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# How Not to Deal with a Giant: Dutch Intra-Party Cohesion and the EU

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## Abstract

Though European issues initially had a very limited impact on party systems in Europe, their importance has grown since the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht. Examining the case of the Netherlands, this article argues political parties of the “new” left and right are communicating much more effectively about the EU than their traditionally dominant counterparts. Based on 49 interviews undertaken in 2011 with politicians from seven different parties, it is shown that the “new” left and right are much more cohesive vis-à-vis EU related issues than older established parties. This makes it much easier for these parties to communicate their vision of what Dutch EU policy should be to the public. This partially helps explain the increased vote share for these parties and their influence over the Dutch European Constitutional Referendum. It also runs counter the expectations often found in the literature on that party cohesion is the norm on issues that are important to a large segment of the electorate.

## Introduction

Until recently the traditional wisdom was that the impact of increased European integration on national party systems was limited (Mair 2000; Börzel and Risse 2000). Accordingly, Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) famously referred to Europe as a “sleeping giant”. However, Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) observed that as the role of the European Union (EU) grew after Maastricht, electorates across Europe become more divided over it. Studies of the British and Danish voters have shown that the pro- and anti-EU dimensions have indeed become activated and have significantly impacted national elections in both countries (Evans 1998 and 2002; Netjes 2004). As for political parties in other European countries, Erica Edwards (2007) has argued that European integration has become “the single most divisive issue” within many. Meanwhile, Kriesi et. al. in their latest work argue that European issues have come to play a dominant role in European Parliamentary (EP) elections, with political parties actively competing over European themes. Accordingly, they argue EP elections no longer just resemble second-order national elections (2012: 128). Clearly the giant had awoken.

With “Europe” increasingly being politicized by political parties, what has been its impact on the Dutch party system? Much of the literature on party cohesion argues that one should expect party cohesion on issues that matter to voters. Examining the case of the Netherlands – one of the founding countries of what is now the EU – this article argues some parties are more effective in their communication and stake out clearer positions about the EU than others. Based on 49 interviews undertaken in 2011 with Dutch politicians from seven political parties, it is argued that the “new” left and right have been much more effective in communicating their party’s position vis-à-vis the EU than traditionally dominant parties do. This is because politicians in “newer” parties are in greater agreement with one another on how to approach European integration. This is not what one would expect upon reading much of the literature on party cohesion. It also partially helps explain the increased vote share for these parties and their influence over the 2005 Dutch European Constitutional Referendum.

## Changing Opinions about the EU in the Netherlands: the Success of Outspoken Parties

The Dutch were traditionally known as one of the most supportive publics of European integration. Eurobarometer surveys from the 1970s onward found that the Dutch were consistently more enthusiastic about European integration than the populaces of the other five founding members. A 2004 Eurobarometer survey found that, “three out of every four Dutch citizens judged EU membership to be ‘a good thing’” (Aarts and Van der Kolk 2006: 243). Accordingly, textbooks on the EU presented the Dutch public and governments as being strongly in

favor of both further European integration and European Monetary Union (EMU) (Wood and Yeşilada 2004: 6; Dinan 2004: 250-251).

