Euroscepticism, according to the definition by Cas Mudde and Petr Kopecký (2002): accepting the idea of European integration, but being pessimistic about the actual manifestation of that idea within the ECSC and EEC. During the 1970s, social-democratic prime minister Joop den Uyl (1973-1977) was also sceptical about monetary cooperation, without rejecting the idea of European integration outright. Moreover, successive Dutch governments were in favour of an

economic and monetary union that would promote the further liberalisation of international trade. Political cooperation, particularly in the field of foreign policy, was unable to attract much support, however. NATO was there for that purpose.

The call for political integration made by the European affairs state secretary, Piet Dankert, during the Christian-democratic and social-democratic Lubbers III government (1989-1994) in the run up to the Maastricht Treaty, therefore marked a departure from the traditional European policy pursued by Dutch governments after the Second World War (Harryvan & Van der Harst, 1994). This proposal can be seen, however, as an attempt to check a united France and Germany in a federal Europe and in the field of foreign and security policy. Dankert's federalist plea was crushed, however, by resistance from the French and British governments. Moreover, continued, though diminished, American involvement in European security meant that European security cooperation was low on the list of priorities for the Dutch government. A new foreign minister, Hans van Mierlo, in the liberal and social-democratic Kok I government (1994-1998), attempted to align the Netherlands with the French-German axis. This alignment with a continental directorate of large countries was short-lived, however.

During the 1990s, Dutch governments mainly focused on achieving the European market, deferring EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe until a later date. Cooperation in the field of justice and foreign affairs was mainly regarded in the context of the European market: enabling the free movement of persons. And Dutch governments did not consider it necessary to deal with matters other than the market and currency. A common employment policy and harmonisation of social policy could therefore count on being met with reluctance or downright resistance. Europe was completed, in Dutch eyes (Harryvan & Van der Harst, 1997), a view that was echoed in the second Kok government (1998-2002). Dutch governments only spoke out in favour of stronger European cooperation, also in the field of foreign and security policy, to prevent a directorate of the larger countries.

From 1994, Dutch governments continuously expressed a wish to reduce the Dutch net contribution to the European Union. In addition, long before the referendum in June 2005, several social-democratic, liberal-conservative and Christian-democratic ministers called for certain European policy fields to be handed back to the national governments, for the enlargement of the European Union under strict conditions, and for a stronger defence of the national interest (Soetendorp and Hanf, 1998, p. 49; Bot, 2004; Nicolaï, 2004). In a radical departure from the past, Dutch ministers were now publicly expressing their reservations on certain European developments. This had seldom occurred since the resistance of the Catholic foreign minister, Luns (1952-1971), to the Fouchet plan in the 1960s. Where, in the past, Euroscepticism had been kept largely behind closed doors, at the start of the 21st century an “[e]xplicit discourse of national interest” came into vogue (Harmsen, 2004a, p. 122).

## 2.2 Political parties and Euroscepticism

The Netherlands owes its pro-European image, first and foremost, to a number of mainly Catholic and social-democratic members of parliament who expressed their enthusiasm for European federalism from late 1947 onwards. While foreign ministers portrayed European federalism as ‘utopian’ and ‘pseudo-religious’, these members of parliament spurred their Catholic and social-democratic governments towards greater European cooperation, both in the economic and political fields (Bogaarts, 1999). Even the European Defence Community was received with enthusiasm in the House of Representatives. Apart from that, the parliamentary agenda for foreign policy placed emphasis on the colonies and the German question.

The call for European integration with Germany by the Catholic KVP party was striking, given the largely Catholic aversion to Germany. International Catholic political networks, however, enabled German Catholic politicians such as Konrad Adenauer to convince their Dutch counterparts of German reconciliation efforts (Bosmans, 1996). The KVP party also became convinced of the need for regional cooperation because of the threat posed by the Soviet Union to (Catholic) Europe. Besides international Catholic networks, Catholic political thought also gave the KVP

party the scope for European cooperation (Burgess, 1994). Catholic belief, given its universal character, transcends the divisions between nations and states. Moreover, the Catholic solidarity principle provides a flexible guiding principle for the division of power among the various socio-political levels in every political context. Catholic thought also seeks harmony and synthesis between, on the one hand, the excessive individualism of an economic union based on liberal principles and, on the other hand, the excessive centralisation of a state-run, socialist Europe. In the aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War and the communist threat, the Catholic KVP party had a case for rebuilding the Netherlands and Europe. Since then, Catholic members of parliament have, with a few exceptions, consistently expressed support for European integration, even though the matter was hardly raised again in the Dutch parliament.

