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## **Accommodating Eurosceptic parties: the test case of the Netherlands**

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## Accommodating Eurosceptic parties: the test case of the Netherlands

### 1. Introduction

Do political parties cooperate in national governments and parliaments despite opposing views on European integration? - That has become a fundamental question in countries where the rise of Eurosceptic parties finished an era of permissive consensus on European integration. For a long time parliaments and electorates often let their governments decide on European integration because of deference, indifference or support (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). Despite its potentially hugely disruptive effect, Europe's direct impact on domestic patterns of partisan conflict and cooperation therefore remained limited until recently (Mair, 2000). In the last two decades, Eurosceptic political entrepreneurs and referendums have incited the politicization of European integration by inserting it into party-political competition (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). However, in comparison to Euroscepticism's definition, nature and causes, its relationship with interparty co-operation has received much less attention in scholarly literature (Leconte, 2010; Mair, 2006). It deserves more consideration. The permanent exclusion of Eurosceptic parties, even though they are just a minority, from cooperation in national government or parliament, particularly on EU issues, may foster anti-European tendencies. That is even more probable since Eurosceptic parties have yet only limited possibilities to oppose European integration in the European Union (Mair, 2007). Without the option of opposition *within* the European Union, opposition *against* the European Union would be the only alternative left.

The case of the Netherlands will be explored to see whether and how the emergence of Eurosceptic parties from left and right has altered interparty cooperation, particularly on EU issues. Due to its institutions of consensus democracy, Eurosceptic parties may be more easily accommodated in the Dutch house of democracy. If, however, patterns of cooperation yet vary *within* the Netherlands, the practice of accommodative, consensual politics would not only depend on its institutional setup. The factors determining its absence and presence have remained a major research puzzle in scholarly literature on consensus politics (Andeweg, 2000; Bogaards, 1998). The Netherlands is therefore a test case whether other factors than the institutions of the Dutch consensus democracy (partly) explain the making of compromises and power sharing between political opponents. This qualitative case study of the Netherlands provides a more thorough understanding how the politicization of European integration may change the process of national decision-making (Marks & Hooghe, 2008: 8; Mair, 2006: 162-163). In addition, it avoids a EU-specific explanation by examining inclusion and exclusion of parties with the help of the more general theory of consensus politics, which has been only limitedly applied in Europeanization literature, despite its prominence in studies of comparative politics (though see Vollaard, Beyers & Dumont, forthcoming). After discussing the concept of consensus politics and its explanation in more detail in section 2 and 3 respectively, section 4 shows whether and how Euroscepticism impacts on consensus politics among parties in government and parliament in the Netherlands. The concluding, final section reflects on the determinants of consensus politics and the possibilities of Eurosceptic opposition in the European Union.

## 2. *Defining and indicating consensus politics*

The period in which the electorate and parliaments let their governments decide on European integration have been often labeled as an era of “permissive consensus” (Hooghe & Marks, 2008). This consensus however refers to substantial agreement, and should not be confused with consensus *politics*. Consensus politics concerns the making of compromises and power sharing to abridge disagreements between political opponents. In other words, consensus politics takes place when there is no substantial consensus. What exactly consensus politics is, and how it should be measured, has remained a “thorny issue”, however (Andeweg, 2000; see also Blondel, 1995; Heffernan, 2002).

The Dutch-American political scientist Arend Lijphart has been one of the main scholars studying consensual politics. He introduced the widely used concepts of consociationalism, consociational democracy, and consensus democracy. Consociationalism is essentially about political elites avoiding decision-making by a simple majority in a deeply divided country (Andeweg, 2000: 511). According to Lijphart (1975), elites can accommodate disruptive tensions and conflicts by cooperating according to diplomacy-like rules of the game. Lijphart used executive power-sharing in grand coalitions, a high degree of autonomy for the subcultures, proportionality, and minority vetoes as the indicators of consociational democracies. Consensual politics also exist in democratic societies without deep divisions (Lijphart, 1999). So-called consensus democracies distinguish themselves from majoritarian democracies by offering more opportunities to political minorities to have a say in decision-making (*e.g.*, by oversized cabinets, the electoral system of proportional representation, bicameralism, and federalism) and to avoid decision-making by simple majority (*e.g.*, by requiring oversized majority, or by rule of independent expert agencies such as the judiciary and an central bank). Among other things, a plurality system of elections, executive dominance over parliament, a unitary state, and a dependent central bank constitutes a majoritarian democracy, in which the political majority rules.

Lijphart’s concepts have generated criticism and confusion, not the least because countries comprise both instances of consensual and confrontational politics simultaneously (Steiner, 1981; Van Schendelen, 1989; Arter, 2006). Classifying political systems as a whole, Lijphart’s concepts cannot denote variation in decision-making modes *within* democratic systems. In addition, the predominantly institutional indicators used to denote a consensus democracy do not reflect whether elites actually work together in a “spirit of accommodation” (Steiner et al., 2004: 8). They thus provide a too static view of the Netherlands and other Western democracies, while these have experienced fundamental changes in political practice over the last decades (Van Praag, 1993; Blondel & Battezzore, 2003; Pennings & Keman, 2008). Institutional indicators of consensus democracy cannot register changes in actual modes of decision-making towards or away from inclusiveness and cooperation. The variety in modes of decision-making within countries underlines the need to develop a concept other than consensus democracy to refer specifically to a certain mode of decision-making, a certain mode of conflict resolution, characterised by cooperation and inclusiveness instead of confrontation and majority rule. The concept of consensus politics is used here for this purpose.