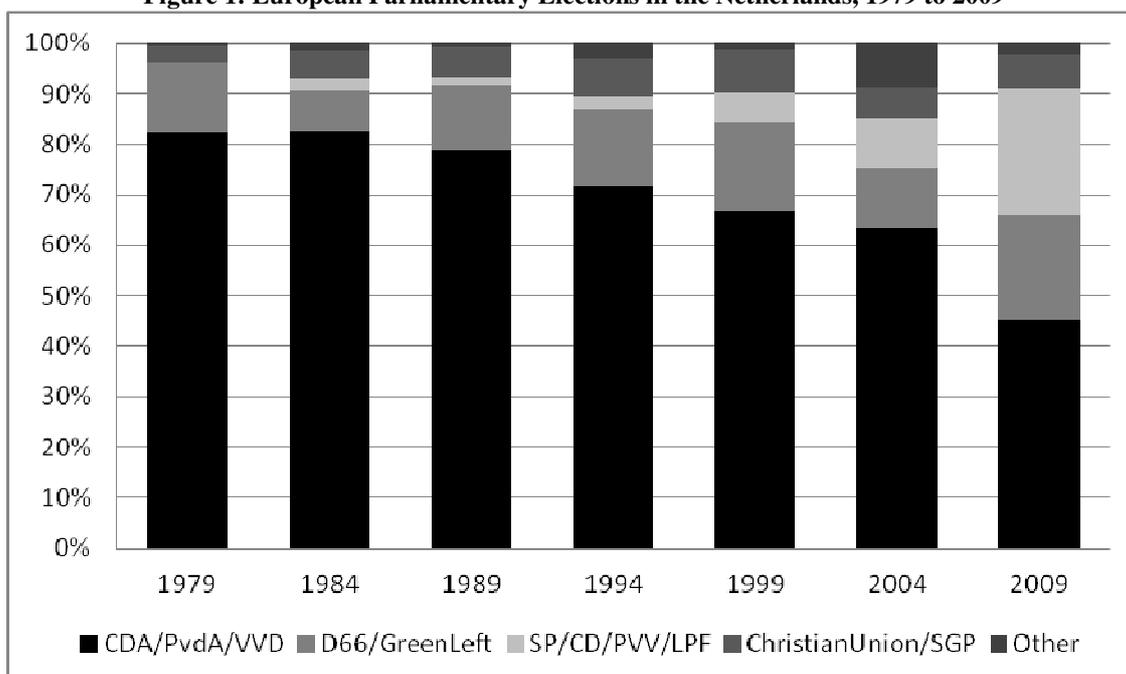
However, when a referendum was held on 1 June 2005 to ratify the new EU Constitution, it failed. Despite all the governing and major opposition parties campaigning in favor of the proposed constitution, 62 percent of the Dutch voted against it.<sup>1</sup> The Socialist Party (SP), the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), the Reformed Political Party (SGP), the Christian Union and the Group Wilders – parties that held a combined 15.3 percent of seats in parliament – campaigned against the adoption of the constitution and came out victorious. What had once been one of the most supportive publics of European integration appeared to have become more critical of the venture.

The failed referendum was symbolic for a Dutch electorate that had become increasingly skeptical toward continued European integration. A 2005 survey of Dutch citizens found that a majority negatively viewed both the introduction of the Euro and the possible implications of further integration. Most also thought the introduction of the Euro had been unfavorable for the Dutch economy (53.2 percent). Furthermore, 69.9 percent of those surveyed thought the transition from the Guilder to the Euro had put the Netherlands at a serious disadvantage. An overwhelming 93.2 percent of respondents also thought prices had gone up as a result of the Euro being introduced (Aarts and Van der Kolk 2006: 244).

A majority also viewed European integration as detrimental for their prosperity and their country's influence within the EU. Since a 1992 EU summit in Edinburgh, the Netherlands had become a net contributor to the EU budget (Van der Horst 2003: 144). This did not sit well with most of the Dutch public. The same survey found that 79.2 percent thought that wealthier states would have to pay more to the EU in the future as a result of previous expansions. Respondents also thought Dutch prosperity would decrease (65 percent); that smaller states would lose influence (83.3 percent); and that jobs would be outsourced to countries with cheaper production bases (91.7 percent). Finally, a substantial minority of respondents thought Dutch identity and culture would disappear as a result of European integration (41.9 percent) (Aarts and Van der Kolk 2006: 245).

With the Labor Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA), Christian Democratic Appeal (Christen-Democratisch Appél, CDA) and the Liberals (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD) – parties that used to traditionally dominate Dutch politics – unwilling, or unable, to position themselves more critically toward the EU, parties critical of European integration have done increasingly well when it comes EP elections (see Figure 1). From 0.7 percent of the vote in the 1989 EP elections, the SP's share of the vote has increased steadily to 7.1 percent in the 2009 elections. The most Euroskeptical party of all, the PVV, did even better. Winning 17 percent of the vote in the 2009 EP elections, the party came in second. Even if EP elections are "second-order" elections,<sup>2</sup> the success of both these parties is testament of the growing skepticism towards the EU amongst a significant section of the Dutch electorate.