The parliamentary spokesmen on foreign politics of the social-democratic PvdA party also expressed support for European integration, initially as a third way between Soviet communism and American capitalism. They saw socialist Europe as an escape from the horrors of the Second World War. After the American Marshall plan and the Korean War, social-democratic politicians saw European integration as a necessary form of defence against the Soviet threat. Moreover, they regarded Germany's economic recovery as crucial within a European context for the reconstruction of the Netherlands itself. The internationalist and idealistic legacy of socialism also gave the PvdA party the grounds for accepting European integration (Koole and Raap, 2005). The PvdA party was thus able to convince its supporters of the need for a democratic socialist, supranational Europe (Singelsma, 1979). Various PvdA politicians, however, including prime minister Drees, feared that European cooperation would become too conservative or Catholic.

That fear eventually wore off, but that does not mean that the PvdA party has unconditionally accepted European integration ever since. In the 1970s, it imposed increasing conditions on European cooperation. And it was also quite pessimistic about European integration, insofar as this was still a political issue. It feared that, with the EEC as a protectionist trade block, international solidarity, democratic control and national social policy would be swept aside (Koole

and Raap, 2005). In the 1980s, these fears disappeared again, when, under the leadership of the subsequent prime minister Wim Kok, the PvdA party stopped striving for a socialist Europe. Yet the party continued to argue strongly in favour of European democratisation, even though various attempts were made to regard the success of European integration in terms of policy rather than the degree of democratisation. After its huge defeat in the 2002 national elections, the issue was further examined within the PvdA party. More emphasis was placed on the idea that European integration should benefit the Netherlands and the Dutch people in some way, and on a stricter application of the subsidiarity principle (Koole and Raap, 2005). The party underlined this after the vote against the European Constitutional Treaty, and also called for the welfare state to be organised at national level (Koole and Duivesteijn, 2005).

As mentioned previously, the Netherlands owed its pro-European image, first and foremost, to the largely Catholic and social-democratic supporters of a federal Europe. This is somewhat misleading, however. To begin with, their often grandiloquent texts were to some extent non-committal, given that, especially in the first years of European integration, foreign policy was mainly a matter for governments. Parliamentary interference with European policy only began to emerge in the late 1980s, and continued to be restricted to experts (Soetendorp and Hanf, 1998, p. 42). Moreover, these grandiose texts were often simply the typical Dutch moral packaging for, above all, the trade motivations for supporting European integration (Singelsma, 1979, p. 49).

Furthermore, the other major parties were far more sceptical about European integration. The liberal-conservative VVD party for a long time harboured doubts about European cooperation without the United Kingdom (Boer, 2005). This was based on fears concerning continental protectionism and loss of national sovereignty in a Europe dominated by France. The VVD party only became more flexible towards the idea of European economic integration when it seemed, in the 1960s, that it could produce positive economic effects (Singelsma, 1979). In the 1960s, a new crop of pro-Europeans emerged in the VVD party and the social-liberal D66 party, who were



strongly in favour of a democratic, supranational Europe. Pessimism, however, over a growing European bureaucracy and the Dutch net contribution to Brussels resurfaced in the late 1980s.

VVD party leader and, later, European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein, would not hear of European federalism. In his view, now that the EU had a common market and a common currency, there was nothing further to be done (Boer, 2005). In the House of Representatives, therefore, the VVD party spoke out against the social protocol annexed to the Treaty of Maastricht. Given its support for a national veto and its Atlantic orientation in foreign and security policy, the party was also critical of European cooperation in this field. After its huge defeat at the 2002 national elections, the VVD party put the government under considerable pressure to agree to EU enlargement to ten new member states only on the condition that they did not all join at the same time and the EU budgets were reduced (Harmsen, 2004a, p. 110). Pim Fortuyn, the liberal-conservative politician murdered in 2002, and his new LPF party, did not completely reject the idea of European integration, but strongly protested against a democratically deficient and overly bureaucratic, vast, elitist and interfering institution – the “soul-less” European Union (Harmsen, 2004a). This protest sprang from Fortuyn's wish to preserve the Dutch identity. He thus placed his party firmly in the Eurosceptic camp. The D66 party was the only liberal party to remain unequivocal and optimistic about European integration.