Attempts to measure consensus politics in practice, to indicate inclusive and cooperative decision-making at the elite level, are still in its infancy (Blondel, 1995: 10; Steiner et al., 2004: 12; Arter, 2006: 6).

Broad majority parliamentary support for decisions has been used to indicate the inclusiveness of consensual politics (see, *e.g.*, Burkhart & Lehnert, 2008; Carson et al., 2010). But what does broad parliamentary support show? It can also be the result of other modes of decision-making, such as hierarchical imposition or outright repression. It may also be a reflection of widespread substantial consensus, rather than an outcome of consensus politics to overcome conflicts. Furthermore, votes do not show whether actors have been willing to listen to political opponents and to consider policy alternatives, which would better reflect an inclusive and cooperative mode of decision-making to deal with a certain conflict (Steiner et al., 2004; Spinner, 2007).

Steiner et al. (2004) introduced the deliberative quality of parliamentary discourse as a measurement of the practice of consensus politics (“the spirit of accommodation”). Although this operationalization may grasp the willingness to listen to political opponents, it is yet too limited to denote inclusive and cooperative decision-making. First, it excludes bargaining, political exchanges without deliberation to seek common ground. Furthermore, Steiner et al. use mutual respect as an indicator of the practice of consensus politics. However, political actors may adopt consensual decision-making out of sheer self-interest rather than mutual respect. Moreover, mutual respect would be rather a source than an indicator of consensus politics. In addition, (consensual) decision-making involves more than parliamentary decision-making. Parliamentary decision-making may be avoided to prevent a visible confrontation between political opponents. Corporatism and the shift from government to governance underline the need to look further than parliamentary voting.

Indicating consensus politics should therefore include attempts to cooperate with political opponents in parliament and government, regardless of the underlying motives. In this way, consensus politics can be distinguished from substantial agreement across the board (no need for cooperation with political opponents), hierarchical imposition (political opponents suppressed), or confrontational politics (resistance to cooperation with political opponents). This operationalization thus includes both oversized, grand coalitions and minority cabinets as long as they reflect cooperation between opponents. Moreover, this operationalization of consensus politics does not exclude decision-making outside parliamentary procedures or (failed) attempts to seek cooperation.

The empirical focus is here on cooperation between parties with opposing views of European integration in parliament and government. To determine the impact of Euroscepticism on interparty cooperation in government, accounts of coalition formation (such as historical literature, media reports, and parliamentary debates), coalition conflict and coalition breakup will be analysed to see whether the EU-issue has been used as motive to select or excluded parties from participation in government. The impact of Euroscepticism on cooperation in parliament will be examined by analyzing the ratifications of EU treaties between 1985 and 2010. If Euroscepticism would matter for interparty cooperation, it should be at least visible when parliament decides on fundamental steps in the European integration process. The time span suffices to indicate shifts in interparty cooperation in the Netherlands, since it includes the rise of Eurosceptic parties such as the Socialist Party (SP) and the Freedom Party (PVV), and the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The focus is not only on the votes on ratification laws, but also on amendments and resolutions concerning these laws as well as the mutual responses in the parliamentary debates – to obtain a better view of (attempts of) cooperation in

parliament. A few interviews have been held with key players to gain the necessary background information on the (non)cooperation between parties.

### 3. *Explaining consensus politics*

With the help of the operationalization above, consensus politics can be indicated, but what determines the inclusion of Eurosceptic parties in cooperation in parliament and government? Lijphart's distinction between consensus and majoritarian democracies suggests inclusive consensus politics is more common in consensus democracies (Lijphart, 1999: 307). The establishment of consensus democracies to improve inclusiveness and cooperation particularly in divided countries has therefore been recommended (Lijphart, 2008; O'Leary & McGarry, 2009). This explanation of consensus politics concurs with the dominant neo-institutionalist approach in political science, in which institutions shape behaviour. However, convincing evidence that consensus *democracy* brings about consensus *politics* in practice is still missing (Bogaards, 2000: 410; Spinner, 2007). If, however, institutions do matter, the Dutch system should reflect continuity in the tendencies towards cooperation among parties, despite the rise of Eurosceptic parties, because its political institutions have barely changed, at least at the national level. The question remains how the institutions would relate to interparty cooperation in parliament and government.

The rational-institutionalist explanation would refer to the absence of the prospect of obtaining an enduring majority for any political party due to the electoral system of extreme proportional representation in the Netherlands. As a consequence, political parties are inclined to cooperate and make compromises to maximize their influence on decision-making (Andeweg, 2000: 524). If so, Dutch parties should motivate cooperation as a means to exercise influence. In addition to this rational explanation, consensus politics is often explained by reference to the Dutch egalitarian and consultative culture, and its historical tradition of elite accommodation (Daalder, 1966; Hofstede, 2005; Van Vree, 1994). If so, Dutch parties should motivate interparty cooperation with political opponents as being appropriate, 'norm'-al behavior. As a consequence, much variation in consensus politics between policy-areas would not be expected. The sociological-institutionalist explanation also suggests that interparty cooperation would not have changed much over the last 20 years, since culture, norms and traditions would normally not change so quickly.

The Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the United Kingdom, exemplary instances of Lijphart's typology of democracy, have showed temporal alternation as well as co-existence of confrontational and consensus politics (Arter, 2006; Heffernan, 2002; Hendriks & Bovens, 2008; Kavanagh, 1987; Van Praag, 1993). The existence of cooperation and confrontation *within* the same set of institutions shows that country-level factors such as the type of democracy and political culture do not suffice as explanation. Other factors should be taken into account to explain the absence and presence of consensus politics fully.