**Figure 1: European Parliamentary Elections in the Netherlands, 1979 to 2009**



Especially the last EP elections saw voters presented with clear choices about the EU. Even though smaller parties such as the SGP and the CristianUnion had been more critical towards Europe in the past, parties such as the VVD, PvdA, CDA, GreenLeft and D66 have traditionally been in favor of further integration. The same parties that had campaigned against the ratification of the European Constitution in 2005 campaigned on Euroskeptical platforms in 2009. Under the slogan “For the Netherlands”, the PVV ran the most critical campaign of all. The party’s very brief program consisted of just seven items:

[T]he party demanded that the Netherlands should not surrender any right of veto, especially on immigration, claiming that ‘the Islamisation of the Netherlands and Europe must be stopped’. The party also wanted to do the following: put an end to The Hague’s role as largest net per capita contributor to the EU; prevent Turkey’s accession to the EU (‘Turkey never a member of the EU, and that means not in 100 years either’); support the ousting of ‘corrupt states’ like Romania and Bulgaria; and reject the ‘dreadful Treaty of Lisbon’. (Lucardie and Voerman 2010: 1095)

As for the SP, it campaigned against any additional powers being transferred to Brussels and in favor of a treaty that would transfer more powers back to the national parliaments. Only two parties were clearly outspoken in their support for further integration: D66 and the GreenLeft. The CDA, VVD and PvdA attempted to bridge the divide by all adopting what they called a “Eurorealist” position. This meant that these parties remained in favor of “project Europe”, yet placed, “greater emphasis on national sovereignty and on Dutch interests” (Lucardie and Voerman 2010: 1097, Koole 2010: 353-362).

With a voter turnout of only 36.9 percent, those that did vote rewarded parties with outspoken positions. The biggest winner of all was the PVV, which became the second largest party with 17 percent of the vote. Compared to 2004, D66 improved its position substantially. It won 11.3 percent of the vote, which was 7 percent more than the previous election and resulted in an additional two seats in the EP. Though the GreenLeft only won an additional 1.5 percent of the vote compared to 2004, this still led to the party being awarded an additional seat in the EP. Despite a marginal gain of 0.1 percent of the vote, the SP broke even in comparison to 2004, maintaining its 2 seats in the EP. The big losers were the CDA, VVD, and PvdA: they lost 4.3, 1.8 and 11.5 percent of their vote share respectively in comparison to 2004. For the PvdA this meant a loss of 4 seats in the EP.

Prior to these elections and the referendum it had become apparent that a significant segment of the electorate had become critical of the EU. Why did the VVD, PvdA, or CDA not adopt a more skeptical platform towards the EU? Also, with D66 and the GreenLeft winning votes with a clear pro-EU platform, why did one of the traditionally dominant parties not take a position clearly in favor of further integration and expansion? In other words, why had the VVD, CDA and PvdA left maneuver room open on both the left and the right for other parties to capitalize on? These are the questions the remainder of this article will answer.

## Party Cohesion and the Party Positioning: The Importance of Intra-Party Cohesion and Communication

It is often assumed in the literature on political parties that they are unified on issues that really matter to voters (Thomassen and Andeweg 2007; Lucardie, Marchand and Voerman, 2007; Jensen 2000; Özbudun 1970; Hazan 2006). In a proportional representational system such as the Netherlands, it is the party leadership that decides both the party’s manifesto and the order of candidates on the party list prior to each election. If members stray too far from the party line they can be disciplined by the leadership. Possible punishments include demotion to the bottom of the list for the next elections and the removal from a desirable committee. The most extreme weapon at the leadership’s disposal is removing an unruly member from the party. Even with all these means at their disposal, parties such as the VVD, CDA and PvdA have remained internally torn for more than a decade over issues such as immigration, immigrant integration, and European integration – all issues that have become increasingly salient amongst voters (Kriesi et. al. 2012; Van Gorp 2012a and 2012b).

Party cohesion is especially important for both a party’s communicative and coordinative discourses. Coordinative discourse is the process whereby political actors agree on a policy programme; communicative discourse is the process through which this programme is defended to the voters (Schmidt 1997: 167-197, Schmidt 2002a: 210, Schmidt 2002b: 168-193, Van Gorp 2012a). The more politicians in a party agree with one another, the easier its coordinative discourse will be. If agreement is the norm on an issue, effective communicative discourse can follow. This makes a party more recognizable to voters. That is one of the main reasons why removal of dissident members would be in a party’s interest. Most Dutch parties establish a commission responsible of

developing a party's manifesto prior to an election (Lucardie and Voerman 2007: 83-96). These commissions are normally chaired by a prominent party member, assisted by a think-tank associated with that party and appointed by the leadership. While some parties allow members to vote whether the proposed manifesto should be adopted (CDA, D66, GreenLeft and VVD), others only allow delegates from the local party branches to vote (ChristianUnion, PvdA and SP). Only two parties do not allow members to vote on their manifestos: the SGP and PVV.<sup>3</sup>

Communicative discourse is the process through which parties communicate their message to the public after their manifesto has been adopted. If disagreement remains within the party after a manifesto has been adopted, effective communication to the public is unlikely to follow. With dissident members speaking out openly against a party's platform, it becomes unclear to voters what the party actually stands for and how serious the party is about pursuing their proposed policies. Furthermore, once an election is over and politicians are asked to vote in favor of the issues they object to, they have the option to vote against their party. Given all the above, it is common in the literature to assume that there is party cohesion on issues that really matter to voters.

