

Notre Europe

ETUDES & RECHERCHES

Policy Paper n° 14

The First Dutch Referendum

A pre-Ballot Assessment

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This paper has been edited by Bruno Kaufmann and Paul Carline. Special thanks to Prof. Philip van Praag (University of Amsterdam) and Richard Wouters (EU expert of the Green party) for their valuable comments.

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Table des matières

1 Background	1
<hr/>	
1.1 General political situation	1
1.2 Dutch attitudes towards European integration	3
2 Analysis of the campaign	5
<hr/>	
2.1 The institutional framework	5
2.2 The level of debate	7
2.3 Key players, their issues and strategy	8
2.3.1 Government	8
2.3.2 Political parties	9
2.3.3 NGOs	15
2.3.4 Media	17
2.4 Polls and expectations about the vote	17
2.5 Issues and splits	18
Conclusion	22
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On June 1st, three days after the French referendum, the Dutch will also vote on the European Constitution. It will be the first national referendum in modern Dutch history. The Dutch have only had some 100 local referendums during the 20th century, so their experience is meagre.

This paper explains the background to the Dutch referendum – the general political climate and the attitude towards European integration – and describes and analyzes the current referendum debate on the European Constitution. However, at the moment of writing the real campaign by the government, political parties and NGOs has only just begun. This makes an attempt to analyze the campaign at this moment somewhat difficult.

Background

GENERAL POLITICAL SITUATION

During the first half of the 20th century, Dutch society was organized according to the principle of “pillars”. Each group – mainly the Protestants, Catholics, Socialists and Liberals – lived more or less separately from the others. Each pillar had its own political party, media and organized interest groups, including unions. Until recently, there were 3 barely distinguishable small theocratic Protestant parties permanently represented in Parliament. Even sports and leisure activities were usually ‘pillarised’ - one could often choose between a Catholic, Protestant or socialist sports club – and the Catholics bought only products from Catholic bakers, butchers etc.

The members of the pillars had roughly the same social and political views. The task of the leaders of the pillars was to successfully defend the interests and views of the pillar group vis á vis the other pillars. The leaders would use an ideological tone when addressing their own pillars, but they would quite pragmatically – and all too often behind closed doors – deal with social problems and conflicts among themselves. This practice has been called the “table model”: the legs of the table symbolize the pillars, all four separate from each other, and the table top represents the leaders doing business with each other.

During the 1960s, this situation came to an end rather quickly and “individualization” became the dominant trend. The pillars disintegrated, membership of churches and political parties fell heavily. In 1960, 730,000 people were members of a political party, against some 300,000 in 2005.¹ This amounts to 2.5% of all eligible voters, one of the lowest figures in Western Europe. Research shows that the political parties have no steady constituency any more, but many voters are “floating”: at each election they choose a different party, being often undecided

1 Yearbooks of the Documentation Center for Dutch Political Parties (NDPP)

until the very last moment. Many voters would like to vote for four parties at the same time, because each party has policies they approve and disapprove of.

At the same time, the system has remained practically unchanged. The Netherlands still has an almost entirely pure indirect system, based upon political parties which get a mandate for four years and which are, during this term, mostly occupied with each other. This has been called the "Hague cheese-cover": the people outside can see what happens, but the politicians under the glass cheese-cover can't hear what's going on outside, only themselves and their colleagues. They are so occupied with the games being played inside that they forget to leave the cheese-cover now and then. And frankly, they don't have to listen to the people outside anyway, because the latter have no way of affecting the process. Those under the cheese-cover think they are doing quite well.

This gap between self-congratulating established parties and the individualized citizens outside has resulted in a kind of permanent voter dissatisfaction. From 1994 until 2002, the Netherlands were ruled by the "purple" coalition of Social Democrats, Liberals and Liberal Democrats under Prime Minister Kok. In this period, the Netherlands had an economic boom, unemployment was at an all-time low and in 2000 there was even a government budget surplus, unprecedented in modern history. The parliamentary budget debates were self-congratulatory that year: TV-viewers saw a well-known politician proposing that they do a Mexican wave like the winners in a football stadium. The economic situation was indeed good, but many people wondered whether the government had played such a large role in that, and the government's triumph glossed over some real remaining problems: the almost permanent traffic congestion in the western part of the Netherlands, waiting lists for health care, mounting bureaucracy for entrepreneurs, poverty and a rising number of families heavily indebted, neglected and unsafe inner cities, and growing tensions as a result of mass immigration from non-Western countries during the 1990s.

This mixture of dissatisfaction with the system and the established parties, and with concrete policies and social situations, was the basis for the rise of maverick politician Pim Fortuyn. When he entered party politics with his provocative appearance and his often creative answers to modern problems – as a professor of sociology he had written dozens of books on politics and society - he was not met normally, but was scorned and slandered. Liberal Democrat leader De Graaf outdid his colleagues by implying a connection between Pim Fortuyn and the Holocaust. Many citizens identified with Fortuyn, were angry because of the way he was treated, and hoped that this outsider could bring about changes they no longer believed the established parties to be capable of. It is telling that the two parties that did enter into a normal debate with Fortuyn have both won the elections too (the Christian Democrats and the small Socialist party SP).

The murder of Pim Fortuyn in May 2002 by a leftist activist has had the effect of removing the taboo on issues and standpoints which used to count as "politically correct". This goes for a broad spectrum of issues, not primarily, but also including, European integration. The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, also a fierce critic of the cosy togetherness of the establishment and the multicultural society, by a Muslim fanatic in October 2004 reinforced this. For example,

while the Social Democrat leader Melkert was the fiercest opponent of the populist politicians, the position of new Social Democrat leader Bos is now that “some populism is good for democracy”.² On the right side of the political spectrum, several politicians and opinion leaders now try to win this seemingly new electorate for their causes. Most prominent among the politicians is Geert Wilders, an MP who was kicked out of the Liberal party (VVD) two months before the murder of Van Gogh, after he refused to give up his “10-point programme”, which included resistance to Turkey’s accession to the EU. He was the most quoted Member of Parliament of 2004.³ After the murder of Theo van Gogh, his poll rating rose, suggesting he would gain 20% of the votes if an election were to take place then. Wilders is campaigning against the European Constitution with the slogan that the Netherlands shouldn’t become an unfree province in a European super-state.

This is the context in which the Dutch referendum on the EU Constitution takes place.

