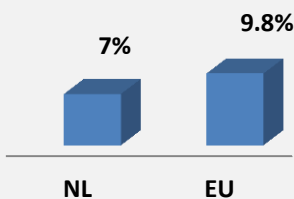


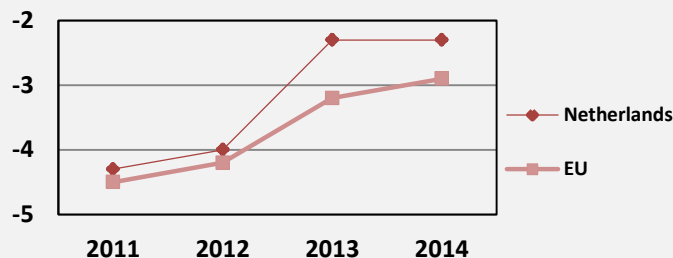
Recent history

The Netherlands shares many elements of common history with Belgium and Luxembourg, having experienced repeated periods of cross-border conflict, co-operation and shared government during their history. The most modern example of this is the **Benelux** Economic Union, founded in 1958, which has acted alongside the European project to bring these countries' economies closer together. The Netherlands was seriously affected by the European wars of the first half of the twentieth century. This shaped its political system after 1945, which placed a strong emphasis upon **consensus**. Dutch politics has been dominated over the past half century by the twin forces of Christian and Social democracy. In recent years, this has been supplemented by the rise of Green Parties and the resurgence of radical nationalism. The Netherlands has seen tension in recent years related to its large immigrant population. For example, populist anti-immigration politician Pim Fortuyn was assassinated in 2002, and the maker of a controversial film about the role of women in Islamic society, Theo Van Gogh, was murdered in 2004. The Party for Freedom (PVV), led by controversial anti-Islam politician and supporter of Fortuyn Geert Wilders, won four seats in the European Parliament in 2009 and made substantial gains in the 2011 Dutch provincial elections. More recently, however, the party has been plagued by defecting party members and following the 2012 parliamentary elections, it lost almost half of its seats.

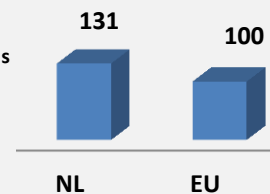
Unemployment rate (2015)



Public budget deficit/surplus



GDP per capita in PPS (2013)



Current government

The Netherlands operates under a constitutional monarchy. The monarch, currently King Willem-Alexander, has purely ceremonial duties. Control of government business is shared between the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers (*Ministerraad*), and the Parliament, which is called the *Staten Generaal*. The Staten Generaal is made up of two chambers: the House of Representatives, which has 150 members elected directly every four years, and the Senate, which has 75 members elected by the members of the *Provinciale Staten*, or provincial governments. The Senate has limited powers and can only reject laws proposed by the House of Representatives.

After the collapse of the centre-right **coalition** government in April 2012, a general election was called for September 2012. In November that year, a new coalition government was sworn in, composed of the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), which had secured 41 seats in the election, and the centre-left Labour Party, which won 38 seats. Overall the coalition government has a slim majority in the House of Representatives (which has 150 seats altogether). The coalition government is led by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, leader of the VVD, who triggered the collapse of the old government after resigning in April for failing to broker an agreement between the then government coalition parties on austerity measures.

The Netherlands: key facts



❖ Capital	Amsterdam
❖ Population	17 million (2014)
❖ % of total EU population	3.3%
❖ Official language	Dutch
❖ Year of EU accession	1958 (founding member)
❖ Currency	Euro since 1999
❖ Schengen Area member	Yes, since 1995
❖ Seats in European Parliament	26

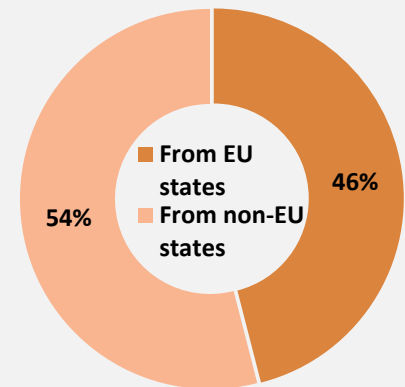
The Netherlands and the EU

The Netherlands has always maintained a close relationship with the EU. As a founder member it has been at the forefront of pursuing European integration, although it has always stressed the importance of the **subsidiarity principle**. Two of the major treaties on European integration have been signed in and consequently named after Dutch towns: the Maastricht Treaty which established the European Union in 1992 and the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. The Netherlands is fully signed up to key measures of closer co-operation including the Euro and the Schengen Convention.

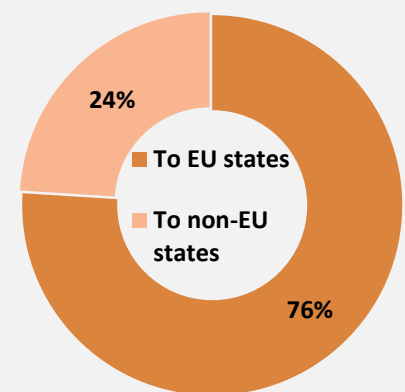
However, attitudes towards the EU project have altered in recent years. In 2005, a few days following the French 'no' vote, Dutch voters rejected the proposed EU constitution in a referendum. 61.6 per cent of the Dutch population voted 'no' to the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. This led to a crisis within the EU and the Constitutional Treaty did not progress any further until the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007.

More recently tension emerged between the Netherlands and other EU member states when the PVV party introduced a website in March 2012 which encouraged Dutch citizens to complain about immigrants from the poorer EU member states including Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. The website was later condemned by the European Commission and the Dutch government. The vast majority of Dutch politicians remain keen supporters of the EU, although they agree on the fact that reforms are necessary to improve its effectiveness.

Dutch imports (2014)



Dutch exports (2014)



Facts and figures

- ❖ The Netherlands is home to some of Europe's largest companies including Unilever and Royal Dutch Shell
- ❖ The Netherlands serves as a European transport hub, largely thanks to the major port at Rotterdam
- ❖ Almost one quarter of the Netherlands total area is technically below sea level, hence its name which translates as the 'low countries'
- ❖ The International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and EU agencies Europol and Eurojust are all located in the Dutch City of The Hague, known as the legal capital of the world
- ❖ In 2011 the Netherlands was ranked as the happiest country in the world by the OECD

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Benelux**: a compound title made up of the first syllables of the member countries' names (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg)
- ❖ **Consensus**: political agreement around a majority opinion
- ❖ **PPS**: GDP per head is expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) to eliminate the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries
- ❖ **Coalition**: a formal agreement between political parties to share power in government
- ❖ **Subsidiarity**: The principle that the EU only acts in the areas over which it has exclusive competence or where it can take more effective action than member states

Links

- ❖ <http://www.government.nl/>
- ❖ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/country_profiles/1047864.stm#facts
- ❖ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
- ❖ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2145.html>