The idea of European integration was also met with reticence by the two major Protestant parties, the ARP and the CHU parties (Vollaard, 2005). Under the pre-war ARP prime minister, Colijn, these parties had, after all, advocated national independence and international law. There was support for regional economic cooperation at the expense of sovereignty, but doubts remained about a possible Catholic and socialist influence on the Dutch Protestant nation. However, the inevitability of international relations, the lack of power of the intergovernmental Council of Europe and the economic advantages of a common market won the Protestant parties over. Although devoted to their nation, the political legacy of the main Protestant parties offered them the basis for supranational cooperation. The ultimate goal was not nationalism or European federalism, but

rather the Christian ideal of public justice, at all levels of government. Moreover, the ARP and CHU parties saw the common European market as a useful tool for containing Catholic corporatism and socialistic state interference. European integration was not an issue when the Protestant ARP and CHU parties merged with the Catholic KVP party in the 1970s, partly because it was not a political issue either. The leaders of both parties had to work long and hard to convince their supporters of European integration (Bron Dik, 1979). For example, former prime minister and ARP member of parliament, Gerbrandy, voted against the EEC because he considered the loss of national sovereignty and the materialistic character of the EEC as a threat to the Calvinistic spirit of the Netherlands. A small section of the ARP party, partly as a result of its European stance, even left the party to form the Orthodox-Protestant RPF party in 1975.

From the very beginning, European integration was overwhelmingly rejected by two other small Orthodox-Protestant parties, the SGP and the GPV parties (Vollaard, 2005). These parties strongly resented the large Protestant parties for squandering a God-given sovereignty to a project that was based on a people's sovereignty, and to boot, was dominated by Catholics and socialists. Convinced that people are inherently bad, they feared, above all, the centralisation of power in a European super state. Their appeal for decentralisation would remain the core of Orthodox-Protestant resistance to further European integration, especially after the de-Christianized Netherlands became less worth defending. In the 1990s, the three small Orthodox-Protestant parties accepted that Dutch sovereignty should be partly ceded to a supranational Europe, but doubts about further European integration could not be dispelled. This Euroscepticism was also reflected in the opposition of the SGP and the ChristenUnie ('Christian Union', formed from the fusion of the RPF and the GPV parties) to the so-called European super state during the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty.

Whereas the prolonged rejection of European integration by the Orthodox-Protestants was mainly based on their protest against the sovereignty issue, the bone of contention for the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) was the creation of a European market (Koole and Raap, 2005).

Partly because European integration was intended as a bastion against the Soviet Union, the Communist Party fiercely opposed it, and was pessimistic about the future of Europe. Like the Orthodox-Protestants, it joined the ranks of the anti-Europe camp on fundamental grounds. The left-wing PSP party also rejected European integration for being too capitalist, lacking in solidarity with the Third World and not pacifistic enough. Although the PPR party, a left-wing party of Catholic origin, accepted European integration, it was also pessimistic over the capitalist character of the EEC. After parties such as the PSP, CPN and PPR parties merged to form the GroenLinks party (Green Left) in 1991, rejection of Europe made way for Euroscepticism and finally Euro-positivism (Koole and Raap, 2005). The GroenLinks party, not only accepted the sharing of sovereignty and the creation of a common market, but also became increasingly optimistic about the scope for creating a social and green Europe that would act as a counterbalance to the United States. An additional advantage of this change in course was that it opened up the possibility for the GroenLinks party to form a government with Europhile parties such as the PvdA and CDA parties.

The Socialist Party (SP), originally a Maoist party, was initially also a strong opponent of European integration, which it regarded as a great capitalist undertaking (Koole and Raap, 2005). After it entered the House of Representatives in 1994, this opposition was transformed into Euroscepticism. The SP accepted the idea of European integration, but was sceptical about the neoliberal, federalist course pursued by the Dutch and European establishments. For this reason, it voted against the Treaty of Nice (2001), the first treaty to be endorsed by the Christian Union, the SGP party and GroenLinks party. For this reason, too, it opposed the European Constitutional Treaty. Currently, there are no Dutch political parties in the Dutch or European parliaments that still reject the idea of European integration. The same holds true for the extreme-right CD party (in parliament from 1989-1998), for the GroepWilders party, which split from the VVD party in 2004 after a dispute over Turkish EU membership, and the Europa Transparant party, founded by the former European Commission auditor and whistle-blower, Paul van Buitenen. The latter led his Eurosceptic party to success at the 2004 elections to the European Parliament (winning 7.3%

of votes) on the platform that the European Union can only give shape to the concept of European integration if it is well organised from a financial point of view.