DUTCH ATTITUDES TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The “table model” used by party elites who were looking to create a consensus among gentlemen (see above) also meant that certain topics which were considered too touchy have often been kept out of party politics and elections. European integration was one of them. In the post-war Netherlands, in which politics was so much defined by the Second World War, it was considered too populist to make this an election theme. Being in favour of European integration was considered a sign of being “one of us”, the good guys. Until the mid-1990s, of the political parties represented in Parliament only the small theocratic Protestant parties could be called euro-sceptic, but they were considered a bit odd anyway. All the large parties – which now support the EU Constitution – are members of the Dutch section of the European Movement (“Europese Beweging”), which keeps a low profile and is little known by the general public. As the public felt that the political establishment was not willing to make Europe a political issue, it sighed and concluded that (in the words of Social Democrat MP and Convention member Frans Timmermans): “Europe is like the weather: it can be good, it can be bad, but you certainly cannot change it.”⁴

This has led to one of the lowest levels of debate on European integration in the whole EU. The annual parliamentary debate on the EU is usually so boring that no newspaper or TV station bothers to cover it. Turnout at European Parliament elections is traditionally among the lowest two or three of the entire EU; only the UK has always had a lower turnout than the Netherlands. The turnout dropped through five consecutive European Parliament elections from 57.8 percent in 1979 to 29.9 percent in 1999.⁵

2 Wouter Bos at the Johan de Witt Lecture in Dordrecht, February 23rd, 2005

3 Cf. the yearly Quotation Score of *Intermediair* magazine, March 22nd, 2005

4 Frans Timmermans during the Parliamentary debates on the Draft Constitution, June 12th, 2003

5 Contrary to this trend, the turnout in 2004 had risen for specific reasons; see below.

However, both the level of debate on the EU and the level of euro-scepticism has increased during the last five years. This is partly due to the arrival on the scene of new political parties and politicians, and partly to the rapid pace of European integration after 1991. The small Euro-critical Socialist Party, growing larger each election and in terms of membership the third largest party in the Netherlands, entered Parliament in 1994. As they are very good campaigners, they have always succeeded in making themselves heard, including on the EU. Pim Fortuyn, as well as his successor “party” LPF (List Pim Fortuyn), was rather Euro-critical and claimed that referendums should be held regularly on European integration issues. As mentioned, Geert Wilders and the two remaining small Protestant parties can also be called Euro-sceptic. These five parties now campaign against the EU Constitution. In 1998, the Society for a Democratic Europe (“Vereniging Democratisch Europa”) was founded, an NGO campaigning for a more democratic and social Europe. However, it does not call itself Euro-sceptic. Its formal goal is to foster debate on European integration.

In 1997 the first campaign to get a referendum on a European topic (the Amsterdam Treaty) was organized by some campaigners. It gained some publicity and support, but did not achieve its goal. In 2002 there was again a call for a referendum on EU-enlargement involving the Eastern European countries. A parliamentary motion asking the government to examine the possibilities for a referendum was adopted by Parliament. When the government responded that it was too late for a referendum, the majority decided to leave it at that. But there was criticism that this was typically how “Europe” was treated in Dutch politics: something is decided in vague terms, and because it is still far away nobody pays attention, but when the actual date comes near, parties suddenly voice objections and there are calls for a referendum, but then it is too late and the opportunity is missed. This – as well as the rise of populism, to which the established parties were looking for an answer – probably contributed to the awareness of a possible referendum on the European Constitution. In October 2002, Convention Member and Social Democratic MP Frans Timmermans brought a motion in Parliament saying that the Parliament would like to have a referendum on the EU Constitution; it was adopted. Formally it meant little, as there would be elections between then and the parliamentary debates on the EU Constitution. But politically it was important. In the elections, the parties in favour of a referendum (the Left plus the LPF) lost their majority. But three progressive parties nevertheless brought in a draft law to hold this referendum, triggered by the European Referendum Campaign, an NGO which had collected signatures and created publicity around this issue. Then the Liberals – normally against referendums – surprisingly crossed the floor and voted in favour of the referendum. This was done under the influence of their new leader in Parliament, Jozias van Aartsen, who is known as an advocate of direct democracy, and who is also looking to regain sections of his usual supporters who had crossed the floor to the “populist right” (who were often advocating referendums). The Liberals normally voice objections and make political theatre around European integration, but in the end they always vote in favour of European treaties.

The possibility of a referendum received hopeful responses in the media, and because of growing signals that a majority could be achieved, though the outcome remained uncertain, there was an increase in media attention on the subject of "Europe". These developments probably led to the rise in turnout to 39% in the 2004 European Parliament elections. Another factor may have been that Paul van Buitenen, the Dutch Commission official whose exposé of extensive fraud led to the fall of the Santer Commission, was a candidate.

Analysis of the campaign

THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Netherlands have an almost purely indirect system of democracy. The referendum is non-binding, initiated "from above" by a majority of parliament against the wishes of the government. The three parties which initiated the referendum – the Social Democrats, Greens, and Liberal Democrats – are all in favour of the Constitution. One may find it strange that the advocates, who have a solid majority in Parliament, would take the risk of a "no" in a referendum for which there is no legal obligation whatsoever. However, their stated motive for fighting for a referendum – which at the beginning did not seem to have a high chance of success – was to build support for European integration vis á vis the growing criticism of "Europe", by showing the electorate that it is taken seriously. The reasoning behind it was that people who are against Europe are not so much against the content – the policies – but against the process: the way decisions are being taken. So if the processes are changed, people can again accept the content.

Because of resistance and delay in the First Chamber of Parliament – which tends to be conservative on issues of institutional change and referendums – it became certain only at the end of January 2005 that the referendum would take place. As the initiators of the law had intended the referendum to coincide with the European Parliament elections of June 2004, the time periods for the campaign were made very short in the law. At the end of February, the date of June 1st was given. That left only a couple of months to prepare a campaign – an unnecessarily short period, because through the failure of the first EU Summit on the Constitution in December 2003, the agreement between the EU heads of state on the Constitution text came only after the European Parliament elections, and the European Commission has meanwhile granted until the end of 2006 for ratification of the European Constitution.

Political parties have to say individually if – and if so, when – they will respect the outcome. A parliamentary majority of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats promised to accept the outcome as long as turnout is at least 30%. This seems to have been inspired by the 1999 European Parliament elections, when the turnout was just under 30%. However, the Christian Democrats added that they also want a proportion of at least 60% of voters against. It is thus

unclear what they will do if the turnout is 35% with a 55% no-vote (which seems a not unlikely outcome according to the current polls). The small Socialists, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats promised to respect the outcome. The LPF promised to accept the outcome only with a 50% turnout, which was criticized, as most European Parliament elections have never achieved that level of turnout. The other parties did not want to say what they will do with the outcome, though the Liberals did stress that they will take the outcome “very seriously”, whatever the turnout. Though many media simplify this picture to the message that the referendum is binding in the event of at least a 30% turnout, this is of course not an ideal situation. Technically speaking, it is not certain what will happen with the result. On Internet forums and in letters-to-the-editor, many citizens have voiced their suspicion that parties will ignore the outcome.

