



MARCH 2021

## Elections in the Netherlands

### What are the parties' views on foreign affairs?



### Introduction

In the run-up to the Dutch general elections on 17 March, the Clingendael Institute has compared the views on foreign affairs of the 13 largest parties, as set out in their manifestos. How ambitious are the political parties in their foreign and security policy?

What do they think of the European Union, migration, trade agreements, defence and development cooperation? What points do they emphasise? Which parties have more or less similar views? Do the manifestos match the views of their constituencies? And which coalitions would stand a chance based on their views of foreign affairs?

\* The authors are very grateful to Noor Broeders for her assistance in conducting this analysis.

This publication has three sections. It starts by examining the extent to which the party manifestos address the principal concern of the Dutch public with regard to foreign affairs. That is followed by a structured comparison of the party manifestos, focusing on nine foreign affairs themes. Finally, the latest opinion poll data are used to assess potential coalitions and identify possible foreign policy obstacles when coalitions are explored.

### The manifestos and the Dutch public's top-three concerns about foreign affairs

The Clingendael Institute recently surveyed the Dutch population to assess which international developments most concerns them<sup>1</sup>. At the top of the list is the migration pressure on Europe's external borders, followed by the rise of China as a major power and thirdly, climate change. What do the manifestos have to say on these three issues?

#### Migration pressure on Europe's external borders

No fewer than 91% of PVV supporters said they saw migration pressure on Europe's external borders as a threat to European security. Next came the supporters of the FvD (83%), CDA (83%) and VVD (80%). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the PVV – as well as the FvD – are advocating a highly restrictive migration policy. Both parties want the Netherlands to reclaim full control of its borders, including by withdrawing from the European Union. The FvD – possibly as an intermediate step towards 'Nexit' – calls for withdrawal from the Schengen Agreement and the reintroduction of border controls. The CDA and the VVD also support a strict migration policy, but believe solutions can be found at a European level, with tight controls

on Europe's external borders. The VVD is prepared to show solidarity and admit more asylum seekers only "when this [border control] has been sorted out". The party wants an annual quota and selection criteria for refugees. The CDA wants to set specific migration targets and create a European asylum policy that includes financial penalties for member states that "do not take their responsibility".

Both parties call for refugees to be received in their region of origin. So do DENK and the SGP. ChristenUnie and the PvdA underline the need to improve the quality of reception. ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks, the PvdA and the PvdD also think the Netherlands and the EU should take greater responsibility for the resettlement of refugees, for example from Greek refugee camps such as Moria. The PvdA wants 500 refugees currently in Greece to be brought to the Netherlands "immediately".

It is also striking that 73% of SP voters are concerned about migration, but the theme hardly figures in the party's manifesto. The party does say, however: "If there are refugees who cannot be received safely in the region, we will receive them in the EU." But no further details are given. The word 'asylum', for example, does not occur in the manifesto. Instead, the emphasis is on the position of migrants in the Dutch labour market.

GroenLinks and 50+ voters are the least concerned about migration. In the GroenLinks manifesto this is reflected in an open attitude towards migration and refugees. Although 50+ expresses support for a humane and fair European refugee policy, the party also wants stricter border controls, as called for by the CDA and the VVD.

#### The rise of China

Dutch voters are also concerned about the rise of China – more than about an assertive Russia. In particular, supporters of the SGP (87%) and to a lesser extent ChristenUnie (82%), PvdA (81%), VVD (79%) and CDA (79%) see China as a threat. The SGP devotes a relatively large amount

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1 Christopher Houtkamp, Bob Deen and Monika Sie Dhian Ho, Dutch public concerned about foreign affairs in run-up to elections, Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer, February 2021.

of attention to China in its manifesto and wonders whether the 21st century will be “China’s century”. The party believes the Netherlands has reason to be apprehensive about China’s “political and economic expansion drive” and wants to work with the United States to provide a counterweight to Beijing. ChristenUnie mentions China in connection with other geopolitical powers such as Russia and the US, but not as a threat in itself. The party does, however, highlight Chinese human rights violations against Uighurs in Xinjiang and seeks to reduce economic dependence on China. The manifestos of the CDA, D66, GroenLinks and the VVD criticise Dutch and European dependence on China, for example in the digital and pharmaceutical sectors.

The PvdA devotes a lot of attention to China, and calls for vigilance. According to the party, China is a partner “when it comes to multilateral agreements on trade and climate”, but in the region it is in pursuit of military dominance and “at a global level uses economic instruments to increase its influence”. The VVD also emphasises the duality of China, namely that it “is not only a trading partner, but (...) also poses a security risk.” The CDA states that China “has its eye on a leading role on the world stage”, while D66 calls China “unpredictable”. The parties thus appear to be addressing the concerns of their supporters.

It is striking that 71% of PVV supporters are concerned about China, but the party’s own manifesto does not mention the country. A similar proportion of FvD voters (69%) see China as a threat. The FvD manifesto states: “a major strategic challenge, for example, is keeping China in check.”

### Climate change

At number three in the threat hierarchy is climate change. Most people in the Netherlands see climate change as a serious threat, but major differences can be seen between the parties’ supporters. Whereas 93% of PvdD supporters and 92% of GroenLinks supporters, for example, see

climate change as a major threat, only 44% of PVV voters and 23% of FvD voters share that view. This difference is clearly reflected in these parties’ manifestos. The FvD and the PVV believe there is no crisis whatsoever, while GroenLinks and the PvdD want an ambitious approach to the climate crisis. GroenLinks, for example, wants to declare a “climate emergency”. It is symbolic that ‘climate’ occurs 77 times in the GroenLinks manifesto and no fewer than 101 times in the PvdD manifesto. In the case of the CDA, PvdA and VVD it occurs 25, 39 and 41 times respectively.