An inclusive and cooperative decision-making mode may also depend on the issue itself. A solid *policy* majority of several parties (even without any political party holding a *political* majority) regarding a certain issue, *in casu* European integration, may lead to the exclusion of a policy minority from decision-

making. A solid policy majority exists when at least during two full legislative periods a parliamentary majority agrees on the fundamentals of a certain issue. The less solid a policy majority is, the higher the probability of consensus politics, the cooperation with and inclusion of political opponents. The rise of Euroscepticism may disrupt existing substantial consensus on European integration among a parliamentary majority (in other words, a policy majority). As a result, Eurosceptic parties would no longer be excluded.

In an analysis of Swiss corporatism, Silja Häusermann and others (2004: 39) argue that political actors are less willing to compromise when the media coverage increases. Political actors would stick to the “logic of membership” (loyalty to the constituency and its preferences) rather than follow the logic of influence of making compromises with political opponents when their acting is more visible. In other words, the more party constituencies are able to inform themselves about their parties’ behaviour, the less inclined the latter are to deviate from their constituencies’ preference by making compromises with political opponents (Tsebelis, 1990: 159-172). If media attention increases regarding a certain issue, the willingness to cooperate with political opponents would therefore decrease. The logic of membership can also be incited by the rising salience of an issue. If the salience of an issue increases, it is therefore likely that actors are less willing to make compromises out of fear of losing support from their constituencies.

Not only the issue itself, but also the timing and the arena of decision-making determine whether consensus politics is practiced. First, the logic of membership would prevail when parties seek votes. This type of party behaviour is most likely just before elections (Strøm, 1990). In other words, the longer before scheduled elections, the larger the probability of consensus politics is. As a matter of fact, vote-seeking party behaviour is also more likely when electoral competition intensifies (Strøm, 1990: 588). The practice of consensus politics would therefore decline when electoral volatility (as the indicator of competition) increases. If decision-making on EU treaties involves the electorate (through a referendum, for example), the logic of membership is also expected to be stronger. Without a referendum, parties can more easily make compromises, because the decision-making is less visible to the electorate.

Type of factor	Propositions
Country-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation to maximize influence, because parties have no solid political majority due to the institutional fragmentation of a consensus democracy (rational-institutionalist)</li> <li>• Cooperation and inclusion of political opponents considered appropriate in political culture (sociological-institutionalist)</li> </ul>
Issue-specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If solid policy majority exists, no consensus politics is practiced</li> <li>• Because of logic of membership consensus politics is not practiced, if media attention for issue increases</li> <li>• Because of logic of membership consensus politics is not practiced, if political salience of issue increases</li> </ul>
Timing and arena of decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of logic of membership consensus politics is not practiced, if decision is made close to elections</li> <li>• Because of logic of membership consensus politics is not practiced, if decision is more easily visible to electorate through a referendum</li> </ul>
Type of party behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because of logic of membership consensus politics is not practiced, if electoral competition increases</li> </ul>

**Table 1: potential factors explaining consensus politics explored in this paper**

Being one of the first “plausibility probes” (George & Bennett, 2005: 75) of explaining variation of consensus politics also *within* democratic systems more thoroughly, this paper speaks more modestly about propositions rather than hypotheses (see table 1). Considering the large number of potential factors involved, the explorative nature of this project, and the limited number of empirical cases, qualitative studies are the most appropriate method to establish the impact of Euroscepticism on interparty cooperation in parliament and government in the Netherlands (George & Bennett, 2005). In this case, the various historical reconstructions of coalition formation processes provide sufficient detail. By also focusing on the ratifications of EU treaties in the Netherlands this project seeks to avoid the criticism Lijphart received for his “impressionistic” and “selective” reading of countries’ histories when taking countries as units of analysis (Steiner, 1981; Van Schendelen, 1989). Scrutinising individual instances of decision-making allows for a more precise analysis of the origins of consensus politics. To conclude, being a well-known example of consensus democracy, the Netherlands is an excellent, explorative case to assess various explanations of consensus politics.

#### 4. *Partisan Euroscepticism in the Netherlands*

##### 4.1 *Defining Euroscepticism*

What have been the dividing lines on European integration in Dutch party politics? And how has Euroscepticism manifested itself? That requires a definition of partisan Euroscepticism, which has been subject of a lengthy scholarly discussion (see among others Taggart, 1998; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002; Harmsen & Spiering, 2004; Flood & Usherwood, 2007; Leconte, 2010). Euroscepticism concerns opposition to something related to European integration, but it is still debated how intense the opposition should be towards what element of European integration to be qualified as a Eurosceptic party. Further conceptual confusion arises from the context-specific meaning and connotation of Euroscepticism. Meaning and connotation may differ, depending on the national history of opposition to European integration. In a country of a long-lasting, widespread agreement on further European integration, any initial criticism on something European may be qualified pejoratively as Eurosceptic. This colloquial, context-specific use of Eurosceptic may be of particular relevance when studying interparty cooperation in parliament and government. For reasons of international comparison, Euroscepticism is yet defined here as opposition to the founding principles of European integration, pooling sovereignty and the creation of a regional market (Scszerbiak & Taggart, 2008: 3). A further distinction is made between hard Eurosceptic parties resisting one or both of the principles and soft Eurosceptic parties opposing *further* European integration across the board (Scszerbiak & Taggart, 2008: 3). Non-Eurosceptic parties can be divided in Europhile, progressive, cosmopolitan parties desiring more supranational and political integration, and Euro-pragmatic parties asking both for more integration and for repatriating European competences if that would serve national interests (Vollaard, 2011).