However, as far as the VVD, CDA and the PvdA are concerned, this has not been the case when it comes to EU related issues. This last decade these parties have all remained openly torn over immigrant and EU related issues (Van Gorp 2012a: 298-323). These issues are all encapsulated by the "socio-cultural" cleavage – a cleavage has become increasingly salient throughout Western Europe since the 1980s (Bornschieer 2010a and 2010b, Marks et. al. 2006, Kriesi et. al. 2006, Kriesi et. al. 2012, Van Gorp 2012a). How parties view European integration is included in this cleavage. Lucardie and Voerman (2010) describe the positions of the CDA, VVD, and PvdA in the 2009 election as "Eurorealist". All three were trying to bridge the divide between more pro- and anti- EU positions.

To see how internally divided Dutch parties remain over EU related issues, 49 Dutch politicians were interviewed in May and June of 2011.<sup>4</sup> Most of those interviewed were Members of Parliament (see Table 1). Additionally, select members of the First Chamber, the Provincial Estates North-Brabant, the Provincial Estates North-Holland, a prominent PvdA party member, a member of the City Council in The Hague, and a D66 member who had previously worked on the party's program were interviewed. This resulted in a total of 49 politicians from seven political parties that agreed to be interviewed.

	MP	Senator	Provincial	Other	Total
GreenLeft	1		3		4
SP	2	2			4
PvdA	5	3	1	1	10
D66	2		3	1	6
CDA	6	2		1	9
VVD	10				10
PVV	3	1	2		6
Total	29	8	9	3	49

## Interviews and Coding

A semi-structured interview was used to evaluate how Dutch politicians view European integration. Three questions all touching on aspects of ongoing European integration were asked:

1. Is further expansion desirable? If yes, which countries do you see joining the EU? Which countries absolutely should not be allowed to join?
2. Is further political integration a positive for the Netherlands? If yes, in what policy areas would you like to see further integration? Are there policy areas which the EU should absolutely stay out of?

3. The EU is currently guaranteeing substantial loans to South European countries. There is much discussion about the possible need for more loans. Which of the following options is best according to you?
- It is necessary to extend more loans.
  - We should not extend more loans, but first see if existing loans can be restructured.
  - Those countries are currently not meeting the criteria to be members of the Euro. It would be best if they left the monetary union.
  - We should get rid of the Euro in its entirety. It was much better when we had the Guilder.

The answers given were coded as follows:

#### *Question 1*

Responses were coded on a scale from -2 to +2. Politicians who saw no room for expansion were coded as -2. Some argued that given the troubles associated with the recent expansions, there simply was no absorption capacity for new countries now, nor would there be in the future. Others drew on cultural objections to argue that Turkey should never be allowed in: "We must absolutely not allow Turkey to enter. They don't fit culturally and will cause too many problems." Finally, went as far as to suggest that current members should be removed from the union: "I am of the opinion that a few countries should be kicked out...Bulgaria, Romania: countries that still have too much corruption and don't meet admission criteria."

Those who thought expansion had gone too far too fast, yet still thought expansion might be possible in some distant future were coded as -1. Such answers included: "It is abundantly clear that the expansion from 6 to 27 countries went much too fast...Brussels is responsible for this. It wanted to shape a strong economic bloc that could be competitive much too fast. As a result, we now have tensions between North and South...Brussels demands too much too fast, and people won't take it anymore." A coding of -1 was also given to those who thought expansion would happen, even though they were not enthusiastic about it. An example: "If have a lot of reluctance when it comes to Turkey...Despite my reluctance, I think it will be let in because it is a tremendously large market..." Those who were not willing to comment, or whose answers were very evasive, were coded as 0.