Despite the flowery rhetoric with which Europe experts from all the major parties in the Dutch parliament have for years clothed European integration, Euroscepticism has existed both within government and the individual parties since the beginnings of European integration. It received little attention, however, because there was little interest in European integration in parliament. As far as foreign policy is concerned, the main emphasis was placed on the colonial wars, the Cold War and international solidarity. Certainly, following the direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, European politics in particular completely disappeared from the foreground in The Hague because there were no longer any members of parliament with a double mandate who were active in this area. It was mainly due to the interventions of Frits Bolkestein that there was any kind of debate among the major parties on European integration. This gave politicians a chance to express their Euroscepticism in public, something which had previously been confined to relatively closed official and political circles.

### 3. European integration (still) not an election issue

The pro-European image of the Netherlands is due, not only to the enthusiasm of a few parliamentarians, but also to the substantial support of the Dutch for EU membership, according to the Eurobarometer (Thomassen, 2005). This image of the Dutch, united in their support, requires some qualification, however. In the early 1970s, for example, 30% of the electorate was sceptical towards or rejected Dutch membership to the EEC (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005). On average, however, the Dutch placed more trust in the EEC than in NATO and their own ministers, trade unions, the media and parliament. Since 1991, support for EU membership has declined, but continues to be above the European average (SCP, 2005).

This support was not a product of great interest in or knowledge about European integration. In the early 1990s, the European project only attracted the attention of 40% of the Dutch electorate.

Dutch voters had little information about the European project, and found it difficult to determine the political party positions on Europe (Irwin, 1995). And voters who did have this information found it difficult to distinguish the party positions. Since 1979, the turnout to the direct elections to the European Parliament has been steadily declining, particularly when compared with national elections. Turnout fell from 57.8% in 1979 to 29.9% in 1999. The European Parliament elections seem to be mainly determined by national issues. Having been regarded as 'second-order elections' they have become 'third-rate elections' (Irwin, 1995).

The national parliament takes the most important decisions on European integration. Europe did however barely matter in voters' choice. In addition, voters did not get the opportunity to influence the parliamentary decisions on European integration. In the election programs for the 1989 elections, only a few references were made to European cooperation. In the subsequent elections of 1994, the bulky Treaty of Maastricht was drawn up and ratified. Moreover, there were other, more important political issues for Dutch voters than European integration, which played little or no role in their voting choice – in spite of the vociferous Euroscepticism of Bolkestein and Fortuyn in the run-up to the turbulent elections of 2002 and 2003 (Harmsen, 2004a, p. 26; Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005). The VVD party, for example, dropped the issue of EU enlargement from its 2003 election campaign because it had too little mobilising force.

Although Dutch voters' knowledge of party positions on European integration rose, the pro-European attitude of Dutch voters fell sharply in 2002 and 2003 (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005). According to voter surveys, trust in European integration in particular appeared to have fallen (6% of voters having absolutely no trust in European integration, and 52% having not much trust). Nowhere in the EU was this decline in trust as deep or widespread as in the Netherlands (SCP, 2004). In 2004, the year of the European Parliament elections, the Eurobarometer shows that satisfaction with Europe and democracy suddenly drops to below the European average (Thomassen, 2005, p. 71). As is characteristic of second-order elections, during the European Parliament election, the opposition parties, PvdA and SP, called on voters to protest against the

national government's social-economic policy and its standpoint on Iraq (Harmsen, 2004b). Nevertheless, for the very first time, some European issues also played a role, such as Europe's limits (the election theme of the VVD party) and the European Commission's lack of financial control (highlighted by Buitenen's party, Europa Transparant). The turnout, at 39.1% of the electorate, had slightly risen again (compared with 79.9% for the national elections in 2003).

Does this mean that European integration had managed to shift the electoral balance? As early as 1998, the political scientist Koole had proposed that a referendum would be a catalyst for this. Certainly, the lack of knowledge of European integration among Dutch voters could be used to political advantage at election time. The decline in support for European integration among voters in 2002 and 2003 provided the ideal opportunity for this. Moreover, European integration received sufficient coverage from the introduction of the Euro, the Dutch contribution to the European Union, the embroilment of the Stability and Growth Pact, labour migration from Eastern Europe and Turkey's possible EU membership.

The campaign for the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005 increased voters' knowledge of European integration and the party positions on this issue (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005). All the ingredients for a relevant election issue were present. A party can gain an electoral advantage from a referendum in subsequent national elections, which is exactly what Pim Fortuyn's party did with the minority issue (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005). A referendum can also serve to circumvent internal divisions within political parties, by presenting a controversial topic to the voters. Certain parties, such as the VVD, GroenLinks, PvdA and CDA parties now have nothing to gain from placing too much emphasis on the issue of European integration, since the referendum showed that their constituencies are divided. An initiative to launch a so-called wide social debate on European integration quickly fell through, probably for that reason, in autumn 2005. In addition, employment and education issues have overshadowed the European issue, especially since the final decision-making on the European Constitutional Treaty has been postponed until after the national elections in the Netherlands (May 2007).