##### 4.2 *Partisan Euroscepticism until the 1980s*

In the late 1980s, widespread substantial agreement on European integration existed among the major political parties in the Netherlands. The creation of the internal market had to be pursued without

hesitation, the European Parliament had to be strengthened to democratise the European Community (EC), more supranationalism should foster efficient decision-making and constrain the domination by larger member states, and NATO should maintain its primacy in European security. This domestic consensus on European integration emerged in the 1950s after initial anti-supranationalist and anti-continental inclinations particularly within the Dutch government (Hellema, 2005; Harryvan, 2009). The domestic consensus had remained largely challenged until the 1980s, with the exception of the Labour party criticising the EC for its lack of social policy, democracy, and international solidarity in the 1970s (Koole & Raap, 2005). However, a centre-right government faced no difficulties to obtain support from the oppositional Labour party for the European Single Act (1986).

Opposition to European integration could be found among the small, extreme-left parties (communists and pacifists). Together with the soft Eurosceptic if not critically Europhile Christian-radicals, they were in the process of merging into the GreenLeft party (1990). The communists and pacifists had a tradition of hard Euroscepticism, considering European integration as a Western, capitalist enterprise. The newly emerging party shifted towards a Europhile position, yet strongly criticising the EC for not being sufficiently green, social and democratic (see Lucardie & Voerman, 2012). The hard Eurosceptic orthodox-protestant fringe parties resisted European integration for different reasons. They accepted an internal market, but opposed supranationalism. They did not want a Protestant nation to lose its distinct identity, and feared the evil consequences of on-going European concentration of power (Vollaard, 2006). In addition, a tiny extreme-right party (in the Second Chamber between 1982 and 1986) protested against “European imperialism” threatening Dutch national identity.

#### *4.3 Rise of Eurosceptic parties only after 2002*

The 1990s reflected a decline of Eurosceptic parties in the Netherlands. The GreenLeft party further shifted towards a progressive, cosmopolitan position, while the orthodox-Protestants slowly moderated their hard euroscepticism. In their view, there was not much left of the Christian nature of the Dutch nation to fight for after legislation allowing more individual choice in issues such as euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and Sunday rest. In contrast, the European Union could serve their policy aims such as the protection of God’s creation. In addition, also the European supranational authorities had to be obeyed, being installed by God. Nevertheless, orthodox-Protestants continued to express sheer reluctance to ceding sovereignty, as they feared on-going European integration would increasingly alienate the largely nationally oriented citizens (Vollaard, 2006).

Opposition to further European integration could be noticed among the extreme-right Centrum-Democraten (between 1989 and 1998 in Second Chamber) and the Pensioners’ parties AOV and Unie-55+ (from 1994 till 1998 in Second Chamber). They did not like to give up Dutch identity. Relying on a much better party organisation, the Maoist-turned-populist Socialist Party (since 1994 in the Second Chamber) expressed its fairly hard euroscepticism much more clearly than these three parties. It combined anti-establishment criticism on the national and European elites neglecting national identity, solidarity and democracy with resistance to the in their view neo-liberal underpinnings of the single market. In the early 1990s, the new leader of the conservative-liberal VVD party, Frits Bolkestein, argued that national identity could not and should not be replaced by a European political community. He also

resisted European integration to move much beyond economic and monetary union. He often received criticism for being Eurosceptic in the Dutch public debate, particularly when he became European Commissioner in 1999 (see, e.g., Lagendijk & Wouters, 1999). However, his discourse rather reflected a pragmatic orientation on what works to solve cross-border problems, not unlike the government's position (Van Schendelen, 1996; Vollaard, 2011). In contrast to hard euroscepticism, this pragmatic discourse did not oppose the introduction of the Euro (which would facilitate free trade) or supranational decision-making per se (if it would make the EU more effective and efficient). Even though the VVD opposed European integration of social and employment policies, it favoured the creation of a European FBI, reflecting its pragmatic position.

In contrast to previous Dutch self-conceptions, Bolkestein as well as the publicist Pim Fortuyn attacked the idea that the Netherlands should be a vanguard nation in the EU (Harmsen, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Vollaard, 2011). They criticised the Dutch government for harming national interests by behaving as "the best student in class". They refuted the automatic equation of national interests and European interests, and argued that the Dutch government should speak about national interests without any reservation. In the run-up to the 2002 national elections, Fortuyn initially became the lead candidate of a new populist party, *Leefbaar Nederland* (LN). This party favoured above all a democratic transformation of all politics, including the European Union. It also wished to strengthen the Common Foreign and Security Policy. After Fortuyn was ousted from LN, and launched the liberal, populist, and pro-national Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), its hastily drafted electoral manifesto criticised European integration for its lack of transparency and democracy. Nevertheless, it expressed itself certainly not against the EU, describing it as a "phenomenal experiment, which has contributed a great deal to peace in our part of the world." (LPF, 2002). Only in later manifestos the LPF adopted a more exclusive understanding of national identity. Fortuyn revealed in previously books greater reservations about certain aspects of political European integration, such as Turkish EU accession and the Schengen Agreements. Notwithstanding his emphasis on preserving Dutch identity, democracy, and sovereignty, he presented himself as a "loyal supporter of the EU" (Fortuyn, 2002: 181). In a country without much few outspoken EU-critics until then, Fortuyn and his party classified quickly as Eurosceptic. Despite the assassination of Fortuyn just before Election day in 2002, his party obtained 26 out of 150 seats, enlarging the group of Eurosceptic parties in the Second Chamber of Parliament (the most important one) considerably.