The law called for the setting-up of an independent Referendum Commission, which was supposed to decide the question, set the date and share out one million Euro of state subsidies between proponents and opponents (both 400,000 Euro), and neutral campaigners (200,000 Euro). The low amount was criticized by the media and NGOs – the whole referendum will cost 23 million Euro – as well as the fact that 30% of the entire sum was to go to the political parties, which had recently decided to raise the state subsidies to themselves by 50% to 15 million Euro annually. Some commentators think that the Referendum Commission didn't dare to bypass Geert Wilders, and if he gets money, Dutch custom dictates that all political parties should get some.

The government's position is unclear. The government had announced that they would make clear their pro stance – which is logical, as they had signed the Constitution – but that they would not spend taxpayers' money on a campaign, as this money is levied on both opponents and proponents. But in January it leaked out through a newspaper⁶ that the government had secretly reserved 1.5 million Euro for a yes-campaign if the no-campaign were to take the lead. A majority in Parliament blocked this, saying that no money could be spent without the consent of Parliament (although in the meantime, a Parliament majority, fearing a “no”, is now asking the government to indeed spend it on a yes-campaign). Furthermore, the government had announced in summer 2004 that if a referendum were to be held – which it hoped would not happen – it would accept the outcome. But in April the reliable news organization ANP quoted a government source to the effect that the government would cancel the referendum in case of a French ‘no’.⁷ This is unthinkable in practice, and it is still unclear whether this was a ‘canard’ or not, but the report has been repeated by Dutch media many times and it has further damaged the legitimacy of the referendum.

The above-mentioned weaknesses in the referendum and/or the government position make it easy for the no-side to attack the fairness of the referendum. For some no-campaigners this is the basic method. It will probably result in a lower turnout, but also in more ‘no’ votes.

6 De Volkskrant, January 27th, 2005

7 ANP, “Frans ‘nee’ brengt referendum in gevaar”, April 5th, 2005

The French referendum also plays an important role. Many feel it is highly unfortunate that the French referendum takes place only 3 days before the Dutch one. The French outcome will have a substantial, if not a very great, effect on the Dutch outcome. There is a widespread awareness that a French 'no' might kill the EU Constitution, but that Europe can live with a Dutch 'no'. In the event of a French 'yes', the turnout will probably be higher and the yes-voters will be more motivated to turn up. A French 'no' would lead to a lower turnout and more no-votes.

THE LEVEL OF DEBATE

The Netherlands have a tradition of very short election campaigns – in Western Europe, only the UK has shorter campaigns. This is now spilling over to the referendum campaign. Both the government and the political parties quoted the first week of May as the starting point for their activities. Another factor in the delay of the campaign may have been the government crisis at the end of March, when the government almost fell due to the torpedoing of the Liberal Democrats' plans for the introduction of directly elected mayors. However, this crisis was ended at the beginning of April.

From the moment that a majority for the referendum was in sight – September 2003 – the media have covered "Europe" substantially more than before, and there has been more controversy. Before that, apart from the leading quality newspaper NRC Handelsblad, most media only gave brief attention to high-level EU events, such as European Council summits. However, a large part - if not most - of the current media coverage on the EU Constitution is about "hoopla and horse races" i.e. not the content of the Constitution, but questions such as who has the lead in the polls, how the Foreign Affairs minister is trying to repair the mistake of the Justice minister who warned of war in the event of a 'no', and reports of the yes-parties accusing each other of not doing enough to stir up the debate. This is a general feature of Dutch political journalism. We are mainly talking about newspapers here. TV programmes had not been giving much attention to the Constitution up until the end of April, but that is now changing.

Up until mid-April, the State Secretary (Deputy Minister) for European Affairs – Atzo Nicolai – was the only government member to regularly speak about the Constitution. However, he was not enough of a top politician to be able to really interest the media. Since mid-April, it is mainly Foreign Minister Ben Bot and Justice Minister Piet Hein Donner who have spoken out, and also - only since the end of April - Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende. On April 22nd he handed out leaflets for the first time on the squares around the government buildings in The Hague. Since then he has regularly spoken on the Constitution in the media.

Since the beginning of May, the public debate has quickly got off the ground. On April 23rd, the official government summary of the Constitution was delivered door-to-door throughout the Netherlands. Several hundreds of debates are being held in the course of May. A dozen websites on the European Constitution have opened up, a majority of them calling for a 'no'. Spits, a free newspaper which is distributed in trains and buses and which reaches many who normally don't read newspapers, has regular big features on the EU. Many NGOs and parties

are handing out flyers in shopping malls and pubs. At least 10 books and booklets have been published on the European Constitution in the last few weeks by parties and campaign groups. The Socialist Party is airing radio commercials.

Dutch commentators who have followed the French campaign said that the latter was both much more intense and that the French public was debating at a far higher and better-informed level, as was apparent from letters-to-the-editor in newspapers and from popular talkshows. Research published in mid-April showed that almost 9 out of 10 Dutchmen did not know which country currently chairs the EU (the Netherlands held the chair just previously). Only 1% knows the nominal chairman: Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker. If asked who the 27 Dutch MEPs are, a large majority can give no correct name at all. Most politicians named are not in the European Parliament, but in other European bodies, the Dutch government, or they are former MEPs.⁸

Most parties have not set aside any money for the campaign extra to the money they received from the Referendum Commission. (All political parties, except the LPF and the Greens who both failed to hand in a request which met the requirements, have received sums of up to 40,000 Euro each.) This has been typical for local referendums too. Political parties tend to view elections as their real interest, and consider referendums to be secondary.

One of the places where the Constitution has already been debated for a longer time and by a quite broad and diverse audience is the Internet. A Google search on April 22nd on “Europese Grondwet” (as one single phrase) showed 392,000 hits on Dutch sites; on May 8th the same phrase already gave 579,000 Dutch hits. The very large and non-partisan site www.grondweteuropa.nl – started by a private Internet company from its own budget in cooperation with Leiden University – has already been active since mid-2004.

KEY PLAYERS, THEIR ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

The key players are: the Government, the political parties represented in the Dutch and European Parliaments, a few campaign groups, and – since the beginning of May – a limited number of Dutch NGOs (mainly unions and employers’ organizations).