Although parties such as the CDA, ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks, the PvdA and the VVD have different views on climate policy, they all want to meet the targets of the Paris Climate Agreement. The CDA, ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks and the PvdA also voice explicit support for the ‘European Green Deal’. The PVV and the FvD, by contrast, want the Netherlands to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement and the EU’s climate policy. They are opposed to the ‘European Green Deal’, for which former PvdA minister Frans Timmermans is responsible in Brussels. The SP devotes a lot of attention to climate policy in its manifesto, but is less focused of a European approach.

## Foreign policy issues in the manifestos

In order to compare the manifestos, it is necessary to examine those foreign affairs themes that appear in nearly all manifestos. The various parties’ positions on those themes also need to be plotted on a scale of rising ambition. Nine foreign affairs issues were identified on this basis. These include the enlargement of the European Union, the strengthening of European economic independence, trade agreements, European military cooperation and spending on development cooperation and defence. The parties’ views on the nine themes differ as follows:

## What are the main differences in views on foreign affairs?

### 1. Should the EU have more powers?

Netherlands should leave the EU

Take back powers from the EU

Status quo and/or emphasise subsidiarity

More powers for the EU

### 2. Can the European Union be enlarged with new member states?

No

Reservations

In favour of enlargement (with Western Balkan countries)