The homosexual Fortuyn castigated the political establishment foremost for their multiculturalist policies, which would particularly allow the Islam to undermine the value of individual freedom within the Netherlands. In response to the turbulent elections of 2002, severe discussions followed inside and between parties about the nature of the Dutch nation. Even though it received less consideration in those discussions, the traditionally governing parties such as PvdA, CDA and VVD sought to moderate their cosmopolitan preferences regarding European integration (Koole & Raap, 2005; Vollaard, 2011). In response to the resounding no of the Dutch electorate to the European Constitutional treaty, CDA and PvdA shifted further towards a Euro-pragmatic position. Only D66 and GroenLinks remained committed to progressive cosmopolitanism, characterised by an aversion of nationalism, individual freedom, and positive stance towards supranational and political European integration. In 2004, Geert Wilders split

from the VVD party in late 2004, because it did not refuse Turkish accession in the long run. He established the Freedom Party (PVV), which foremost wanted to defend the fundamental freedoms of the Western civilization and the Dutch nation, if necessary by limiting the freedom of Islamic Dutch citizens. Its monocultural conception of the Dutch nation fitted less well with the compound identity of the EU, reflected by its resistance to Turkish accession, and to a so-called “European super state”. It advocated the restoration of Dutch sovereignty and the abolition of the European Parliament. More moderately, the SP considered European integration as “absolutely necessary”, but it resented how the neoliberal European super state constrained national democracy and (inter)national solidarity. Emphasizing the need for politics at human scale, it therefore demanded to slim the EU down, and did not want to lift veto rights any further.

Due to the electoral successes of PVV and SP, the group of Eurosceptic parties grew considerably in the Second Chamber of Parliament (see table 2). They were joined by the Animal Rights party, which foremost criticised the EU for its animal-unfriendly and undemocratic nature. Meanwhile, the orthodox-Protestant parties left their hard Eurosceptic positions. The ChristenUnie adopted a more Euro-pragmatic position. It argued that cross-border issues had to be solved at international, including the European level, where supranational decision-making could enhance EU’s effectiveness and efficiency. The SGP accepted the EU as a given, but remained more of a soft Eurosceptic by resisting further European integration. As table 2 indicates, changing party positions on European integration in the Netherlands between 1990 and 2010 has been a matter of declining Europhilia rather than rising Euroscepticism. A Euro-pragmatic policy majority has replaced a long-lasting policy majority of Europhile parties in 2006. If cooperation with opponents depends on the existence of policy majority, no inclusion of Eurosceptic opposition is therefore expected before 2006, while remaining unlikely thereafter.

If cooperation with Eurosceptic opponents is determined by the visibility of the EU issue in the media, it would decline over time because of growing attention to European integration (‘t Lam, 2012). For example, the quality newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* devoted a special page to EU issues between 2004 and 2010 (first biweekly, later on weekly). Media attention did therefore not depend on the ratification of EU treaties only. Also evolutions in the political salience of the EU would suggest a decline in the practice of consensus politics, particularly after 2005. Even though the electoral salience has remained low in both national and European elections (De Vries, 2009; Vollaard & Schyns, forthcoming), parliamentarians and government became acutely aware of the issue’s salience when the referendum in 2005 showed a large difference of opinion between voters and politicians (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2006). Also the rising electoral competition would result in less consensus politics. After an average level of electoral volatility in the 1980s, it rose considerably in the Netherlands in the 1990s reaching exceptional heights in the 2000s in comparison with other West European countries (Mair, 2008). The factors of media attention, salience and electoral volatility would suggest less cooperation with Eurosceptic opponents. The case-study should trace which factor or combination of factors incited the logic of membership explaining declining consensus politics in the processes of coalition formation and ratification of EU treaties between 1985 and 2010. A number of factors denoted in table 1 are only relevant in case of ratifying EU treaties: the number of years before elections scheduled the ratification

takes place, and the arena of decision-making: involving the electorate or not? These factors will also be discussed in the reconstructions of the EU ratification debates below.

Election	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	2010
<b>Party position</b>								
<i>Europhile</i>	142 D66, <b>CDA</b> , PvdA, <b>VVD</b>	137 D66, <b>CDA</b> , PvdA, <b>VVD</b>	100 D66*, CDA, PvdA*, GL	99 <b>D66</b> , CDA, PvdA, GL	85 D66, GL, <b>CDA</b> , PvdA, LN	100 <b>D66</b> , GL, <b>CDA</b> , PvdA	10 D66, GL	20 D66, GL
<i>Euro-pragmatic</i>	0	0	31 <b>VVD</b>	38 <b>VVD</b>	28 <b>VVD</b> , CU	31 <b>VVD</b> , CU	102 <b>CDA</b> , <b>PvdA</b> , <b>VVD</b> , <b>CU</b>	87 <b>CDA</b> , PvdA, <b>VVD</b> , <b>CU</b>
<i>Eurosceptic:</i>	8	13	19	13	37	19	38	43
<i>Soft</i>	PPR	GL	AOV, Unie55+	GPV, RPF	SGP, <b>LPF</b>	LPF, SGP	SGP, PvdD, SP	SGP, SP, PvdD
<i>Hard</i>	PSP, GPV, RPF, SGP	GPV, RPF, SGP, CD	GPV, RPF, SGP, CD, SP	SGP, SP	SP	SP	PVV	PVV

**Table 2: Classification of parties according to their position on European integration (based on Vollaard, 2011)**

parties in government in bold

- *Definition party positions*: Europhile: in favour of more supranational and political European integration; Euro-pragmatic: in favour of integration and repatriation of competence depending on policy-area at stake; Eurosceptic: soft: opposing further European integration; hard: opposing European integration

- *Indication party identities*: D66 liberal-democrats; CDA Christian-Democrats; PvdA social-democrats; VVD conservative-liberals; PPR, PSP: left-wing predecessors of green-libertarian GL; GPV, RPF, SGP, CU orthodox-Protestants; SP populist left; LPF populist right; LN: radical-democratic; Wilders, PVV populist nationalistic; PvdD animal rights party; CD extreme-right.