GOVERNMENT

The government consists of a coalition of Christian Democrats (CDA), Liberals (VVD) and Liberal Democrats (D66), which have all voted in favour of all European treaties and are all members of the Dutch European Movement. Since January, it is mainly the under-minister for European Affairs, Atzo Nicolai, who has been active. He regularly speaks out in the media and has started the website www.grondweteu.nl on which he tries to show the very practical, concrete advantages for the everyday lives of Europeans. He also debunks “myths” of the EU

⁸ Research by Team Vier, published April 13th, 2005

Constitution. Since mid-April, the Foreign Affairs minister Bot and Justice minister Donner (both Christian Democrats) have spoken out a number of times. Donner lost credibility in the eyes of many when he predicted European wars in the event of a French 'no'. Bot maintained that the government would wait with its campaign until "three or four weeks before the referendum". Dutch campaign specialist Prof. Philip van Praag says that this is not wise, as the no-campaigners have begun earlier and are more active than the yes-campaign, so the government campaign is starting with a handicap. The opposition parties in favour of the Constitution have criticized the government for not starting earlier, but they themselves started very late as well. The full text of the EU Constitution was made available in mid-April in a circulation of 250,000 through libraries, gas stations and grocery stores. It was gone in less than a week, after which the government promised to print an extra edition. This indicates that enough people are interested in the EU Constitution, but that they are waiting for prominent politicians, parties and social organisations to speak out. At the end of April a government summary of the Constitution was distributed to all households. There has been criticism from academics for its inclusion of some factually wrong information.

POLITICAL PARTIES

The opposition parties in Parliament are divided. In favour of the Constitution are the Social Democrats (PvdA) and the Greens (GroenLinks). Against it are the small Socialists (SP), Pim Fortuyn's populist party LPF, the two rightist Protestant parties (CU and SGP) and independent MP Geert Wilders. All in all, the large and mainstream parties are in favour, and on the (populist) left and right ends of the spectrum the parties are against. The pro-Constitution parties have a large majority of 127 of the 150 seats. The yes- and no-parties have some clear differences. The yes-parties have a rather technical and official-sounding message, and there aren't many differences in their issues and tone of voice, apart maybe from the Greens. They stress how the Constitution is a careful balance between different interests and principles. They all acknowledge that the Constitution is not ideal. The no-parties are more passionate and tend to stress general principles and values (such as freedom and independence).

Another weak point of the yes-campaign is that the progressive voters of the Social Democrats and the Greens do not like to vote the same way as the centre-right government parties. According to some, this may also be the reason why the leader of the opposition, Social Democrat leader Bos, who is one of the most popular politicians of the country, had not spoken out until May 1st. It is in the interest of his party for him to distinguish himself from the government, not take the same position. But he has come under increasing pressure to speak out and is doing so now.

This same principle does not seem to apply to the no-campaign. Socialist Party voters do not seem to mind that they take the same position as (potential) voters of Geert Wilders. These two parties are clearly the most active/influential campaigners on the no-side. Ideologically, they are each other's opposites (though they both use populist overtones) and they will never work together, but they have not attacked each other either. An article in the Socialist Party

magazine about the Swedish no-campaign against the Euro, in which the ideological brothers of the Socialist Party took part, describes this “non-aggression pact” as a deliberate strategy.⁹

In contrast to this, the yes-campaigners sometimes attack each other. The Greens called Justice Minister Donner to the Parliament to explain his warning that a no vote would lead to war, though both are on the yes-side. The progressive yes-parties also consistently criticized the government for real or suspected foul play. The former are afraid to alienate undecided voters through foul play – but at the same time they are siding with the no-campaigners who also attack the fairness of the referendum.

Christian Democrats (CDA; coalition party; in favour; 44 seats in parliament; www.cda.nl): Both in terms of members and of parliamentary seats, the largest party in the country. Until the end of April, hardly anything on the European Constitution could be found on its website, and there were no reports, leaflets and other documents available. This has changed now that the party has received its state subsidy.

The main talking points for the Christian Democrats are: the European Constitution allows better cooperation against terrorism and international crime; the European market assures more growth; common values have safeguarded 60 years of peace; the Constitution assures there will be no European super-state; and the European citizens’ initiative involves citizens.

The Christian Democrats have always voted in favour of all European treaties, often from a sense of duty and responsibility. As CDA Justice minister Donner said in April to a party congress: “The C [Christian] in CDA obliges you to vote in favour of the European Constitution.”¹⁰ However, the Summer 2004 issue of a CDA magazine devoted entirely to Europe claimed that “there is a growing sense of discomfort among Christian Democrats about the way Europe is developing”, according to the article. Major party thinkers quoted were CDA senator Van der Lans, who said that “something went very wrong with what has been called the most successful political project of the 20th century”.¹¹ This is an internal discussion; though they do not try to hide it, they have never suggested that they may vote against the European Constitution. But it can be a reason why the Christian Democrats are not campaigning as enthusiastically as they might do.

Liberals (VVD; coalition party; in favour; 27 seats; www.vvd.nl): In spring 2004, the Liberals threatened to vote against the Constitution if a three-point wish list were not implemented (a veto for every member state on the EU Budget; the rules of the Stability Pact to be binding; each member state to have a permanent European Commissioner). Only the

⁹ “Je moet vertrouwen hebben in het volk”, Tribune (SP magazine), April 2005

¹⁰ ANP, “CDA’er heeft plicht voor referendum [sic] te stemmen”, April 16th, 2005

¹¹ “Europa als de toren van Babel?”, CDV (Christen-Democratische Verkenningen), Summer 2004

first point was implemented, but the Liberals nevertheless declared themselves in favour, just as they were on all other European treaties.

Their resistance was partly based on a real Euro-scepticism of parts of the party, and partly they are afraid to lose voters to the new populist parties on the right, which are campaigning against the European Constitution. Until recently, the VVD was – apart from the small theocratic Protestant parties, who are no alternative for most people – the only party on the right of the moderate Christian Democrats. The VVD was never really populist and didn't need to be either. During the last three years, rightist, more populist parties have sprung up and they get their voters mainly from the Liberals. Reasons to now vote in favour, however, apart from the content, are their links with the business community – which supports the Constitution – as well as the wish to avoid a conflict in the coalition, as it may well collapse over this issue.

The Liberals point out that the EU is a liberal project. They say that the European Constitution is not a Constitution, but a Treaty between states. They stress the progress made in comparison with the Treaty of Nice, which was also the reason cited as to why they nevertheless supported the EU Constitution. They quote the national vetoes that remain intact and the fact that the Constitution arranges the free market, competition and consumer rights. They maintain that the Dutch population gets a better grip on “Brussels”.

On the EU accession of Turkey they are divided to a certain extent and are, again, afraid of populist competition. Liberal leader Van Aartsen has proposed a national referendum on the question (which was met with resistance from most other parties). The Euro-scepticism of the Liberals is greater and more publicly displayed than that of the Christian Democrats.

According to polls, a majority of Liberal voters may not follow the party recommendation and will vote 'no' in the June 1 referendum.