Those either favored expansion, saw limits to how far the EU could expand, or were slightly hesitant in their answers, were coded as +1. Such responses included: "My opinions about expansion are moving and depend on the stability of the union. It has currently become more unstable. In principle, I have no objection to Turkey joining." Another: "You can never say that Europe is 'done'...But a few problems should be solved before we consider expansion again."

Those who saw no limit to how far the EU could expand, or who identified themselves as federalists and idealists, were coded as +2. This category included mostly politicians from D66 and the GreenLeft. Amongst their answers were: "Ideally, let it get as big as possible. That way more people can share in its welfare," and, "If you meet the criteria...I don't see a reason why you shouldn't be allowed to join the EU." Another commented: "I'm a dying breed. I'm a proponent of the EU and dare call myself a federalist."

#### *Question 2*

Answers to this question were coded on a scale from -2 to +2. Those opposed to further political integration were coded as -2. Not only did most PVV and VVD politicians fall into this category, but also those from the SP. One SP politician used a Marxist argument to argue that integration should not proceed further, stating that the EU is currently geared towards helping big multinationals access a larger market. This, according to him, results in the, "need to create a super-state, which was always denied by Brussels. We, and the majority of European citizens, never said yes to this...If you force internationalism, it will only result in more nationalism and more xenophobia...It results in Brussels as being seen as the source of all trouble." Most PVV politicians insisted too much sovereignty had already been surrendered. Their answers included the following: "50% of legislation the EU now already has a say over...The EU should only be concerned with economic cooperation, and that's it...They suffocate us now. They are only interested in gaining more power for themselves, that's it," and, "That macro-economic thinking about creating a larger market is rubbish...it has become ungovernable. You give up your own sovereignty and before you know it you have nothing left to say."

A few politicians spoke in general terms about the disadvantages and advantages of further integration. Others first identified policy areas where they thought further integration was warranted, but then finished their answers by pointing out areas in which they thought EU integration had gone too far. Both types of answers were coded as 0.

Those who saw further political integration as both inevitable and desirable were coded as +2. Such answers included: "I am a supporter of a strong EU. I don't really see a policy area where they should do less," and,

“The role of the European Parliament should be considerably strengthened.” Especially D66 politicians were enthusiastic about further political integration, responding: “We should become a United States of Europe,” and, “I’m a D66 person: onto a federation of Europe!”

### Question 3

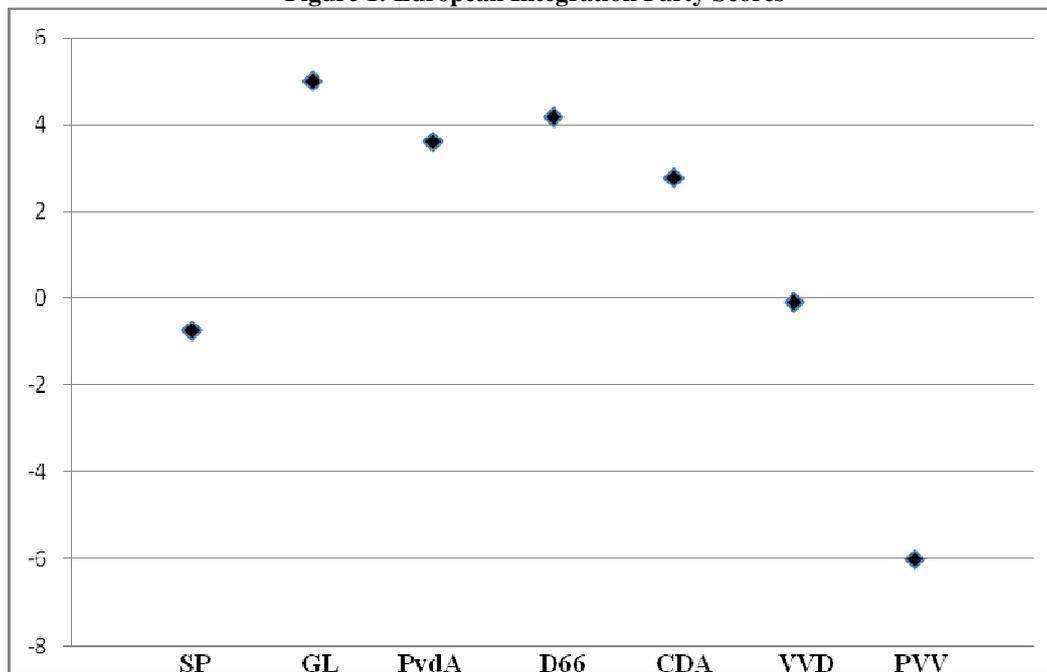
The multiple choice answers given for this question were coded on a scale from -2 to +2. If politicians chose either option A or B, their answers were coded as either +1, or +2. Those who were very outspoken and passionate in their explanation were given a +2. These respondents were usually very negative towards options C and D. One D66 politician called them “nonsense,” while a PvdA politician argued, “Options C and D would have very negative effects upon pension funds and banks...It would also severely damage trust in the Euro...and would hurt everyone.” Those who gave more subdued technical answers, but nonetheless argued in favor of A or B were coded as +1.