### 3. Should Europe be economically more independent and pursue economic sovereignty?

Focus on national (rather than European) economic sovereignty

Promote European independence in specific sectors

Bring crucial production chains to Europe

### 4. Should more trade agreements be signed?

Against new trade agreements

Extra parliamentary scrutiny or referendum on trade agreements

Attach conditions to content of trade agreements

Enthusiastic about more trade agreements

### 5. How open should the Netherlands be to labour migration?

Restrictive migration policy

Reservations: based on specific number or quotas

Depends on developments in Dutch labour market

Promote labour migration

### 6. Should more money be spent on development cooperation?

Against a budget for development cooperation

Critical/cuts

Increase to 0.7% target

Exceed 0.7% target

### 7. How important are relations with the United States and NATO?

Decreasing support for NATO

US & NATO remain important, but Europe must stand on its own two feet

In favour of strong links with US & NATO

### 8. Should European armed forces cooperate more outside NATO?

European defence integration is undesirable

NATO has leading role

Closer defence cooperation between European countries to complement NATO

Move towards European armed forces

### 9. Should defence spending be increased?

No increase

European average of GDP percentage

European NATO average as step towards 2%

2% NATO benchmark

**Figuur 1 How ambitious are the party manifestos?  
(Order based on distribution of seats)**

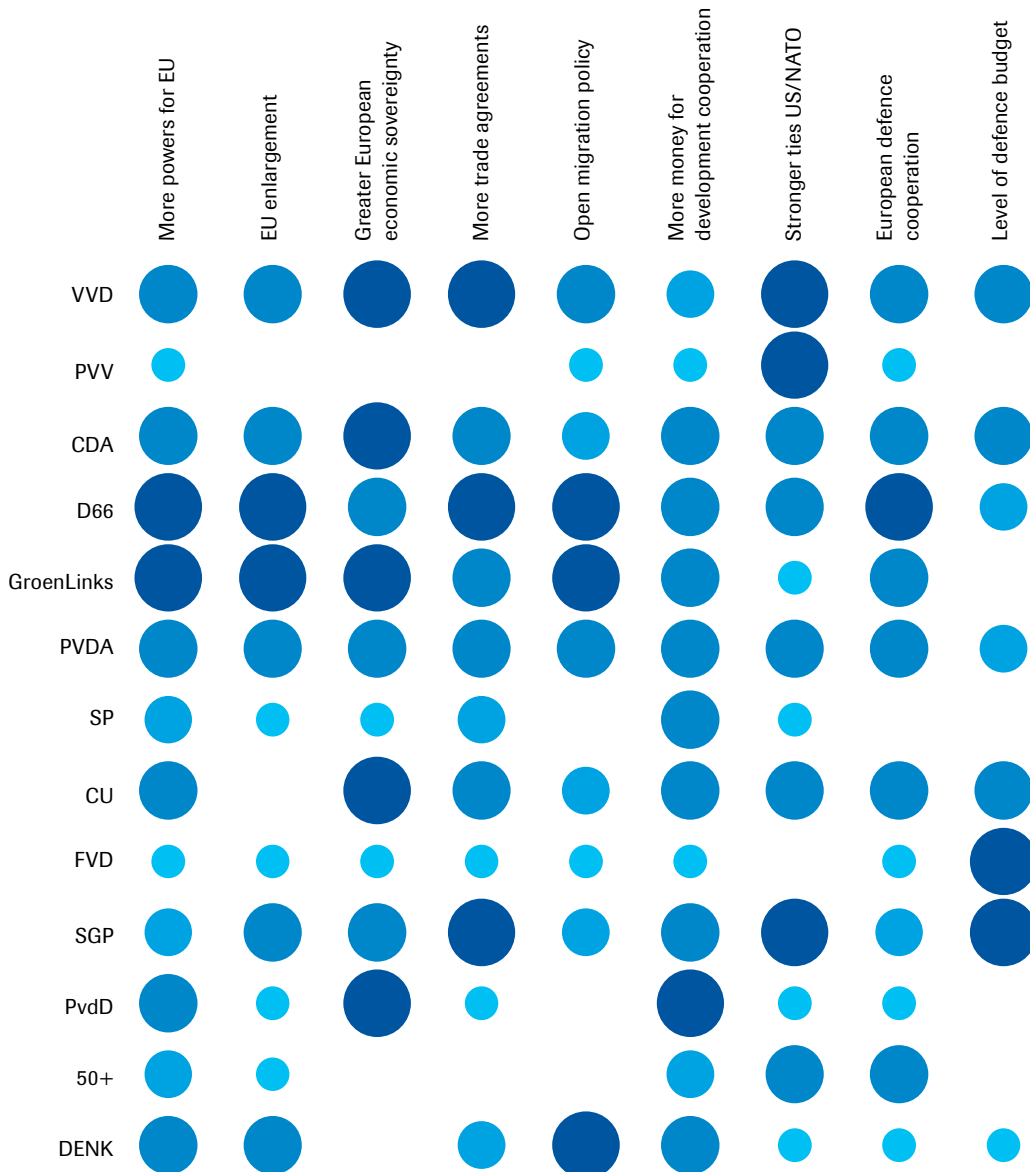


Figure 1 shows the results of this comparison. The larger and darker the ball, the greater is the political party's ambition on the issue. This chart shows which parties have more – or less – ambition with regard to European and international cooperation. If a party does not mention the subject in its manifesto, no ball is shown. The figure is based solely on the views in the manifestos. Statements by politicians before or during the election campaign, or the financial

implications of the programs as assessed by the CPB, are not taken into account.

**More powers for the EU?**

The party manifestos show a range of views on the Netherlands' relations with the EU. Some parties want to leave the European Union (PVV and FvD), while others want to give the EU more powers (GroenLinks and D66). D66, for example, is in favour of the EU having a “permanent own income”,

while GroenLinks wants to strengthen the European Parliament with a right of initiative. In order to strengthen the link between Dutch and European policy, D66 and GroenLinks also want the next government to include a Minister (or state secretary) for European Affairs.

In between these positions, we find parties that are more or less satisfied with the status quo and the existing division of competences between member states and EU institutions (ChristenUnie, PvdA, VVD, CDA) or that want to repatriate powers but do not advocate a 'Nexit' (SP, SGP, and 50+). The SGP and the SP want to overhaul the existing distribution of powers, possibly with treaty change. This would most likely trigger a referendum in the Netherlands. ChristenUnie also wants treaty change, in order to agree "more European cooperation on the major, cross-border challenges of our time: climate change, migration policy, a fair (digital) economy and geopolitical policy". Despite the desire for 'more Europe' in these areas, the party is also critical of the EU, particularly with regard to the euro and the democratic content and transparency of European decision-making. ChristenUnie also wants to make it possible for a country to be expelled from the eurozone.

Clear differences can be seen among the parties that make up the current government: D66 wants to introduce European taxes, while VVD states that the EU should not become a transfer union and should not have the right to levy European taxes. The CDA also wants no "new European taxes". The VVD does, however, see "a strong union" as "crucial for Dutch security and prosperity". The CDA, the PvdA and the VVD want to see the Netherlands exerting greater influence in the Union together with small groups of like-minded member states.

Several parties call expressly for Europe to play a stronger international role. The CDA talks of the need for a "strong European bloc", while D66, GroenLinks, the PvdA and the VVD call for a "strong Europe". These five parties, plus ChristenUnie, want to strengthen EU foreign policymaking by scrapping the

right of member-states to veto decisions on European sanctions policy. Such a plan was also advocated by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in September 2020. D66, GroenLinks and the PvdA even want to abolish the principle of unanimity in all areas of European foreign policy.

### EU enlargement?

Although EU enlargement is not a major theme in the manifestos, almost all parties address the issue. Most parties have reservations about it and state that candidate countries must fulfil the accession conditions. The parties with the most positive views on enlargement – D66 and GroenLinks – say that accession must be open to countries in the Western Balkans. The PvdA also mentions the Western Balkans, but says only that countries in the region have a prospect of accession. The FvD, the PvdD, the SP and 50+ are generally opposed to enlargement.

Nine of the 13 parties examined have positions on Turkey. Seven parties – CDA, ChristenUnie, D66, GroenLinks, PvdA, SGP and VVD – are opposed to further enlargement negotiations with Ankara. This outcome is not surprising given the recent deterioration of relations between the European Union and Turkey. The SGP and ChristenUnie do suggest, however, that the aim should be an alternative partnership with the country. The VVD believes discussions should focus on an EU-Turkey free trade agreement rather than EU membership. The CDA talks of an "alternative form of cooperation". DENK's manifesto says nothing about a possible Turkish accession to the European Union. The word 'Turkey' occurs only twice in the DENK manifesto, on both occasions in the context of migration policy.

The FvD and the PVV make no mention of possible Turkish membership of the European Union, probably because they want the Netherlands to leave the EU. Both parties do say, however, that Turkey should be expelled from NATO, even though the 1949 Washington Treaty includes no provision for expulsion.