Liberal Democrats (D66; in favour; coalition party; 6 seats; www.d66.nl) Like the Liberal VVD, they belong to the ELDR family in the European Parliament. Together with the Greens, the Liberal Democrats are the real pro-integration party, but without the internal division of the Greens on this. One of their early reactions to the European Constitution was that it was not European enough. Together with the Greens they have been the most outspoken about the European Constitution on the yes-side, though not very visible. They are in favour of international organisations which take over a substantial number of tasks and powers from the national states.

However, the Liberal Democrats always have money problems, as they have one of the smallest memberships of all political parties, and because of their low number of parliamentary seats (from 24 in 1994-1998 to 6 now), they do not receive much government subsidy. They have a lack of volunteers, as D66 members are individualistic people. So it remains to be seen how much they can do.

The Liberal Democrats stress the democratic and civil aspects of the EU Constitution: more powers for the European Parliament, more civil rights for Europeans, less bureaucracy and

more efficiency. They say that Europe will have one more voice in the world through the EU Foreign Minister (they often stress how the European Union should be a counterweight against the United States in the world, but that the EU needs to be more integrated for that). They claim the Constitution is the beginning of the end of the current Common Agricultural Policy.

Social Democrats (PvdA; in favour; opposition party; 42 seats; www.pvda.nl): The second largest party in the country, both in terms of parliamentary seats and membership. Within the Social Democrat ranks there aren't many signs of Euro-scepticism. In the Dutch debate, Euro-scepticism was traditionally associated with narrow-mindedness, nationalism, and right-wing politics. Only the smaller Socialist Party (SP) put an end to the left-right dichotomy, although they are also sometimes pictured as narrow-minded and nationalistic.

The Social Democrats are leading the opposition to the centre-right government. Social Democrat leader Wouter Bos is one of the most popular politicians in the country and could be important for the yes-campaign. Until the end of April he had not spoken out at all, and some commentators think he was keeping silent because he does not want to support the government. However, on May 1st (Labour Day), the Social Democrats launched their campaign with a public speech by Bos which was covered by several TV channels. The Social Democrats have promised that Bos will be very visible from now on. Of the three big parties, they are the most vocal in the campaign. However, the campaign will target their own voters, not the public as a whole. This is still important, because – just like the Liberal voters – the polls say that a majority of the Social Democrat voters does not follow the party line and plans to vote 'no'. The Social Democrats have quite a lot of money, but they will only use the 40,000 Euro subsidy they received from the Referendum Commission. They will not work with commercials or poster campaigns. They have arranged for all MPs (42) and all MEPs (7) to be campaigning door-to-door during the last 2 weeks in areas with many Social Democrat voters, and taking part in local debates and events.

In Frans Timmermans, member of the Convention and one of the key parliamentarians behind the referendum, they have a skilled debater in favour of the Constitution, but he is not a top politician and has thus not been able to attract much public attention.

LPF (Pim Fortuyn's party; against; opposition party; 8 seats; www.lijst-pimfortuyn.nl): The LPF is more a list than a party, as the list was quickly put together just three months before the 2002 elections when Pim Fortuyn was ousted by his former party, "Liveable Netherlands". As Fortuyn was murdered just days before the elections, the LPF came into parliament with 24 seats. But as a group with little political experience and many difficult personalities, they were continuously fighting each other, and making coups in the party and parliamentary group. No-one among them really had the personality, ideas and leadership qualities of Pim Fortuyn to become his successor.

Now they have 8 seats and – after the rise of Geert Wilders – will lose most of them, according to polls, if there were to be elections now. They have a modest influence in the Dutch debate, and generally support government proposals; many in the public view them as over and done

with. They have more materials on the Constitution on their website than the big parties or Geert Wilders, and sometimes have a quite sophisticated critique of the EU. But on the populist right, Geert Wilders will probably be the dominant force.

Their issues: just like Geert Wilders they stress the dichotomy between independence and freedom versus a European bureaucracy which controls the Netherlands "from outside". The EU should not be a political federation, let alone a unitary state, but an intergovernmental cooperation limited to economic matters only. An LPF motion that the government should replace the term "European Constitution" with "European treaty" was adopted by parliament, but it failed to carry it out. National parliaments should have the final say over all EU legislation. They are against EU membership for Turkey, and would like to have a referendum before the start of negotiations. They have asked the government – in vain – to research the possibility of leaving the EU in the event of undesired political developments.

Socialist Party (SP; against; opposition party; 8 seats; www.sp.nl): The Socialist Party – leftist populists from the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament – are sure to dominate the left-wing no-campaign. The Socialists are good campaigners who have never lost a national election since their entry into the Parliament in 1994, and only rarely a local election. They do not have so many seats, but they are the third largest party in the country in terms of membership, and a high percentage of them are active locally. Their campaign agenda shows several debates per day with party politicians from Mid-April until June 1st across the country. Their content is often traditionally leftist, but they do know how to wrap it up to appeal to those who would normally never vote socialist. Parliamentary speaker Van Bommel has been quite visible for months, showing up in many TV-programmes, and to a lesser extent party leader Marijnissen.

As Geert Wilders has been quiet and will probably only do public events during the last 2 weeks, the Socialist Party is now dominating the whole no-campaign.

The SP, LPF and Geert Wilders all have one main issue: that the Netherlands are becoming a powerless province in a European super-state. For the rest, they differ on all counts. The Socialist Party is quoting the Liberals' claim that the EU is a liberal project, saying that the Netherlands will be forced to introduce privatisations in areas where we would normally not accept it. They also declare the plans for common military operations, and economic competition with the United States, to be dangerous. Their other issues are mostly variations on the theme of Dutch independence and accountability versus the European super-state: the Brussels bureaucracy, the new competences that we will "lose to Brussels", and the loss of national vetoes.

Greens (GroenLinks; in favour; opposition party; 8 seats; www.groenlinks.nl): The Greens were formed in 1992 out of the pro-Soviet Communist Party and other left-wing parties (including leftist evangelicals) and belong to the Greens-EFA family in the European Parliament. They do not always support European integration: they voted against the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties and the Euro, but in favour of the Nice Treaty. They were internally very divided on the Constitution and had to vote at a party congress in September 2004 to obtain a party standpoint. However, a (small) majority is passionately in favour of European integration, associating the nation-state with narrow-mindedness, nationalism, competition and war, and they won the vote. The Greens may be the only party which will devote 50,000 Euro of its own money to the campaign (unlike the other political parties which filed an application, they did not receive money from the Referendum Commission because their application did not meet the requirements). The Greens are targeting progressive voters with poster and flyer campaigns at railroad stations during the last 2 weeks. Their online campaign agenda shows considerably less debates, however, than their big opponents the Socialist Party.