Respondents that either were vehemently opposed to the Euro, argued in favor of bringing the Guilder back, or insisted countries which were not meeting the Growth and Stability Pact criteria should be removed from the European Monetary Union, were coded as -2. Such answers included: “I would have preferred it if the Euro had never been introduced at all,” and, “I’d like to bring the Guilder back, but getting those South Europeans who don’t meet the EMU criteria to leave the Euro is the most realistic option right now.” Politicians that argued that C was the best option, identified it as unrealistic, and then chose either A or B, were coded as -1. The response from one VVD politician is an example of this: “I would prefer it they step out of the Euro, but we can’t force them to step out. That forces me to support extending them more loans.”

## Results

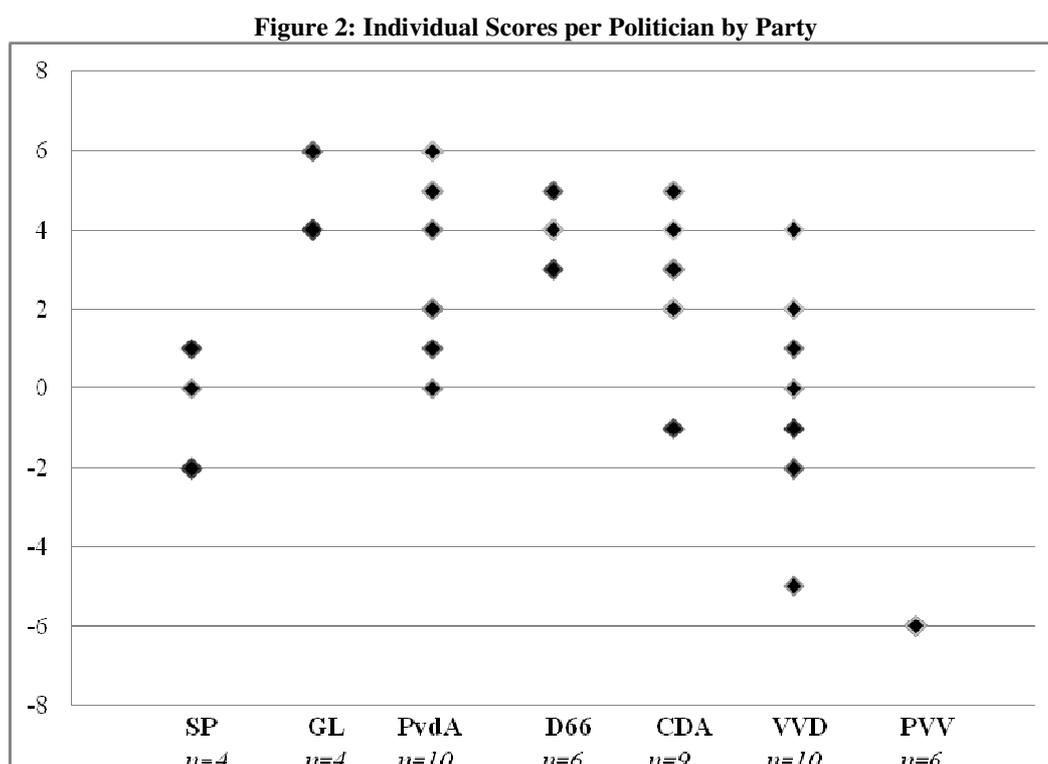
When answers were coded and the average for each party was taken, a clear left-right division is visible among parties when it comes to European integration. Most parties on the left favor deepening *and* further integration of Europe. Similarly, those on the right have become more wary of both. Outliers are the SP and PVV. The SP is much more critical of European integration than other parties on the left, while the PVV politicians are the most outspoken of all when it comes to Europe (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: European Integration Party Scores**