### **Greater European economic sovereignty?**

The promotion of European economic autonomy, reducing strategic dependencies and securing access to raw materials are themes frequently discussed both in the European Union and in the election manifestos. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how vulnerable some global production chains are and how dependent the Dutch (and European) economy is on countries such as China. The same debate is under way in the context of European dependence on energy supplies from countries such as Russia, concerns surrounding the procurement of Chinese 5G mobile technology and the dominant role of American 'Big Tech'.

Such dependencies may produce security risks, or could be leveraged to exert pressure on the Netherlands or the EU and undermine Europe's strategic competitiveness. This has led to a debate on whether Europe should produce or control some products and services itself, such as critical medical equipment or essential digital services, and how the EU can tighten the global rules governing certain economic activities.

Many parties emphasise this geopolitical approach to global economic relations. They explicitly back the promotion of European 'economic sovereignty'. The CDA, ChristenUnie, GroenLinks, the PvdD and the VVD want to see crucial production chains returned to Europe. Regionalisation instead of globalisation appears to be the message. The CDA calls for a "made in Europe" strategy. The VVD wants to prevent Europe becoming dependent on another power bloc for crucial goods or raw materials, "even if those goods consequently become more expensive". ChristenUnie wants a "robust industrial policy on a European and national scale". GroenLinks also mentions the desire to make Europe strategically independent. Like the PvdD, GroenLinks wants to bring production chains to Europe for climate reasons. D66, the PvdA and the SGP call mainly for greater European sovereignty in specific sectors, such as energy and digital. D66 wants Europe to aspire "to compete with the US and China in new technologies". The party also wants a "strong European

energy union" that negotiates collectively with countries such as Russia on pipelines and gas contracts. For these reasons the PvdA and ChristenUnie want Europe to scrap the Nordstream2 gas project with Russia. The PvdA, like D66, also wants to make the Netherlands less dependent on American 'Big Tech'. The SGP wants a "Delta Plan" to protect vital digital and physical infrastructure. By contrast, the SP and the FvD want to promote Dutch rather than European economic sovereignty. The FvD, for example, wants to stop the use of Chinese mobile communication equipment.

Various parties devote a lot of attention to economic security, trade policy and industrial policy – including a bigger role for the state in the free market. The VVD – a party not traditionally known for its protectionist views – has a separate section in its manifesto entitled "Protecting the free market". The party stresses the importance of an international level playing field and states that third-country companies should only have unimpeded access to the European single market if such access is reciprocal. The VVD wants to be able to keep foreign companies out of the European single market if they receive improper state aid.

Although the Netherlands is known internationally as an open, liberal, free-trade country, parties are not shying away from arguing for restrictions on foreign investment. The CDA wants a "Protected by Europe" strategy to prevent vital sectors and services falling into non-European hands. The party also wants European state aid rules to be made applicable to non-European companies. D66, the SGP and the VVD also want to be able to control and possibly block foreign investments. Various parties, including the SGP and the VVD, want intelligence services to be better able to protect economic interests and combat economic espionage.

ChristenUnie wants more government "control" of strategic goods and services; and the Dutch economy should also be protected against "foreign influences and digital interference". According to the VVD, the Netherlands should have the power to block sales of strategic businesses to foreign

buyers on security grounds, neither should it be a taboo that the state takes a stake in companies that are of strategic importance. The SGP goes further and wants to stop mandatory European tenders for government contracts related to national security.

### **More trade agreements?**

The strong focus on economic security and a Dutch, or European, industrial policy raises the question how the political parties view trade agreements? Nowadays international trade discussions no longer focus explicitly on 'free' trade (most global tariffs are already low), but on agreeing joint trade rules instead. We see this reflected in the party manifestos. Three parties express wholehearted support for more trade agreements: D66, the SGP and the VVD. The VVD sees trade agreements as a means of countering "global growth in protectionism". The SGP invokes the traditional image of the Netherlands "as an out-and-out trading nation". D66 covers international trade extensively and says Dutch prosperity depends on international trade. The party wants more trade agreements, but also attaches conditions, for example in relation to climate agreements, environmental standards and labour conditions.

The CDA, ChristenUnie, GroenLinks and the PvdA set similar conditions for the conclusion of new trade agreements. There is a widely shared desire for the EU to commit to agreements on fair trade rules and sustainable development. The CDA wants new agreements to guarantee a level playing field, thereby promoting fair competition for Dutch companies. The PvdA and GroenLinks see trade and development cooperation as intertwined and want trade agreements to meet international climate targets and sustainable development goals. ChristenUnie has the same objective but also calls explicitly for the cancellation of Europe's trade agreement with the Mercosur countries of South America. This agreement was reached in 2020 after 20 years of negotiations and is pending approval by member states. In June 2020 the House of Representatives adopted a PvdD motion calling on the government to withdraw support for the agreement.

The SP and DENK have major reservations about international trade agreements. Both parties want a stronger democratic approval procedure for new agreements, involving a referendum or a parliamentary vote. The PvdD, like the SP, wants a binding referendum. But the party also wants the Netherlands to withdraw its support for all international trade discussions currently being conducted by the EU. In that regard it is in line with FvD. Although the FvD says it supports international trade, it is "opposed to the multilateral trade agreements being negotiated by the European Union". The PVV and 50+ do not address the issue.