Although, according to the Eurobarometer of autumn 2005, the Dutch are more positive towards the European Union than other Europeans, and their support for the European Constitution has also increased (European Commission, 2005b, p. 16, 24), the referendum revealed that the Netherlands cannot be regarded as being entirely positive towards Europe. There is a distinct group among Dutch voters who consider EU membership a bad thing and/or are opposed to further European cooperation. These views played an important role in the vote against the European Constitutional Treaty (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 190). In particular, voters who are less educated and who receive social benefits think the European Constitution will have a harmful effect on Dutch prosperity, social security, culture and identity (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 201). They also think that, with further integration, smaller member states will have less say, richer member states will have to spend more, and social security in the Netherlands will be reduced (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 177). Voters surveys also show that Euroscepticism and the rejection of Europe are linked to nationalistic, and to a lesser extent socio-economic, views (Van Holsteyn & Den Ridder, 2005). It is therefore mainly the new political parties which oppose the transfer of Dutch sovereignty that reap electoral benefit from this.

#### 4. Dutch Euroscepticism does not stem from protest against the establishment

The main claim made by recent studies on the party-political roots of Euroscepticism is that it stems above all from an anti-establishment programme, and not so much from ideological motives (Taggart, 1998). This is not surprising, given that the European project was consciously conceived as the technocratic project of political and administrative elites, without much public interference. This could easily apply to the Netherlands, according to Canadian political scientist Robert Harmsen:

The Dutch case also provides confirmation for Taggart's "touchstone of dissent" thesis, insofar as the stronger forms of Dutch Euroscepticism all form part of more general anti-

establishment programmes directed by protest movements against the mainstream ('cartel') parties (Harmsen, 2004a, p. 123).

Indeed, the parties in the political margins (such as the SP and ChristenUnie party) protested the loudest against the European Constitutional Treaty. Yet the claim that Euroscepticism springs mainly from an anti-establishment programme requires some qualification.

Paul Taggart (1998) begins by, correctly, pointing out that, historically speaking, Euroscepticism and the rejection of Europe were not part of an anti-establishment movement that emerged from the political margins. Moreover, it was already clear that government leaders and major parties – such as PvdA prime minister Drees, the VVD party and the main Protestant parties – had strong reservations about European integration. The claim made by Taggart c.s. applies mainly to the 1990s. In this period, too, Euroscepticism manifested itself in the Netherlands first among government circles and mainstream political parties. As early as 1986, Frits Bolkestein, then minister for economic affairs, publicly expressed his concerns about the Dutch net contribution to the EEC. This contribution was also the reason behind the growing 'doubts of a loyal member' in its European policy (Soetendorp & Hanf, 1998).

Since 1990, Bolkestein, as leader of the VVD party, has vociferously criticised European integration. From his liberal point of view, the European Union was complete with the achievement of the Economic and Monetary Union (Boer, 2005). More bureaucracy and social and green legislation would extremely hinder economic freedom. According to his more conservative principles, further European integration would, moreover, extremely weaken the Dutch identity, and he protested against a federalist blueprint for Europe. His successors, Hans Dijkstal and Gerrit Zalm, have also been highly critical of European integration. Even though their party was presented in government, they put pressure on the government to reduce the costs and administrative burden of enlargement. The new leader of the Christian-democrats, who later became prime minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, partly supported them in autumn 2001.



Euroscepticism was voiced, therefore, first and foremost, by the VVD party, which has been in government from 1977 to the present (with an interlude in opposition from 1989 to 1994). It can, therefore, hardly be passed off as an anti-establishment programme. Bolkestein's views on European integration, in particular, were based on his political principles. Pim Fortuyn examined this further in his book *Zielloos Europa* (1997; with a foreword by Bolkestein). Fortuyn can "be read as a radical prolongation of mainstream Dutch right-wing liberalism" (Harmsen, 2004a, p. 120), which harbours both liberalism and conservatism. Fortuyn was certainly no stranger to protesting against the establishment. He wanted the voice of the people to be heard above the cartel of the mainstream parties. The consensus of that cartel regarding the minorities issue and European integration had to be broken, especially in light of his wish to protect Dutch culture and identity.