However, when individual scores for each politician were compared by political party, a different pattern emerged (see Figure 2). Responses from D66, GreenLeft, SP, and PVV politicians were similar to one another. This was noticeable during the interviews themselves. After a few interviews, the answers from politicians in these parties began to be repetitive. This contrasted sharply with the CDA, PvdA and VVD. Their answers varied

substantially from one another. PvdA politicians at times were especially critical towards their own party's positioning on European issues. They were not pleased with the party's increasingly Euroskeptical position. Accordingly, the individual scores for these three parties varied substantially in comparison to the other parties (See Figure 2).



## The EU and Party Cohesion in the Netherlands

Why have the CDA, VVD and PvdA remained internally divided over questions of European integration? The literature suggests this should not be the case for issues that have become salient amongst voters for a prolonged period of time. However, as discussed above, despite EU related issues becoming increasingly salient amongst Dutch voters since the 1990s, the CDA, PvdA and VVD have remained much more internally divided over these issues than “newer” political parties on both the left and right of the political spectrum.

One explanation can be found in party identity. Leaders of both the CDA and PvdA continue to justify internal dissent by claiming that their parties have traditionally been – and should remain – “people’s parties” (volkspartijen). This idea dates back to the founding of both parties. In the years prior the Catholic People's Party (KVP), Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and Christian Historical Union (CHU) merging to form the CDA,<sup>5</sup> there was a long drawn out discussion over how the new party should define itself. The whole point of the merger was to prevent further electoral losses. An important compromise was reached during the new party's first congress in 1975. While the CDA would continue to be a Christian party, it would not insist that its members go to church or adhere to a religion. They would expect them to support the policies put forth by the party. This was supposed to make the CDA a “people’s party” that could attract votes from a wide spectrum of voters. It was stated that the party was intended to be, “a party for everyone” (Christen-Democratisch Appél 2012). After the CDA decided to form a coalition with the VVD in 2010 that depended upon support of the PVV, that same sentiment was echoed by then party leader Maxime Verhagen in 2010 when party members began to wonder aloud whether the party was moving too far too the right. He published an open letter addressed to CDA members in which he wrote that: “The CDA is a center party and I am proud of that. A coalition which the CDA joins therefore cannot be a coalition of the right...The CDA will remain a decent people’s party with a warm social heart” (Doorduyn 2010).

From its founding onward, PvdA members have also described their party as a “people’s party”. Like the CDA, the PvdA also moderated its positions when it was created in 1946 to broaden its electoral appeal. As far as Europe was concerned, the PvdA had traditionally been a party that favored a more supranational approach toward European integration (Van Rooyen and Voerman 2008: 146). Like the CDA, VVD and D66, the PvdA had supported all treaties that furthered European integration (Voerman 2005: 50). Accordingly, the PvdA campaigned in favor of the EU Constitution prior to the 2005 referendum. However, many within the party deviated from the party line and spoke out against the proposed constitution. Most notable among them were Ronald Plasterk – who would become the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in 2007 – René Cuperus, Marcel van Dam, Sam Rozemond and Paul Bordewijk (Koole 2010: 356). They found their position strengthened within the party when it was found that 63 percent of PvdA voters had voted against the constitution. No other party saw their electorate deviate this much from the official party line (Vliegthart 2006). This led the party to conclude that it should reevaluate its policy regarding further European integration. At a March 2009 party congress, PvdA members were asked to vote on amendments to the party program regarding the party’s position toward the EU. As opposed to supranational integration, subsidiarity would now be emphasized more by the PvdA. Additionally, only countries that had already been promised accession into the union should be allowed in (Kranenburg and Stokmans 2009: 3).

This does not mean that the issue is now a settled one. In interviews between the author and PvdA politicians, several respondents spoke negatively about the party’s growing Euro-skepticism. One PvdA senator explained that the party had always contained those who were opposed to further European integration and those in favor of it. The party leadership came up with the above position – which he referred to as “Eurorealist” – in an attempt to bridge the divide between the two. While this might have tried to bridge the divide within the party over Europe, the divide remained nonetheless.