### **Open policy on labour migration?**

We have already seen above that migration and refugee policy is a major theme in most manifestos. But what about labour migration? The views vary widely between parties calling for a very tight migration policy, parties reluctant to admit migrant workers, parties wanting to set strict conditions or quotas and parties wanting to maintain a fairly open migration policy. DENK, D66 and GroenLinks want to offer more opportunities for migrant workers to come to the Netherlands. The PVV and the FvD are at the other end of the spectrum and want tight restrictions on migration and migrant workers, including border controls and migrant returns. The CDA, ChristenUnie and the SGP take a critical stance and want "guide numbers" or quotas to limit the number of migrants the Netherlands will accept.

The PvdA and the VVD both want to see the government exercising more control over migration. They approach the issue from a transactional perspective. The VVD considers, for example, that migrant workers can make an important contribution to the Dutch economy, but the party wants to introduce a points system to enable selection. The PvdA wants migration to be determined by the needs of the Dutch labour market and "not left to the market". Among other things it wants to see measures taken to combat "social dumping". These views also require clearer insight into the contribution that migrants and migrant workers make to the Dutch economy.



### More money for development cooperation?

The level of the budget for development cooperation is the issue on which there is most consensus among the parties. Eight of the analysed manifestos (CDA, ChristenUnie, DENK, D66, GroenLinks, PvdA, SGP and SP) call for an increase in the development cooperation budget to meet the OECD target of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). The budget in 2021 was estimated at 0.55% of Dutch GNI.<sup>2</sup> 50+ wants to maintain the current level of spending, while the PvdD wants to raise the budget to 1% of GNI. The VVD has reservations and wants to see an end to automatic rises in the development budget when the economy is growing. It is advocating cuts. Furthermore, it wants to use the development budget more directly to promote Dutch interests, for example to “curb migration flows”. The PvdD says development money should not be used to that end. GroenLinks also says that funds earmarked for development cooperation should not be used for the reception of asylum seekers. The party also wants climate support to be made available to developing countries on top of the development budget. The PVV and the FvD believe development cooperation is not a government responsibility and they oppose spending 0.7% of GNI.

### Stronger ties with the US and/or NATO?

The relationship with the US has been under pressure in recent years and this is clearly reflected in the manifestos. Last year, before the US presidential elections, Clingendael canvassed the views of the Dutch public: 29% stated that they saw the US as a threat to European security. This percentage was only slightly lower than the percentage that views China and Russia as threats.<sup>3</sup> The

same survey clearly showed that four out of five people in the Netherlands think the US will be increasingly unwilling to protect Europe in the next five years because Europeans should do more to maintain their own security.

A number of parties, such as DENK, D66, GroenLinks and PvdA, argue that the Netherlands and the EU cannot, or can no longer, rely on the US at all times and that Europe will increasingly have to stand on its own two feet, including militarily. D66 states: “Since we can no longer rely on the familiar military security umbrella of the US, we need to be able to stand on our own two feet.” GroenLinks says: “The EU should become more independent of the United States, regardless of who is in the White House.” GroenLinks wants to pivot away from NATO to the EU and the United Nations. The SP and the PvdD even call for a structural overhaul of the relationship with NATO. Support for the transatlantic security relationship also appears to have weakened with the traditionally Atlanticist CDA. The party still acknowledges the Alliance’s central role in Dutch security, but also wants more European defence cooperation (see below). The contrast with that other traditionally Atlanticist party, the VVD, is striking. In the CDA manifesto the word ‘America’, or a derivative of it, only occurs once. In the VVD manifesto it occurs 12 times. The word ‘NATO’ occurs twice in the CDA manifesto, but 21 times in the VVD manifesto.

Although the VVD says it can no longer be assumed “that the US will take the lead in countering every threat”, the party continues to emphasise military cooperation within the NATO framework. The VVD is also the only party that wants to retain the Dutch Air Force’s nuclear role within NATO’s deterrent posture.

The PVV and the SGP are two other parties that strongly support the relationship with Washington as a pillar of Dutch security. The FvD says nothing on this subject in its manifesto.

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2 Government of the Netherlands HGIS – memorandum of the Homogenous Group for International Cooperation in the 2021 State Budget, September 2020.

3 Rem Korteweg, Christopher Houtkamp and Monika Sie Dhian Ho, Dutch views on Transatlantic ties and European security cooperation in times of geopolitical rivalry, Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer, September 2020.

## More European defence integration?

For some parties the notion that the Netherlands can no longer rely on the US at all times is a key reason for backing more European defence cooperation. The unpredictability of major powers such as China and Russia is also often cited in this context. Most parties in the House of Representatives want more cooperation between European armed forces, including within an EU framework, but not a ‘European army’.<sup>4</sup> Other parties totally oppose more European military cooperation, precisely because they believe it would lead towards a ‘European army’. Our Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer showed that there is broad support for greater European military independence. Most support comes from supporters of D66 (81%), the CDA (80%), the PvdD (78%), GroenLinks (77%) and the VVD (75%). Only D66 mentions an ambition to move towards “European armed forces” in its party manifesto.

Steps towards greater European military independence come in many different flavours. Some parties want more European defence cooperation in order to strengthen NATO, while others want Europe to be able to act independently of NATO. The VVD is one of the former. It backs smaller-scale military cooperation in Europe and rejects “abstract prospects” of a European army. The VVD wants the Netherlands to focus on niche specialisation to ease the burden on other allies, and to allocate tasks between the EU and NATO to avoid duplication. The party believes the EU should focus mainly on developing a European defence industry and rules governing military transport across the continent.

The CDA aims to strengthen European defence cooperation outside NATO, through “joint missions and exercises, cooperation between military units and countries, specialisation and joint procurement”. The party is the only one calling for the

establishment of a European Security Council to enable Europe to resolve conflicts on its own. It wants the United Kingdom to be included in this Council post-Brexit.