### 5. Cooperation with Eurosceptic parties in government?

What is the impact of growing partisan Euroscepticism on consensus politics? Are Eurosceptic parties excluded from interparty cooperation by other parties, even though the latter become less Europhile? And if so, which factor or combination of factors explains their exclusion? Until the 1980s, the small, orthodox-protestant and left-wing parties never entered government, except for the Christian-Radicals (PPR) between 1973 and 1977. However, its position on European integration foreshadowed the critical yet Europhile inclination of GreenLeft party. The non-selection of the other small parties can be explained by their size and large policy distance on many other issues than European integration (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009: 135-136). In the 1980s a solid policy majority on European integration existed, comprising the four largest parties CDA, PvdA, VVD, and D66. It did not mean they agreed on all foreign policy issues. The parties forming the Van Agt-II cabinet (1981-1982) decided that its PvdA ministers would resign if the cabinet decided to place new nuclear weapons in the Netherlands (Van Merriënboer et al., 2008: 421). The cabinet fell quickly on diverging views on social-economic issues, however. In 1994, PvdA, VVD and D66 differed on the budgetary priorities in foreign policy (defence; development aid) and the role of NATO after the end of the Cold War. They agreed to launch a large-scale review of

Dutch foreign policy, and devoted much more attention to their differences on social-economic issues. Nevertheless, European integration did not matter much, if at all, in coalition formations from 1980 until 2002 (Van Poelgeest, 2011). The willingness of the small, Eurosceptic parties RPF and Unie-55+ to participate in the coalition formation process in 1994 were considered “undesired and unrealistic”, but it was rather size, policy distance, and their lack of governing experience explaining their exclusion (Van Poelgeest, 2011: 99).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century provides a completely different picture. In 2002, the softly Eurosceptic LPF joined government. After new elections in 2003, the orthodox-protestant parties ChristenUnie and SGP were involved in (failed) negotiations on government participation. In 2006, participation of the populist left-wing SP was more thoroughly considered than ever before, while the formerly Eurosceptic ChristenUnie eventually joined government. And in 2010, a centre-right government concluded a detailed support agreement with the anti-Islam, Eurosceptic PVV in parliament. This cooperation with Eurosceptic parties clearly refutes the expected decline of consensus politics due to the EU’s declining invisibility in the media, growing political salience and the increasing electoral competition. So, what explains this sudden cooperation in government with the growing Eurosceptic parties in the last decade?

All coalitions since 2002 are minimal winning coalition, except for the caretaker cabinet Balkenende-III (2006-2007) and the minority cabinet Rutte (2010-2012). However, the latter cabinet concluded a support agreement with the Freedom Party in parliament, providing it a parliamentary majority on major issues such as security, migration, and budget cuts. The cabinets’ composition also reflected parties’ compatibility on the fundamental left-right dimension, even though the cultural understanding of left and right gained more weight over the years in addition to the social-economic one. The centre-right CDA thus governed with its right-wing neighbour VVD (2002-2012), its centrist colleagues LPF (2002) and D66 (2003-2006), and its centre-left neighbour PvdA (2007-2010). It indicates that parties have sought to maximize their influence on decision-making through cooperation with ideologically adjacent parties or minimise their loss of influence by taking electoral competitors on board, which would corroborate the rational-institutionalist explanation. However, the notion of appropriateness of cooperation played a role, too. In their advises to the Queen, most leaders of the parliamentary groups in 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2010 considered it appropriate to explore first the creation of a majority coalition that includes both the largest party and the party with the largest gain in votes: CDA and LPF in 2002, CDA and PvdA in 2003, CDA and SP in 2006, and VVD and PVV in 2010.<sup>1</sup> They did so, even when the suggested coalition was at some distance from their policy preferences. For example, the GreenLeft party suggested in Summer 2010 to explore the formation of a right-wing coalition including the Freedom Party to prevent “a decay of democratic relationships” (cited in Brief van de Informateur, 2010a: 3).

Different views on the EU did not exclude any party from being involved in coalition negotiations after 2002. Did these different views feature prominently in the government negotiations with Eurosceptic

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<sup>1</sup> See Brief van de Informateur, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002 (TK 28375 no. 1), Brief van de Informateur, (TK 28375 no.22), Brief van de Informateur, January 27<sup>st</sup>, 2003 (TK 28637 no. 5), Brief van de Informateur, February 3<sup>d</sup> 2003 (TK 28637 no. 6), Brief van de Informateur, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (TK 30891 no. 2), Brief van de Informateur, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2007 (TK 30891 no. 6), Brief van de Informateur, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (TK 32417 no. 1), and Brief van de Informateur, August 3<sup>d</sup>, 2010 (TK 32417 no. 8).