In the spring, some texts from the Greens about the Constitution began with everything they didn't like in it, concluding in the end that, however, it was better than nothing, so they would vote in favour. Maybe this was a bonus for their no-voting minority, but in the meantime they have dropped this strategy, probably wisely, and developed a mix of democratic and social arguments in favour. The top three of these are: more democracy, since the European Parliament receives more powers; the Constitution articles on sustainable development and green energy; and the common foreign policy "through which we can resist the United States better". The other issues are an extension of this line: less secrecy, as the Council of Ministers will open the doors when legislating; more civil rights for Europeans; more attention to animal rights and the possibility of transforming the Common Agricultural Policy; and a limit to the privatisation of public services.

Protestant parties (ChristenUnie and SGP; both against; opposition parties; in total 5 seats; www.christenunie.nl and www.sgp.nl): These are more or less theocratic parties which are Euro-sceptic and belong to the IND/DEM group in the European Parliament. They barely differ in voting behaviour, though the ChristenUnie is more popular in political and media circles than the SGP, which is more Calvinist than the ChristenUnie. The ChristenUnie is progressive on many social issues and, being composed of both Calvinists and Pentecostals, uses a positive "evangelical" tone. By contrast, the SGP is in favour of the death penalty and of a strong reduction of social welfare, and often employs a negative tone. The ChristenUnie adopted the Nice Treaty and was dubious about the European Constitution, while the SGP has categorically rejected every European treaty. Still, even the ChristenUnie does not have a substantial influence outside their own circles. They see each other as natural allies, however, and have a combined list in the European Parliament.

Evangelical/Protestant topics are for both most important. Their main concern is the absence of a reference to God or Christianity in the Constitution. In addition, they are quite against the

supranational aspects of the EU in principle. They tend to see the national states as installed by God, and the EU as a “Tower of Babel”. They are against the national vetoes being lost, and claim that the big states will overrule the little ones. They also use the term “super-state”.

Geert Wilders (against; 1 seat; opposition party; www.geertwilders.nl): Being the most quoted Dutch member of parliament, Geert Wilders is the most likely candidate to take over Pim Fortuyn’s electorate. Although in the polls conducted shortly after the murder of Theo van Gogh he was rated at up to 24 seats if there were to be elections then, at this moment he is still on his own. He gets no government subsidies and he is currently building up a party organisation and doing fundraising. As the number of death threats are still increasing, even daily, he is closely guarded and had to stay in military premises for a long time.

All these factors have limited his ability to campaign. However, he has recently begun appearing again in media interviews, with the European Constitution one of the topics. His main campaign event against the European Constitution will be a bus tour through all 12 provinces. This will probably attract serious media attention, if only to see the army of bodyguards which the government has forced upon him. Although the taboo on rightist populism is gone to a large extent, and the media give Wilders lots of attention – they “missed” the rise of Pim Fortuyn and are afraid to be criticized again for ignoring or ridiculing such a figure – practically no politician has debated with him or mentioned his name, probably because it isn’t in their electoral interest.

His basic line, just like the Socialist Party and the LPF, is that the Netherlands – whilst being the biggest net financial contributor to the EU - will become a powerless province in a European super-state. For the rest, he shares most issues with the LPF. He attacks the Brussels “technocrats and bureaucrats”, saying that Europe can never become a real democracy, because the basis for that – a “demos” – is lacking. Europe is too diversified to be pushed into a centralist state, this can only happen with the use of force. He claims EU membership for Turkey has directly to do with the Constitution, because it gives power to the big states to rule over the little ones, and Turkey is big and the Netherlands little. He is in favour of a strict immigration policy, and quotes the Danish example, which according to Wilders was only possible because they demanded an opt-out from EU policy in this area. He claims the member states lose national vetoes in 63 policy areas.

NGOs

Most important NGOs refuse to speak out. Partly this is because they are internally divided, more often this is because they are afraid to alienate a part of the public from themselves (these factors are probably most important for progressive NGOs). Many tend to see themselves as defenders of a certain narrow interest who should not speak out on broad issues like the European Constitution. The fact that many NGOs are dependent on the government for subsidies underlines this last factor. Even activist groups with a radical past, such as the Dutch section of Friends of the Earth (environmental movement), receive structural government

subsidies. (There was a public row in April because “Euroodusnie”, an “autonomous” organization closely associated with the squatting movement and those who like to confront the riot police, also received an incidental 40,000 Euro subsidy from the Referendum Commission for the referendum campaign.)

This does not mean that the Dutch NGO sector is weak. On the contrary, in terms of their membership numbers and the amount of private donations they receive, Dutch civil society is one of the strongest in the whole of Europe. But in the logic of the “table model” discussed in the first part, NGOs are at the same time seen as a “middle field” (this is the literal Dutch term) between the individual citizens and the government. They often have fixed positions in the policy-making community, are members of official or semi-official advisory bodies to the government, and are seen by the government as partners in the common task of enlightening the public. They do not want to endanger that position.

Of the important NGOs, only the largest federation of unions (FNV) and the two main employers (VNO-NCW for the big companies, and the MKB for the middle and small companies) are known to have a position: all three in favour. They were planning not to campaign, but as the no-campaign started earlier and has been growing, they have been under pressure to make their position actively known. As a result, the VNO-NCW announced that they would after all start a campaign in favour of the Constitution, through radio commercials and other means. The MKB and the FNV are more restricted; they are not formally advising their members to vote in favour, but practically they are doing so, as they are publicising the advantages of the Constitution. The FNV launched a special Constitution website for this, www.eenbetereuropa.nl. The other big union, the CNV, does not really take sides.

In addition, a surprisingly high number of ad-hoc groups and websites devoted to the Constitution have sprung up recently. Most of them only have a virtual life. They are small, but as the Dutch are relative heavy Internet users, they may have quite some impact. The great majority of them are campaigning against.

The “Stichting Grondwet Nee” (Foundation for a No to the Constitution, www.grondwetnee.org) is the most important. They do not only have a website, but also take part in debates and are interview partners for the media. They are led by freelance journalist Willem Bos, who also writes for Green Party magazines. They have also published a book on the Constitution. They operate from a left-wing perspective, but (contrary to the Socialist Party) claim that the European Constitution is not federalist enough. They would like to see a Europe with a full democracy, like a fully developed state. The www.eunee.nl website operates from a libertarian point of view, and has the same kind of arguments as LPF and Geert Wilders. www.grondwetnee.nl (not to be confused with www.grondwetnee.org) has a mix of leftist and rightist arguments against the Constitution. www.stemtegengrondwet.nl is an original site from a progressive perspective. www.tegengrondwet.nl is closely associated with “Nieuw Rechts”, a small ultra-right party which is probably close to the Front National in France. Turkey’s membership and the “flood” of immigrant workers are featured next to the other rightist arguments against the Constitution. A few websites are in favour: www.betereuropa.nu is not

really an NGO in our sense as it was started by a number of politicians from several progressive parties. www.referendumplaza.nl is a website from a couple of entrepreneurs. The rest are neutral, offering news, viewpoints from several sides, or online discussion facilities. Examples are www.europeesreferendum.nl, by the European Referendum Campaign, and www.grondwethoezo.nl, by the Dutch bureau of the European Parliament.