ChristenUnie wants to strengthen European defence cooperation in order to be more independent of the US. The party states: “The shifting political relationships and the reorientation of the US make military cooperation at EU level increasingly important.” The party also wants to strengthen the EU headquarters for civilian missions and develop a European budget for EU military missions.

As well as European armed forces, D66 wants a “physical European military headquarters” and a fully fledged Security and Defence Committee in the European Parliament. Although all four coalition partners support more European defence cooperation, their programmes show significant differences.

Supporters of the FvD (57%) and the PVV (60%) are fairly sceptical about greater European military independence. Even so, majorities are in favour despite the wish of both parties to leave the European Union. After all, a lot of European military cooperation takes place outside the EU. That may explain why the PVV and the FvD expressly oppose a ‘European army’, but say nothing about Dutch military cooperation with other European countries in general. A similar contrast is apparent with the PvdD. No fewer than 78% of PvdD supporters back greater European military independence, but the party’s manifesto explicitly rules out a ‘European army’. The party says nothing else on the subject.

## Higher defence spending?

Seven parties want to raise the current defence budget (€11.6 billion in 2021, and around 1.4% of gross domestic product): CDA, ChristenUnie, D66, FvD, PvdA, SGP and VVD. Five parties refer to the NATO benchmark of 2% of GDP as a target, but do not state a particular year in the party manifesto. The SGP and the FvD simply state they want to spend 2% of GDP on defence, though they do not mention a timeline. The CDA wants to reach that target “as soon

4 Dick Zandee and Noor Broeders, ‘Veiligheid en defensie in de verkiezingen: tussen ambitie en realisme’, *Atlantisch Perspectief*, no. 1., 2021, February 2021.

as possible". Both the CDA and the SGP want the 2% benchmark enshrined in law. Together with VVD and ChristenUnie, the CDA refers to the European NATO average of GDP (1.5% to 1.8%) as a target for 2025 with subsequent growth towards 2%. D66 does not go beyond the European average, while the PvdA states no specific percentage.

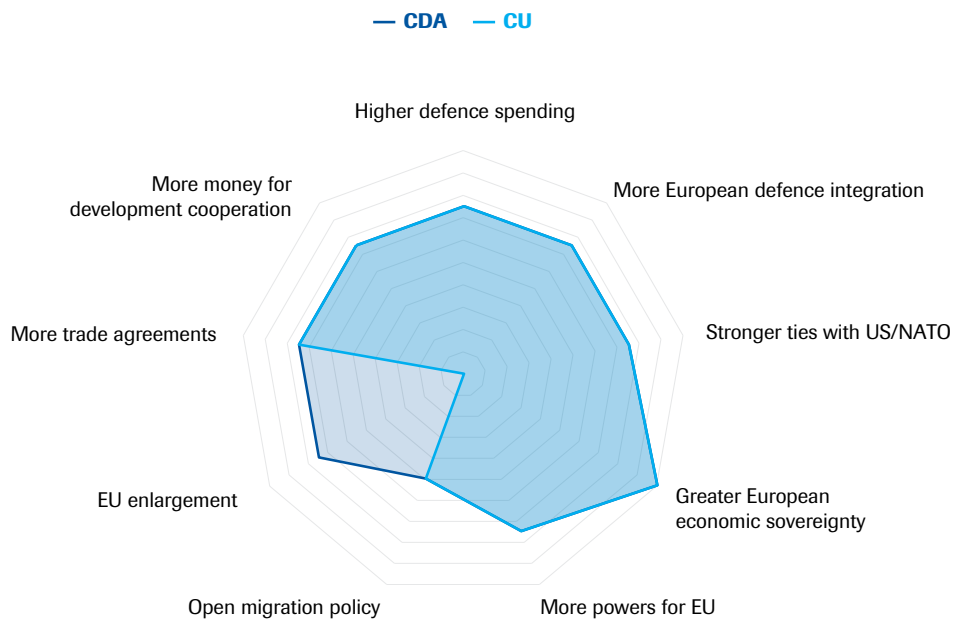
DENK is the only party explicitly opposed to the 2% NATO benchmark. Many parties, such as the PVV, GroenLinks, the SP, the PvdD and 50+, do not explicitly address the level of defence spending. This is remarkable for the PVV and 50+. The Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer shows that a sizeable majority of PVV voters (69%) and a majority of supporters of 50+ (55%) are in favour of raising the defence budget.<sup>5</sup>

## The parties compared

Below is a selection of comparisons between political parties. In each case two parties are shown in the same chart. Each chart shows the extent of a party's ambitions on the nine issues. The charts are derived from Figure 1. We present here a selection of parties that are often compared to each other. The charts show the main differences, but also the similarities between the two parties' views on foreign affairs.