To the left of the political spectrum, too, the SP had an anti-establishment programme, which also took the form of protest against the pursuit of a neo-liberal course and what it considered a democratic deficit in the Netherlands and the European Union. The protest of the LPF party and the SP, therefore, had a clear, issues-based motivation, the desire to defend the national identity, national democracy and/or national solidarity. This held true especially for the smaller Protestant parties, whose Christian ideology and conservative reasoning would be play a decisive role in their initially dismissive and later sceptical attitude towards European integration. Resistance to European integration therefore seems to stem from a wish to preserve the pure ideal of national democracy, solidarity and/or identity, as seen from a liberal, socialist, or Christian point of view.

Government parties have to water down those ideals in the interests of national compromise and European negotiations. It is difficult, after all, to defend pure ideals in a Dutch coalition, not to mention in the context of cooperation with 6, 12 or 25 countries. It is easier for parties that do not or do not wish to participate in government to *publicly* express their Euroscepticism, than for parties that do or wish to participate. Parties with no interest in taking part in government can play

the ideological card to their advantage, especially in second-order elections where power is not a major issue, such as the European Parliament elections and referendums. Ultimately, the fact that parties from different countries with the same ideological base have more or less the same standpoint on European integration shows that Euroscepticism is based on ideology (Marks & Wilson, 2000). It is not so much the coincidence of being in the opposition or in government that seems to determine their standpoint.

Although Euroscepticism among parties mainly serves issue-related motives, among voters, the protest against the establishment can determine the way they vote in elections. This was the case with the European Parliament elections in 2004: *“one can easily make the case that 1 out of 5 Dutch voters cast a protest vote, in the sense of supporting parties with clear Eurosceptic and/or anti-establishment agendas.”* (Harmsen, 2004, p. 12). According to Harmsen, these parties include the SP, the Europa Transparant party, the Partij van de Dieren (animal rights party) and the LPF party. In this light, the No vote in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty can also be seen as a protest against the establishment. The SP even used the slogan ‘against politics’ explicitly in its campaign against the European Constitutional Treaty. The protracted silence of the ‘Yes’ camp can also be seen as an attempt to avoid giving too much ammunition to the anti-establishment parties. Although, in autumn 2005, the Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands would still not give an explanation for the referendum result, it did point to a possible link between sensitivity to the elite in the Hague and Brussels and the No vote. The Eurobarometer after all showed that the gradual build-up of resistance to European integration could suddenly explode. Moreover, the Eurobarometers show that there is a static, positive correlation between having trust in the Dutch government and supporting “a” European constitution (SCP, 2004; SCP, 2005, p. 17). In addition, 14% of No voters later claimed that their vote had been a vote against the current government (European Commission, 2005a).

It has always been difficult, in hindsight, to explain, differentiate and link the circumstances, causes, motives, reasons, rationalisations and the actual (Eurosceptic) behaviour of voters. This

is shown by the difference between claiming to support "a" European constitution in Eurobarometers and eventually voting against "the" European constitution. Certainly, given the strangeness of a national referendum (the first in about 200 years) on a relatively unfamiliar topic as the constitution, this is a major undertaking. Nevertheless, according to political scientists Aarts and Van der Kolk (2005), protest against the establishment hardly played a role in the referendum. The most important factors for the No vote were concern about Dutch social security, culture and identity, Turkey and the Euro. Moreover, Dutch voters appeared to be sufficiently informed about the European Constitutional Treaty. And the less they agreed with its content, the more they were inclined to vote against it (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005). The flash Eurobarometer report of early June 2005 concisely sums up the issues-based character of Dutch voting: "*The European aspect was the key element*" (European Commission, 2005a, p. 18).

Moreover, the standpoint of the Dutch government, hardly contributed to the No vote (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005). Although voters had a negative view on the campaign of the Yes camp and the Dutch government in particular, the majority claim not to have been influenced by this (Vandaag, 2005). And even though lack of information was a reason for voting No, increased information about European integration and the treaty in particular certainly did not lead to an increase in support for the Yes camp (besides, the level of knowledge among the Dutch was on average comparable to that of the French or Spanish; SCP, 2005). Finally, although No voters had little to gain from the course pursued by the current government, this did not necessarily influence the way they voted (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 200).

Dutch voters therefore seem to have rejected the European constitution mainly on the grounds of content. This has consequences for a new European treaty and referendum. Holding a referendum on the same treaty during a more popular government may not serve any purpose. Appeals from Belgian and Austrian politicians for the Dutch referendum to be repeated, or from Slovenian, Portuguese and German politicians to leave the European Constitutional Treaty as it is, can count on resistance from Dutch voters. In early June 2005, 45% of Dutch respondents

found, in any case, that the treaty should be swept off the table (European Commission, 2005a), and later that year, 64% felt the treaty should be renegotiated (European Commission, 2005b). Because it is difficult for a small member-state to change the policy of the European Union, Euroscepticism will prevail in the Netherlands.