parties? Rather not. In the negotiations with the softly Eurosceptic LPF, the issues of migration, security and multiculturalism rather stood out. In the 568 out of 20,159 words devoted to European integration, the coalition agreement argued in favour of the development of a European asylum and migration policy, the strengthening of CFSP, and the strengthening of the European Parliament and the European Commission (Van der Wiel, 2009: 45). Even though the inclusion of the winning party in the government was also considered appropriate, the quick negotiations to form a new cabinet with the LPF (taking only 66 days, well below the Dutch average) reflected also a strategy to stem the new party's growth by burdening it with government responsibility. In 2003, initial negotiations between the two largest parties, CDA and PvdA, failed, partly due to different views on Dutch support for the US-led invasion in Iraq. In the second round of negotiations, CDA sought together with its previous coalition partner VVD one or more parties to obtain a majority in parliament. Even though LPF tried to present itself otherwise, CDA and VVD perceived it too instable to cooperate with. Negotiations with the orthodox-protestant CU and SGP failed because of the unwillingness of the liberal VVD to govern with the SGP, which excluded female members and representatives at that time (Moerland & Staal, 2003; Vollaard, 2010). In the end, CDA and VVD concluded a coalition agreement with the Europhile D66, which sufficed to obtain a parliamentary majority.

In 2006, the Eurosceptic SP (making the largest gains in the parliamentary elections), CDA (the largest party) and PvdA started talks about forming a coalition. The Queen's coalition informer reported that the SP did not have any "*breekpunten*", issues on which it does not want to make compromises. In the end, the Christian-democrats did not want a cabinet with two social-economically left-wing parties (Brief van de Informateur, 2006). It preferred the much smaller, centrist ChristenUnie (6 seats) over the left-wing SP (25 seats). In contrast to CDA and PvdA, both SP and ChristenUnie opposed the European Constitutional Treaty during the 2005 referendum campaign. Nevertheless, ChristenUnie negotiator Arie Slob was convinced that also the SP could have made a compromise on the EU issue, as his party had done, too (Van der Wiel, 2009: 24). According to PvdA negotiator Jacques Tichelaar, the differences between the Eurosceptic-turned-Europragmatic ChristenUnie and the Europhile-turned-Europragmatic CDA and PvdA appeared to be less than expected (Van der Wiel, 2009: 27). The negotiations focused more on the *ratification* of the next EU treaty. The PvdA eventually accepted not to have a referendum. That can be considered as part of the exchange between parties (CDA and CU are against referendums), but also as a way to avoid divisions on the EU issue within the PvdA constituency.

In 2010, the largest party, VVD, did not have problems with the largest winner in the elections, the Eurosceptic and anti-Islam party PVV (from 9 to 24 seats), to join government. It needed the participation of the CDA to obtain a majority, however. The CDA expressed hesitations to join government after losing heavily in the elections, while it showed reservations regarding the PVV's opinions particularly on the freedom of (Islamic) religion. After a failed attempt to create other coalitions, VVD, PVV, and CDA re-launched talks on government formation. They eventually agreed to disagree on their views on the role of the Islam, and to form a minority cabinet of VVD and CDA with the PVV's partial, parliamentary support (Bukman, 2011; Heymans, 2010). The PVV's exclusion from government participation could thus be explained by the unwillingness of the CDA to cooperate with an anti-Islamic party in government. The PVV's EU position did barely matter. The PVV did not show any

regret about not taking part in the cabinet, arguing that it would allow them more leeway to express their views (Brief van de Informatie, 2010b). Nevertheless, it supported a substantial part of the government's accord, which included plans to tighten EU migration law. On issues not covered by the support agreement between PVV, VVD and CDA, the PVV could oppose the government's policy. And so, it did.

Based on the available sources, the conclusion should be that Eurosceptic parties have not been excluded from coalition formation, or better phrased, the EU issue has not been a reason to exclude parties from government. The major motive for cooperating with (winning) Eurosceptic parties has been to obtain a parliamentary majority with ideologically adjacent and electorally competing parties, which by and large confirm the rational-institutionalist explanation of consensus politics (Andeweg, 2010). Also the eurosceptic parties showed their willingness to government participation, reflecting consensus politics being a rather permanent than fluctuating feature of the Dutch coalition formation process, regardless of changes in media attention, electoral volatility, and an issue's salience.

#### 6. Cooperation with Eurosceptic parties in parliament

To what extent are Eurosceptic parties also accommodated in parliament? Since they have been included in governmental cooperation, do policy opponents also seek cooperation in parliament? If the divide between Eurosceptic parties and others would matter in interparty cooperation, it should be at least visible in decisions regarding the fundamentals of European integration. The ratifications of EU treaties are therefore examined here. As table 3 shows, governing parties always voted in favour, but ratification bills also received support from at least one major opposition party. Voting patterns reflected foremost the division between Eurosceptic and non-Eurosceptic parties, except for the ratification of the Nice Treaty and GreenLeft's no vote in 1992 and 1998 (see table 3). GreenLeft voted against the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaty, because it considered them not going far enough in terms of democracy, environment and social policy. The Eurosceptic orthodox-protestant parties supported the Nice Treaty because it allowed Central and Eastern European countries to join the European Union, while the measure of pooling sovereignty remained fairly limited. As discussed in the section on indicating consensus politics, voting does not say much about cooperation between opponents. Also in this specific instance, it is rather an expression of substantial agreement. Scrutinizing the drafting and voting of resolutions and amendments and responses to Eurosceptic contributions in parliamentary debates should reveal whether, how and why cooperation between opposition and governing parties and between Eurosceptic and other parties took place, indeed.

