

Confidence in the Future

2017–2021 Coalition Agreement

People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), Democrats '66 (D66) and Christian Union (CU)

10 October 2017

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Introduction

In the Netherlands individual freedoms and a strong sense of community go hand in hand. Here, everyone can aspire to great things, in the certainty that there is a safety net to catch them if necessary. We also share each other's concerns. When there are problems, in the Netherlands we solve them together. This means that we have everything we need to address the major issues of our day. We have confidence in the future.

Our goal is to make an already strong country even better for everyone, including people who feel that government is no longer there for them. We will invest in opportunities for all and strengthen the community. We see great opportunities to make this happen:

- We will invest in our collective services, earmarking additional funds and human resources for public safety, education and healthcare.
- We will enact reforms to foster greater certainty and more opportunities in a new economy, for example by striking a new balance between flexible working and permanent contracts, pursuing a more customised approach to old-age pensions, modernising the tax system and lowering taxes.
- We will address the challenge of climate change. The Netherlands will become a sustainable country.
- And we will stand firm for Dutch values like freedom, democracy, the rule of law and internationalism. The Netherlands' identity will remain distinct, while we maintain a strong presence in the international system.

We are starting from a position of strength. The economy is growing, the labour market is expanding, unemployment is falling and government finances are again in order. We score high in numerous international rankings: for the innovativeness of our economy, for the accessibility of healthcare and for the quality of education and research.

But a good country is more than macroeconomic statistics and international rankings. A snapshot of the Netherlands would also show divisions and concerns. Everyone can think of examples. While some people see robotisation, globalisation and innovation as opportunities, others fear for their jobs and those of their children. There are young people and middle-income people who are having a hard time ensuring their own economic security, for example because it is difficult for them as flexible workers to obtain a mortgage, or because they cannot find an affordable flat to rent. Many people feel their own neighbourhoods have become unrecognisable and are no longer a safe place to come home to. Some even experience a sense of alienation. Some no longer feel at home in their own neighbourhoods because newcomers are not fully integrated. And others wonder if they are truly accepted in our society. In addition, many Dutch people have long been

concerned about the state of healthcare. They question whether care will be available and affordable when they need it.

There are still too many people who think: 'Economic growth is all well and good, but it doesn't apply to me.' When too many people are left behind, our whole society suffers. Social divisions turn into social tensions, which can quickly grow, especially now that international instability and unrest are contributing to the sense of discontent and alienation in our own country. For example, when growth in migration seems to be out of control, or when international tensions spill onto Dutch streets.

Politics should be about the Netherlands and its people, not about numbers and the political establishment in The Hague. This is what people are asking for, and it is the guiding principle on which this coalition agreement is based. Progress in the Netherlands is not just about statistics; Dutch people need to experience qualitative progress in their own lives. This is our ambition, and we will pursue it along four policy tracks over the course of the next several years.

First of all, we will invest in the services that are there for us all. Everyone should feel sure that they live in a safe, caring and close-knit society. This is why we will invest in defence, the police, healthcare and education. These sectors need our support and appreciation, and the professionals who work in them should be given the latitude they need to do their jobs. All too often, with the best of intentions, we get bogged down in detailed government regulations. This is not the solution. Healing patients is the work of doctors. Caring for people is the work of nurses and people in the community. Keeping the streets safe is the work of police officers. And it is that one special teacher that people remember their whole lives, not a government policy document. These professionals should be given the latitude they need, as should the many other positive forces in our society of individuals, associations and faith communities.

Secondly, we will institute reforms that will result in greater security and more opportunities in a new economy. Our labour market, pension system and housing market are meant to offer security and opportunities for everyone, even when circumstances change over time. Systems require periodic maintenance and modernisation.

This starts now, with tax cuts for the working middle-income groups and for companies that have helped the Netherlands through the crisis during the past several years. We are therefore setting aside funds for purchasing power, infrastructure, research, innovation, digitisation and an attractive business climate. We are also working to create more permanent jobs. A flexible labour market is a good thing, but it can also go too far. Employment relationships that are too flexible can make workers feel insecure, cause companies to lose experienced workers and result in insufficient investment in knowledge and training. We want to strike a new balance between flexible and permanent contracts. We need to make it more financially attractive and less risky for employers to offer people a regular employment contract. We will put no impediments in the way

of those who make a conscious choice to be self-employed. At the same time, we will protect people who find they have no alternative but to work freelance, often without insurance.

A new balance must also be found for our pension system. We want to move away from abstract entitlements that lead to disappointment, and instead work to grow individual pension capital. Within such an arrangement, elements of collective risk sharing remain both sensible and necessary. Together with trade unions and employers' associations we seek to give shape to a new system.

Thirdly, we will work to forge an ambitious climate policy. The Netherlands will become a sustainable country. There is no alternative but to take decisive action. We will shoulder our responsibilities under the Paris climate agreement. A national climate and energy agreement will be concluded with all parties in order to sharply reduce CO₂ emissions. This means, among other things, making the built environment and transport more sustainable, introducing a greener tax system and tapping new sources of energy. We are setting a high standards for ourselves. We want to have the most ambitious objective in the Paris agreement, and for this reason we will work with like-minded countries in Europe.

Fourthly, and finally, we seek to project a distinct Dutch identity embedded in a strong international system. A distinct Dutch identity means that our language, our flag, our national anthem, our commemorations and our constitution are not symbolic relics from the past, but rather emblems of the pride, freedoms, rights and duties that are a rightful part of the Netherlands, Dutch citizenship and our democracy, founded on the rule of law. We must maintain, share and pass on these symbols and values, to each other and to newcomers.

We have many values in common with our international partners. An international orientation is also part of the Dutch identity. We have long known that prosperity, well-being and security for everyone in our country is intimately connected to what is happening in the world around us. We earn a large part of our income abroad. International trade generates many jobs in the Netherlands. Melting polar icecaps have consequences for our coasts and ports, and instability on Europe's borders can lead to migration and terrorism in this country.

One of the ways we protect our way of life is through our membership of the European Union, NATO and the United Nations. An active international policy is in our national interest. This is not an abstraction; it is directly connected to opportunities and threats in our own country. We have no intention of withdrawing to an imaginary island that offers the illusion of security. On the contrary, we want to remain an active and reliable international partner and a leader in pushing for a more decisive EU, which addresses the major issues of our day in order to protect its citizens. In this spirit we will contribute to the prosperity and welfare of other countries, thus combating the root causes of migration. We will implement the climate agreements made in Paris, and we will continue to work actively for peace and security elsewhere in the world. We will also help innovative Dutch ideas and companies to find their way into the wider world.

Our agenda will move this country ahead. This is the conviction of the MPs representing the VVD, CDA, D66 and ChristenUnie, in the full realisation that the investment of billions of euros will only be meaningful once millions of people actually benefit from it. This is our motivation – people, not numbers.

Yes, the political landscape is fragmented. Yes, our financial resources are still limited. Yes, everyone would rather get their own way than compromise. But simply resigning ourselves to these facts will get us nowhere. We want to shoulder our responsibility and move forward in the best Dutch tradition: in the Netherlands we work together in the hour of decision, and we do not face each other in rigid opposition. We champion differences but oppose divisions. We want to work in this spirit with all partners to make this wonderful country even better for everyone.