There is also a long history of internal divisions within the VVD. Dutch liberals have traditionally been divided into two camps: a progressive and a conservative one. After a period of internal party discord in the 1980s, the VVD became much more unified under the leadership of Frits Bolkestein. A “classical liberal”, Bolkestein believed the government’s role should be limited and that society is not “makeable”. While the intentions behind the creation of the Dutch welfare state might initially have been good, by the 1990s it had created too much dependence according to him (Maas, Marlet and Zwart 1997: 7-23). After Bolkestein’s departure from Dutch politics for a position in the European Commission in 1998, the VVD entered more turbulent times. Hans Dijkstal became the next leader of the VVD. He took a much more conciliatory tone towards multiculturalism and embraced the policies of the Purple Coalition that the VVD had been a part of (Voerman and Dijk 2008: 124). In the 2002 parliamentary elections, during which Pim Fortuyn railed against the Purple Coalition as the culprit responsible for “the mess in the collective sector” after eight years in power (Fortuyn 2002: 184), the party lost 14 of its seats in parliament. After regaining four seats in the 2003 elections following the implosion of the LPF, the VVD lost six in the 2006 elections after a weakly run campaign. An especially heated fight for the leadership of the party in the spring of 2006 between Mark Rutte and Rita Verdonk had also not helped (Van Praag 2008, Fennema 2010: 114-116). While Rutte had the majority of the party establishment behind him, Verdonk had become popular among a significant portion of the electorate during her tenure as Minister of Foreigner Affairs and Integration because of her hard-line approach towards immigrants and their integration.

Because of the above, the process used by the CDA, VVD, and PvdA to compose their manifestos and party lists ensures divisions over European integration are likely to remain. Party leaders do not want to ostracize any significant factions within their own party when deciding what policies to adopt. They therefore involve members associated with differing camps in this process (For an example from the VVD, see Fennema 2010: 70-72). When one of these factions loses, they often do not remain quiet, only further perpetuating the image of a party divided.

## Conclusion

Despite the prevalence and growing importance of European issues, internal divisions over European issues have remained prevalent within the CDA, PvdA and VVD. This will make the coordinative discourse in each party more fraught and prone to the public infighting. As for their communicative discourse, it is likely to remain weak and conflicted on issues related to Europe. Each time a party makes an attempt to move in a certain direction, a substantial minority publicly voices its criticism. Parties such as the SP, PVV, GreenLeft and D66 have not been plagued by such problems. As far as the EU is concerned, the majority of these politicians share similar opinions on issues related to Europe. This allows for easy coordinative discourse in these parties and for clearly recognizable

communication on European issues. In turn, this makes these party's positions on Europe much more recognizable to voters.

These findings do not conform to what much of the literature on party cohesion tells us to expect when issues become salient amongst voters. This has important implications for future research on party cohesion and issue salience. As the Dutch case makes clear, one should not assume that because an issue is salient to voters, parties will be cohesive in their positioning on these issues.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> The total turnout was 63.3%.

<sup>2</sup> For more on second-order elections see Reif and Schmitt (1980), De Vreese (2003) and Nugent (2006: 257-260). The notion that EP elections remain second-order events that merely mirror national elections has been challenged by Kriesi et. al. (2012: 127-150). Through a media-analysis of EP elections from 1994 and 2004, these authors argue that EP elections actually differ from national elections and that parties actively compete on issues specifically related to European integration.

<sup>3</sup> The SGP only lets the party leadership vote. The PVV only has one party member: its leader, Geert Wilders. Therefore no one else can actually vote to adopt the party platform.

<sup>4</sup> Given their limited size in the Dutch party system – and that they still predominantly position themselves on a cleavage that has lost in salience (the religious one) – it was decided not to interview SGP and ChristianUnion politicians. Politicians from the Animal Party (Partij voor de Dieren, PvdD) were also not interviewed, since it is a single issue party that currently has no interest in expanding its platform further (Partij voor de Dieren 2005 and 2010:5). Interviews did not just focus on EU related issues. Questions were also asked about Dutch identity, immigration, and integration. However, for the purposes of this article, only the findings on European integration are discussed. Anonymity was guaranteed so that politicians could feel free to voice their opinions freely. While a few made it known they had no problems being identified with what they said, the majority insisted that they remain unidentifiable. This makes sense given how contentious these issues have become within various political parties.

<sup>5</sup> The CDA was not formed until 1977, when the Catholic People's Party (KVP), Anti-Revolutionary Part (ARP), and Christian Historical Union (CHU) fused into one party. However, prior to becoming one party, cooperation between the three had been close.

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