Treaty (year of ratification)	European Act (1986)	Maastricht (1992)	Amsterdam (1998)	Nice (2001)	European Constitutional Treaty** (2005)	Lisbon (2008)
<i>In favour</i>	142 CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66	137 CDA*, PvdA, VVD, D66	126 CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66	145 CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66, GL,	127 CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66, GL	111 CDA, PvdA, VVD, D66, GL,

				CU, SGP		<b>CU</b>
<i>Against</i>	8 PPR, PSP, SGP, GPV, RPF	13 GL, GPV, SGP, RPF, CD	24 GL, GPV, SGP, RPF, CD, SP	5 SP	23 CU, SGP, SP, LPF, Wilders	39 SGP, SP, PVV, PvdD, Verdonk
<i>Years before scheduled elections</i>	4	2	4	1	2	3

**Table 3: votes on EU treaty ratification laws in Second Chamber of Parliament**

Party in government in bold

\*indication of party identities, see table 2; \*\*not formal vote, but expressed preference

A straightforward precondition for cooperation is presence. Eurosceptic parties usually showed up in committee meetings and plenary sessions devoted to the various Intergovernmental Conferences preparing EU treaties and subsequently to the ratification of the EU treaties. Particularly the orthodox-Protestant GPV actively participated, contributing often in the first and second term of the debate, and also interrupting regularly. Representatives of the other orthodox-Protestant parties, the small, left-wing parties, SP, PVV, and the Animal Rights Party also gave their views. The extreme-right Centre Democrats, the pensioner's parties and the MP Rita Verdonk (split off from the VVD) attended more occasionally. Except for the Centre Democrats and sometimes the pensioners' parties and the Freedom Party, all parliamentarians received response from the Prime Minister, the minister of Foreign Affairs, the junior minister for European Affairs and fellow-parliamentarians in parliamentary debates. Non-response could be explained by their somewhat incoherent, not always to-the-point contributions, and in case of the Centre Democrats, the other parties' ostracizing policy towards extreme-right parties.

Further cooperation could also take place by drafting resolutions and amendments on the ratification bills. In 1985 and 1986, the Europhile policy majority of both governing and oppositional parties did not make any effort to obtain support from the small, Eurosceptic parties. A solid policy majority of both governing and oppositional parties made cooperation between parties with different European views unnecessary. However, ever since the solid policy majority started to crumble during the negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty, the orthodox-protestant parties and GreenLeft (in its soft-Eurosceptic phase), the SP, and in 2008 also Verdonk and the Animal Rights Party cooperated with their opponents, mainly on issues such as the parliamentary scrutiny rights on EU affairs powers and the democratic and transparent nature of EU decision-making. Since the ratification of the Single European Act, both Eurosceptic and other parties mutually supported resolutions and amendments concerning these and other issues, such as subsidiarity. Cooperation between parties with opposing views on European integration also concerned the way of ratification. A parliamentary majority of Europhile, Euro-pragmatic and Eurosceptic parties supported the initiative of the progressive, cosmopolitan parties PvdA, GreenLeft and D66 to hold a referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. Defending the principle of representative democracies, only the parties of Christian origin (CDA, ChristenUnie and SGP) opposed it. The failed parliamentary initiative to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008 was co-drafted by the Europhile D66 and GreenLeft as well as the Eurosceptic SP, PVV, and Animal Rights Party.

In sum, all Eurosceptic parties cooperated with other parties in ratification debates, except for the ostracized Centre Democrats. Cooperation did not depend on media attention, political salience or electoral volatility. D66 and PVV did work together on a referendum bill in 2008, despite their contrasting views of European integration. Rather substantial agreement on a specific EU-related issue and the need to obtain a parliamentary majority (for a referendum, for example) determined cooperation between opponents. Nevertheless, cooperation with Eurosceptic parties had its limits in substantial terms, since it did not concern the contents of the treaty but rather the procedural aspects such as parliamentary rights. Policy majorities thus determined the cooperation patterns. Also the timing and arena of decision-making did not matter (see table 3). However, visibility of decision-making had yet an impact on the choice of arena. The social-democratic PvdA co-initiated the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, while not expecting a no vote (Van Holsteyn, 2005). In 2008, however, it voted against another referendum. The PvdA referred to the negative opinion of the Council of State (the government's most important consultative body on legal and legislative issues) and the removal of constitutional symbols from the EU treaty. Nevertheless, avoiding a referendum also meant avoiding a potentially painful disclosure of divisions on the EU issue within its constituency.

### *7. Conclusion*

In sum, Eurosceptic parties have been accommodated in the Dutch democracy. They have not been excluded from cooperation in government and parliament, despite their oppositional views of European integration. In more theoretical terms, this case study clearly showed that indicating consensus politics is more than counting votes in favour or against certain legislation. Cooperation in parliament on amendments and resolutions as well exchanges in debates also indicate whether opposing parties yet work together. The Dutch case also showed that the practice of consensus politics did not depend on media attention and political salience of the issue at stake, the timing and arena of decision-making, or electoral volatility. The need to obtain a majority for a government or for specific proposals rather determined the cooperation with parties with opposing views on European integration. Not only the institutionally induced fragmentation of the Dutch party system requiring cooperation to obtain a governing majority, but also the absence or presence of policy majority matters for the practice of consensus politics. Further comparative research between policy-areas and issues should show whether variation *within* the same set of institutions does only depend on the presence or absence of policy majorities. As of now, the Dutch case showed that Euroscepticism had impact on the practice of consensus politics, since the rise of Eurosceptic parties increased the possibility and need of cooperation to obtain parliamentary majority. Eurosceptic opposition has been accommodated in the Dutch house of democracy, although to a certain extent. Eurosceptic parties could not have their preferences satisfied to stop completely pooling sovereignty or the creation of a single market, the two principles of European integration. Despite cooperation with Eurosceptic parties on other EU-related issues, it may not be sufficient to stem emerging opposition towards European integration.

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