MEDIA

The media of course play an important role, especially when many parties have put aside little money and aim for free publicity. In their editorials, most newspapers have spoken out in favour of the European constitution, among them the liberal NRC Handelsblad (www.nrc.nl), the progressive Volkskrant (www.volkskrant.nl), the progressive-Protestant newspaper Trouw (www.trouw.nl) and the populist-conservative Telegraaf (www.telegraaf.nl). Only one reputable magazine has spoken out against: the conservative-liberal magazine Elsevier (www.elsevier.nl).

However, it is striking that all media tend to be critical of both the European Constitution and the EU in general. All negative news about the EU that could be reported has been reported, and every incident of 'foul play' or a not-so-clever move of the government was criticised. However, after the no-voters took the lead in the polls at the beginning of May, many media are now more positive about the Constitution. They may be afraid of getting part of the blame for a no-vote.

POLLS AND EXPECTATIONS ABOUT THE VOTE

Regular polls are conducted by Interview-NSS, a polling organisation working for the public TV programme NOVA¹²; by Maurice de Hond, who is the godfather of Dutch political polling and who works for the public TV news station NOS¹³; and by Market Response, a not-so-well-known company hired by the government to do a monthly survey¹⁴. The Interview and the De Hond polls show the same patterns, though not exactly the same numbers.

Both Interview and De Hond currently show that the no-voters have slowly increased their share over recent weeks and that since the end of April they have been in the majority. Of those who are likely to vote, Interview shows 36% no, 23% yes and 31% undecided (May 6th). De Hond shows 42% no, 37% yes and 21% undecided (as of May 7th). If the undecided are divided proportionately among the yes- and no-voters, then the result is:

- • Interview: 61 percent no, 39 percent yes
- • De Hond: 53 percent no, 47 percent yes

12 The Interview-NSS polls are not systematically published on the Internet, but only in the media.

13 The De Hond polls are published on his polling website www.peil.nl

14 "Rapportage Referendum Europese Grondwet", April 11th, 2005, Market Response (Leusden), also published on the government website www.grondweteu.nl

So De Hond has a smaller percentage of undecided voters, and his gap between 'yes' and 'no' is smaller. One explanation might be that Interview always works with a "fresh" random group who are randomly telephoned, and De Hond works with a database of 25,000 subscribers to his polling website www.peil.nl, from which he takes a sample. Although he says that he weights the sample to make sure that it is representative – he knows everything about his subscribers – his system is nevertheless based upon self-registration, which may lead to an over-representation of politically active citizens, who may be less often undecided and more often in favour of European integration.

De Hond is able to provide some interesting extra data. He asked about the general attitude towards the EU and found that 19% consider themselves to be EU sceptics, 33% "EU with a brake", 29% EU supporters and 19% EU adepts. He then shows that the former two, of which a majority tends towards a "no", are more inclined to vote than the EU supporters and adepts. This is of course important for the final outcome. Moreover, 70% (including a majority of the "EU adepts") agree with the thesis: "The government campaign in favour of the Constitution is not convincing." Nine percent say that the actions of government members during the last week had a positive effect on the yes-campaign, 38% say it had a negative effect, and 40% say it had a neutral effect.¹⁵

From these polls it seems that the no-voters changed from a minority into a majority during April, when several no-campaigners were already active and the yes-campaigners were repeating that they would start their campaign in May.

On the likely turnout, Interview and De Hond are very close: 39% and 35% on May 6th and May 7th, respectively, are likely to vote (as elsewhere, the rule goes that the actual turnout will be lower). Around April 11th, the government survey found that 47% would "definitely" vote and an additional 28% would "probably" vote (in total 75%). That seems rather unlikely.

ISSUES AND SPLITS

There are two major representative sources for finding out what the motives are for the yes- and no-voters: the above-mentioned government survey and questionnaires by Maurice de Hond. As they use different methodology, we will keep their respective lists separate from each other.

- The government survey (published April 11) showed the following main reasons for the yes-voters¹⁶:
 - more unity / uniformity in Europe (41%)
 - a stronger position for Europe in the world (16%)
 - I am in favour of Europe / more European cooperation (15%)
 - European solutions for problems such as criminality and terrorism (14%)

¹⁵ Survey by Maurice de Hond, May 7th, 2005, www.peil.nl

¹⁶ "Rapportage Referendum Europese Grondwet", op.cit., p. 14

And for the no-voters:

- the Netherlands lose power / have less to say in Europe (24%)
- the Netherlands loses its own identity (16%)
- the big countries will be in control (16%)
- no advantage for the Netherlands (12%)
- the Netherlands must pay the bills of poorer countries (14%)

Maurice de Hond shows the following major reasons for yes-voters¹⁷:

- The Constitution is better than the current situation (53%)
- The EU has more advantages than disadvantages for the Netherlands (52%)
- Because I agree with the new Constitution (46%)
- Because I feel like a real European (37%)
- Because a 'no' will break up the EU (27%)
- Because the party I voted for is in favour of the Constitution (21%)
- Because I support the Euro (18%)
- Because I support EU accession to 25 or more countries (11%)
- The manner in which the opponents present themselves in the Netherlands (11%)
- Because I support the government (10%)
- Because I think the Netherlands will lose credibility (10%)
- Because I support Turkish EU membership (9%)
- Other (8%)
- Not sure / no answer (1%)

And for the no-voters:

- The EU has more disadvantages than advantages for the Netherlands (49%)
- Because I'm against EU membership for Turkey (48%)
- Because I disapprove of the Constitution (35%)
- Because I'm against the Euro (33%)
- The Constitution is worse than the current situation (32%)
- Because I don't trust the Dutch politicians (30%)
- Because I don't support the government (30%)
- The way in which the pro-camp present themselves (29%)
- Because I don't feel like a European (27%)
- Because the party I vote for is against the Constitution (7%)
- Because a 'no' will break up the EU (5%)
- Other (15%)
- Not sure / no answer (6%)

De Hond also concludes that the no-voters are being led by broader issues than merely the European Constitution. The yes-voters focus on the Constitution, because "they have less problems with developments in the EU or with the EU itself".