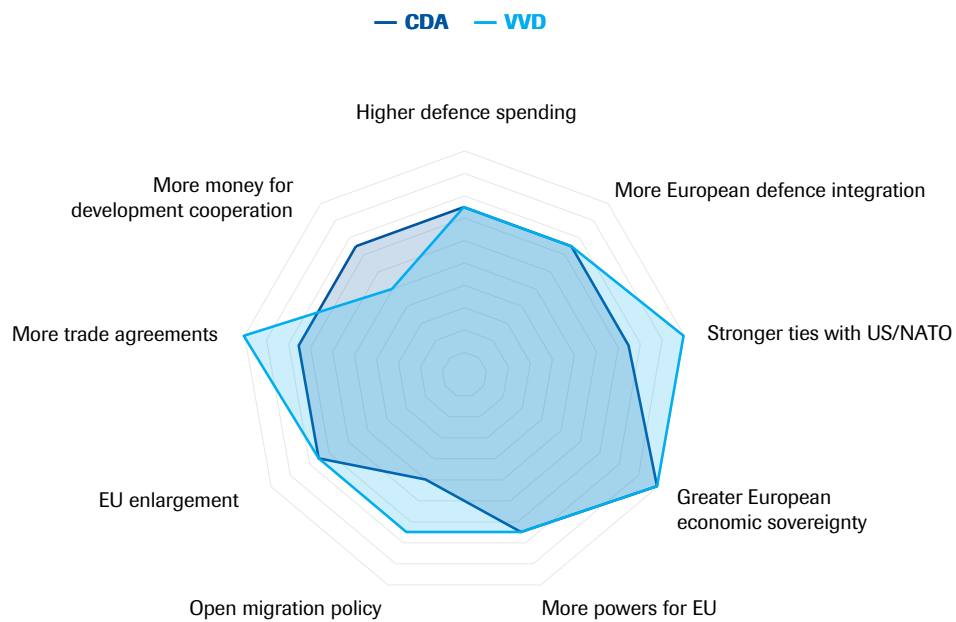
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5 Dick Zandee, Christopher Houtkamp and Monika Sie Dhian Ho, Dutch focus turns to Europe, Clingendael Foreign Affairs Barometer, December 2020.



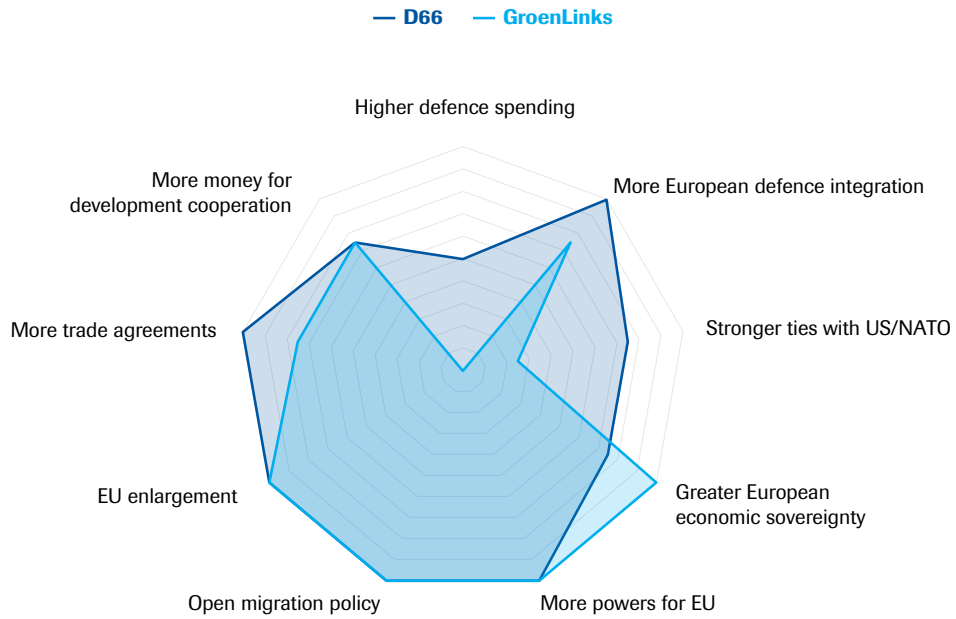
**CDA vs CU**

- The two parties share many common views. They have similar positions with regard to European defence integration, the defence budget, European economic sovereignty, the strengthening of European powers, labour migration, trade and spending on development cooperation.
- The CDA is explicitly in favour of EU enlargement, while CU is not.



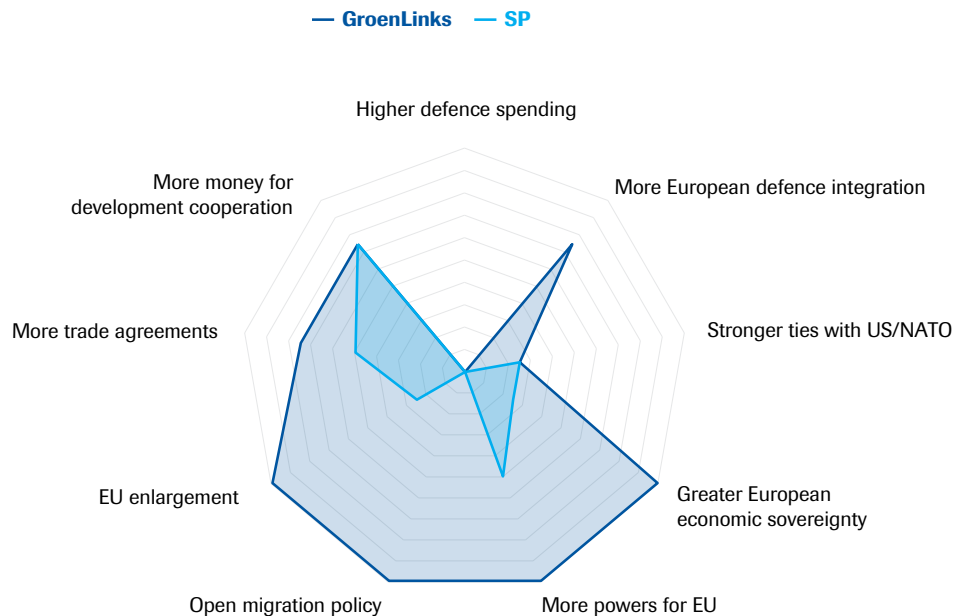
**CDA vs VVD**

- The two parties have different views on the importance of the transatlantic relationship and NATO: while the CDA focuses more on European defence cooperation outside NATO, the VVD is strongly Atlanticist.
- The VVD attaches fewer conditions to trade agreements and has fewer reservations about labour migration.
- The CDA is more enthusiastic about development cooperation, while the VVD wants to cut the development cooperation budget.