##### 5. There is no direct link between the Dutch net contribution and electoral Euroscepticism

More than 15 years ago, the VVD party had raised the issue of the Dutch net contribution to the EU. The question is whether this issue also served to promote Euroscepticism among Dutch voters. Given that European integration is mainly an economic one, it has always been assumed that individual and national economic profit from EU membership would also influence political attitudes and behaviour with regard to EU membership. Based on Eurobarometers between 1973 and 1989, one of the first studies of this influence concludes, however, that: *“the net return from the EC budget has virtually no impact on citizen support for the community”* (Eichenberger & Dalton, 1993, p. 524). The same conclusion is reached from an analysis of Eurobarometers up to 2005 (Griffiths & Petter, 2005). Despite a growing net contribution to the EU, the Dutch see more to be gained from European integration than the French, Belgians, Germans or Italians (Thomassen, 2005, p. 69). Also, the fact that EU membership may be ‘too expensive’ for the Netherlands, was not a strong enough reason to vote against the European Constitutional Treaty (SCP, 2005, p. 23). Following a decline between autumn 2003 and autumn 2004, the majority of the Dutch feel that EU membership as a good thing (77%), from which the Netherlands can benefit (67%).

Other financial issues do influence Dutch voters, however. For instance, they are extremely negative about the Euro. Although in the Eurobarometers the Dutch claim to be strongly in favour of a monetary union with a common currency, there is very little support for the Euro itself. 70% agrees or completely agrees that the Euro has not been good for the Dutch economy, and 93% agrees or completely agrees that prices have risen (Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 173-174). Opinion about the Euro influenced the No vote. Another financial issue is EU enlargement, in

which the Dutch will be forced to share money, power and work with even more new people. Although the Dutch are generally in favour of EU enlargement to the rich Scandinavian countries, they are less keen on enlargement to southern and eastern European countries. There is a sharp decline in support for enlargement in spring 2003, and, unlike with most indicators, it stays low (45% in spring 2005). The prospect of Turkey, a relatively poor country, joining the EU clearly had an influence on the No vote in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty. It appears that, in particular, people who do not see any economic advantages in European integration have a more negative attitude to Turkey's membership. An earlier, extensive study showed that people who saw an economic advantage in further liberalisation, a reduction of state support and reorganization of finances at European instigation, were less keen on European integration (Gabel, 1998). Indeed, it was precisely people with a low level of education and on social security who rejected the European Constitutional Treaty.

Economic factors and identity, therefore, play a role in the enlargement issue. The key question is whether solidarity exists among people to share money, power and work. In the discussion on public opinion on European integration, identity and the economy were always seen as two, distinct, opposing factors. We can find the conclusion that the fear of loss of identity has little influence on support for EU membership, as opposed to economic advantage (McLaren, 2004), as well as the conclusion that it strongly influences support for EU membership (Hooghe & Marks, 2004). The combination, in particular, of the loss of an exclusive national identity and a divided political elite increased the influence of a sense of identity on support for European integration.

Indeed, public opinion in the Netherlands seems to have become more nationalistic since the 1990s. Exclusive identification with the Dutch state has increased in the Netherlands (Dijkink & Mamadouh, 2006). People who feared the loss of national identity also tended to be against "a" European constitution and "the" Constitutional Treaty (SCP, 2005, p. 23, 29). An international, comparative, longitudinal study could show us whether the fear of the loss of national identity

leads to a negative economic evaluation of EU membership. Indeed, the heated public debate on Dutch identity in 2002 went hand in hand with a more negative view of EU membership.

If a negative economic evaluation of EU membership mainly stems from fear of the loss of national identity, the reduction of the Dutch net contribution to the EU is not the solution. Although more clarity slowly seems to be emerging about the Dutch identity in the debate on immigration and integration, the series of (anticipated) EU enlargements is creating uncertainty about the nature of the Dutch identity in a European context. During the Cold War, the Netherlands had an important role to play in the context of a divided Germany and a dominating United States. But now, the Netherlands has gone back to the political-military position it had in Europe up to the Second World War. Witness the difficulties it experienced in coming to terms with its colonial past, the uncertainty surrounding the nature of the Dutch identity could remain for some time to come.