17 Survey by Maurice de Hond, May 7th, 2005, www.peil.nl, p. 2

The discussion as reflected by the media has concentrated on the following issues:

- The loss of independence and freedom. Many people are afraid of more bureaucracy and more regulations being forced upon the Netherlands.
- EU finances. According to polls, a high percentage of the Dutch know that the Netherlands are the largest net payers to the EU. The Dutch perceive themselves as financially prudent, while especially many Southern European and big member states are perceived to be less prudent. The goings-on about the Germans and French exceeding the 3% EMU rules without being penalised have been covered and criticised quite substantially.
- Typical Dutch traits and Dutch identity. Many Dutch see The Netherlands as a country with a relatively high tolerance for alternative life styles, such as gay marriage, use of soft drugs and euthanasia. Some people are afraid that the harmonisation of EU law will put an end to this.
- The position of small countries. The Dutch are very aware of how small their country is; many Dutch sayings use this image. They tend to distrust big European countries, especially France and the Southern European states. As population archetypes/cultures, the French and the Germans are rather disliked than liked.
- EU membership for Turkey. Both for cultural and economic reasons, EU accession for Turkey is contested. But it is less of an issue than expected.
- Fairness of the referendum. Both the media, the no-campaign and the progressive yes-parties point out real or suspected “foul play” by the government, although the yes-parties’ fears of a “no” and the frustration with the low level of debate (of which all parties are guilty) led to a call by a majority of parliament to the government on April 19th to use the secret reserve of 1.5 million Euro for a yes-campaign after all.
- Chaos and loss of influence as result of a ‘no’. This point is stressed by the yes-side. Many politicians have gone on record to warn of several forms of damage or even disaster in the event of a “no”.
- The improvements in the European Constitution versus the current situation. Many yes-campaigners stress that they are not perfectly happy with the EU Constitution, but that it is better than the current situation. They imply that other options are not possible or cannot realistically be expected, so it is “this or nothing”.

Looking at ideological cleavages, it is clear that one cleavage dominates the debate: less versus more integration. This cleavage permeates all political parties and campaigning NGOs. In the words of the no-campaign: “the European super state versus Dutch independence”. They point out that the EU has acquired all the features of a state over the years, and they cannot believe that it will be a democratic state. They fear that The Netherlands are being entangled in something from which they will no longer be able to withdraw and which causes new problems, instead of solving the old ones. They associate saying ‘no’ to the Constitution

with rejecting the build-up of such a super-state, and thus creating or taking back the freedom to find local solutions to problems, and not being bothered by other people's problems. In the words of the yes-campaign, it is about "European cooperation versus Dutch powerlessness when left on its own". They say that modern problems can only be solved through cooperation. They associate the EU not with force, but with cooperation. They do not see a Dutch "Sonderweg" (separate path) as something desirable, as they associate it with the powerlessness of a small country in a big world, with not being able to jump on a moving train, and with being an international outcast.

Two other minor cleavages can be identified which are directly connected to this main cleavage and to each other. The first is trust versus distrust of the ruling elite, in which the Dutch and European political elite is seen as interlinked and exchangeable. The second is the possibility versus impossibility of an alternative organisation of Europe. The yes-campaigners imply that they are the realists who know that it is not possible to achieve a better deal when negotiating with very diverse social groups from 25 countries. They say we have to accept the outcome of the current negotiations even though they do not perfectly like either the content or the processes through which the content was achieved; also because they basically trust the current political – Dutch and European - elite. They acknowledge that the EU is not perfect, but believe that the Constitution takes the rough edges off. They agree that the Constitution gives no water-tight solutions against misuse of power, but they imply that they don't believe that the current political elite would do really immoral things. They say that going with the flow is of greater importance than being able to precisely determine your own policies, but remaining alone in the meantime. The no-campaigners do not trust the political elite. They imply that they are idealists, refusing to accept a certain method as a given only because those who practise it have power. They believe an alternative Europe is possible, but that saying 'yes' to the Constitution will actually give a green light to the current elite to carry on in the old way. They imply that a 'no' will stop a train going in the wrong direction, and create openings for a major rethink of the way Europe is being organized. Typically, in their distrust they often add that even in the event of a 'no', the Dutch-European elite will find a way to bypass this 'no' and still carry on in the old direction.

A last word on a demographic cleavage between party politicians and their voters. Maurice de Hond provides data on this too¹⁸. It is only among Christian Democrats voters¹⁹, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens that a majority is in favour of the Constitution (70, 73 and 53 percent, respectively). Of the other two proponents, the Social Democrats and the Liberals, a majority of their voters plan to vote 'no' (54 and 52 percent, respectively). The parties who vote 'no' are in accordance with their voters: of the Socialist voters and those who would now vote for Geert Wilders, 90 and 94 percent respectively of the votes would be against the Constitution.

18 Maurice de Hond, survey of May 7th, 2005, www.peil.nl, p. 4

19

Conclusions

It was always thought that there was no real Euro-scepticism in the Netherlands, that it was a stable pro-European force. However, we have shown that there is indeed Euro-scepticism, that it was merely hidden and glossed over by the elitist character of Dutch politics. The referendum gives an opening for the Euro-sceptics and those who are ambivalent towards European integration.

The yes-campaign is focusing on the Constitution, listing advantages, sometimes in a rather technocratic way. The no-campaign is focusing on the EU in general, including the Euro and EU membership of Eastern European countries and Turkey. They stress general principles and values. The yes-campaign answers that the referendum is not about the Euro, EU accession for Turkey etc. That is formally true, of course. But on the other hand, the Dutch voters have had few occasions to speak out on the EU. This referendum is the first ever, and as the citizens have no right to initiate a referendum, there's no saying when the next referendum will be. So they take this opportunity to finally say about the EU what they've been wanting to say for a long time.

Most polls now show a lead for the "no" campaign. This may diminish, as many no-campaigners started earlier than the yes-campaign, which only began a week ago. On the other hand, polls indicate that the yes-campaign of the government and the political parties has largely had a counter-productive effect on the undecided.

The turnout will probably be low, but according to the polls it is slowly rising. Many observers will be happy if it is above 30 percent. If it is 29 or 28.5 percent, the political parties will probably still accept the outcome, but if it is 26 or 25 percent, they will feel permitted to ignore a possible "no", and approve the Constitution. This is customary in the Netherlands: turnout quorums are usually also set for non-binding referendums, because political ethics say that you cannot ignore a referendum, even a non-binding one, unless the quorum was not met. However, as the Christian Democrats have demanded both a 30 percent turnout and at least a 60 percent "no", the situation seems very unsure, because at this moment the polls are predicting a 35 percent turnout and a 55-60 percent "no".

Study available in French and english on the website <http://www.notre-europe.asso.fr>

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