That again reduces the possibility of a Yes vote for the European Constitutional Treaty in a future referendum. The subjective evaluation of the national and, to a lesser extent, individual economic situation, however, seems to have an important influence on support for European integration (Gabel & Whitten, 1997). During the referendum, the economic mood in the Netherlands was quite sombre. If support for European integration had translated into support for the European Constitutional Treaty, a change in the national economic situation could have made a difference: *"...the timing of referendums, with respect to public economic perceptions, may prove critical for the success of future integrative reforms."* (Gabel & Whitten, 1997, p. 93). Nevertheless, it again appears that the Dutch net contributions to the EU are not so important to a Eurosceptic view of European integration.

#### 6. Euroscepticism is good for the legitimacy of European integration

Not surprisingly, after the majority of the Dutch had voted No in the referendum, some politicians spoke of a Dutch and European legitimacy crisis. In the absence of any other means, the

European Union has to rely on the existence of trust in the European (and partly national) elites, and on consensus between such elites and the voting masses. The Dutch No vote, according to these politicians, had revealed a lack of trust and consensus. The resulting Euroscepticism, therefore, was a sign of a legitimacy crisis.

The parliamentarians who submitted the proposal for a referendum (that was not binding on the government) on the European Constitutional Treaty defended it on the grounds that it would strengthen the legitimacy of the proposed EU reforms. A constitutional advisory committee, however, concluded that they had taken a Yes vote for granted, and questioned what a No vote would mean for European legitimacy. The referendum revealed that a majority was indeed against the treaty, whereas about 85% of members of parliament had publicly expressed their support for the treaty. Members are also far more favourable to the Euro and further European integration than their voters, and are often too positive in their views (Thomassen, 2005, p. 80; SCP, 2004). Such differences of opinion do not necessarily point to a lack of legitimacy, however. Firstly, it is not surprising that such differences exist, since Europe is seldom much of an issue for voters during the elections for the Dutch parliament. In the referendum, however, voters were able to make their views on Europe known to their members of parliament. There are also differences of opinion between voters and their representatives on other key issues, such as the death penalty. It is only when actually faced with having to make a decision on the death penalty, however, that such a check on public opinion can be considered.

The politicians who presented the referendum proposal also expected the referendum to increase the legitimacy of Europe because it would increase the participation of voters in the European Union. 37% of eligible Dutch voters stayed at home during the referendum (although it would probably not have made much difference to the result if they had turned up to vote; Aarts & Van der Kolk, 2005, p. 203-5). Yet, never before had so many Dutch voters participated in a European election. Moreover, there was a huge increase in knowledge about European integration, the European Constitutional Treaty and the different party positions on these issues. Although a

Christian-democratic opponent of the referendum described it as the instrument of a *“political class looking for absolution for its sins of negligence”* (cited in Van Holsteyn, 2005), this was the first time since European integration that Dutch voters had been able to directly express their views on a European treaty. As far as legitimacy is partly based on voter participation, the referendum actually helped to increase the legitimacy of Europe.

Furthermore, the Eurosceptic vote can serve to prompt the largely pro-Europe elites to involve the voting public more in the European project and pay greater attention to their wishes. In this regard, Helen Milner (2000, p. 3) refers to the *“salutary shock”* of Euroscepticism, *“a shift in emphasis away from elites and towards public concerns”*. European integration now promotes *“depoliticization and disengagement”* (Mair, 2006). Through the European Union, voter-citizens have, after all, become accustomed to technocratic institutions that are not directly answerable to the electorate or their representatives. They have also become accustomed to not voting in European Parliament elections, which can have negative repercussions for national elections. The European Union simply keeps on going, even though people vote less and less for the European Parliament. Euroscepticism can reverse this trend, and European integration can again become a topic of public debate (Milner, 2000, p. 11; Harmsen, 2004b). After all, a debate on the form that European integration will take is only possible if Euroscepticism is set against Euro-positivism.

That is possible, firstly, because more and more politicians and officials in the national capitals and Brussels consider themselves Eurosceptic. This acknowledgement of the wishes of a portion of voters strengthens the identification and ties between Eurosceptic voters and their national capitals and Brussels. In this context, after the referendum, the PvdA party called on all its MEPs to act more as national representatives in Europe rather than European ambassadors in the Netherlands (Koole & Duivesteijn, 2005). Euroscepticism can also lead to a power shift from the executive to the legislative. Whereas, for years, the Dutch House of Representatives had allowed Dutch civil servants and ministers too much leeway in Brussels, after the referendum, it tried to



recover parliamentary control on European decision-making. Through their national representatives, voters can be assured that European politics is back in their control, and feel connected to it again. The shock effect of Dutch Euroscepticism can, therefore, eventually turn out to be good thing for European legitimacy.

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