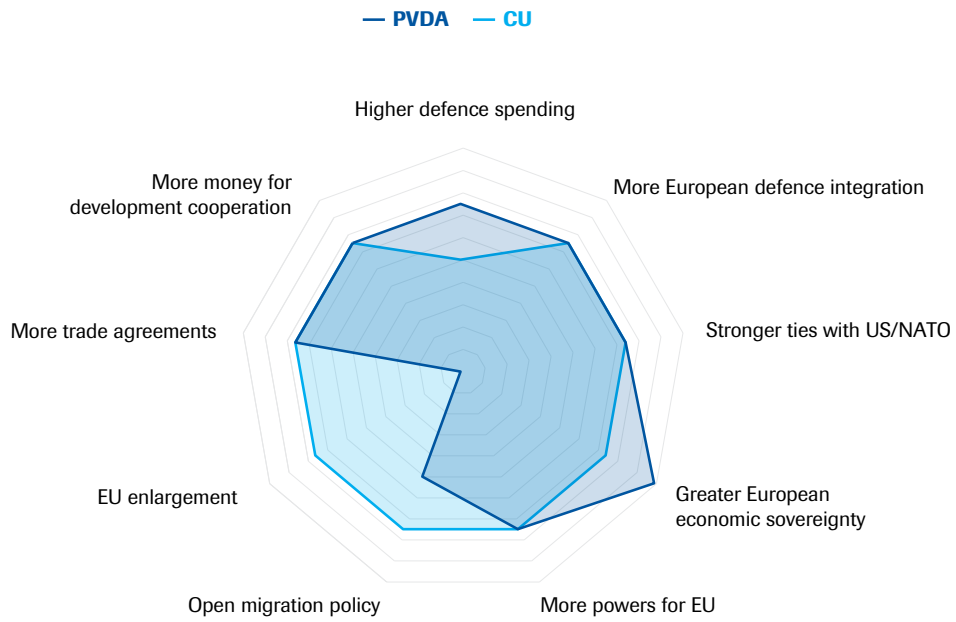
**D66 vs GroenLinks**

- D66 and GroenLinks have similar views on strengthening the EU, EU enlargement, labour migration and development cooperation.
- D66 calls for a higher defence budget and has higher ambitions with regard to European defence cooperation. The party is also more enthusiastic about trade agreements than GroenLinks. GroenLinks wants to change the Dutch relationship with NATO.
- Both parties want greater European economic sovereignty, but GroenLinks also connects this with a “reevaluation of manufacturing industry in the Netherlands and Europe”.



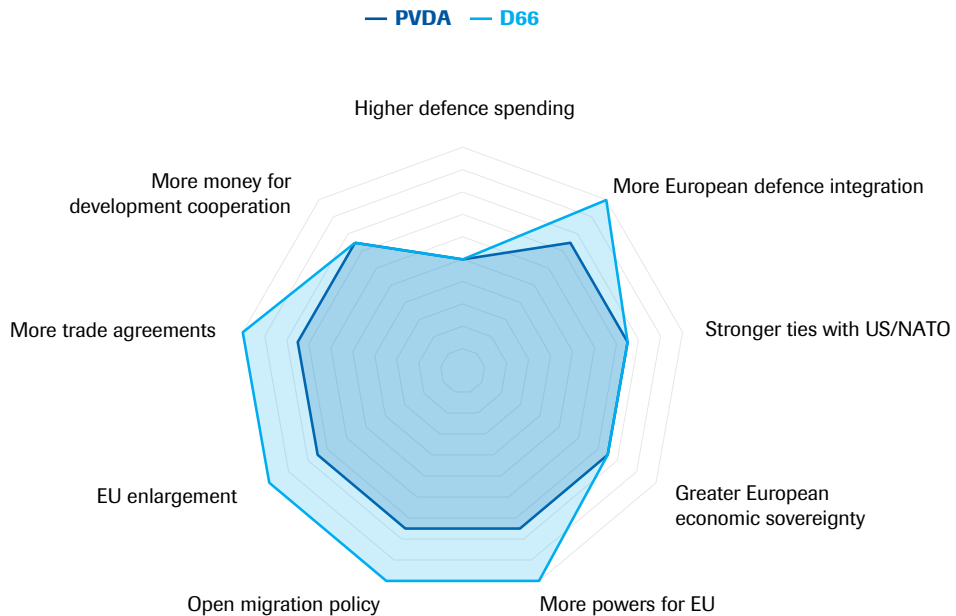
**GroenLinks vs SP**

- GroenLinks is more strongly committed to European cooperation than the SP.
- Both parties want to devote 0.7% of GNI to development cooperation and to reduce Europe’s dependence on the US and NATO.



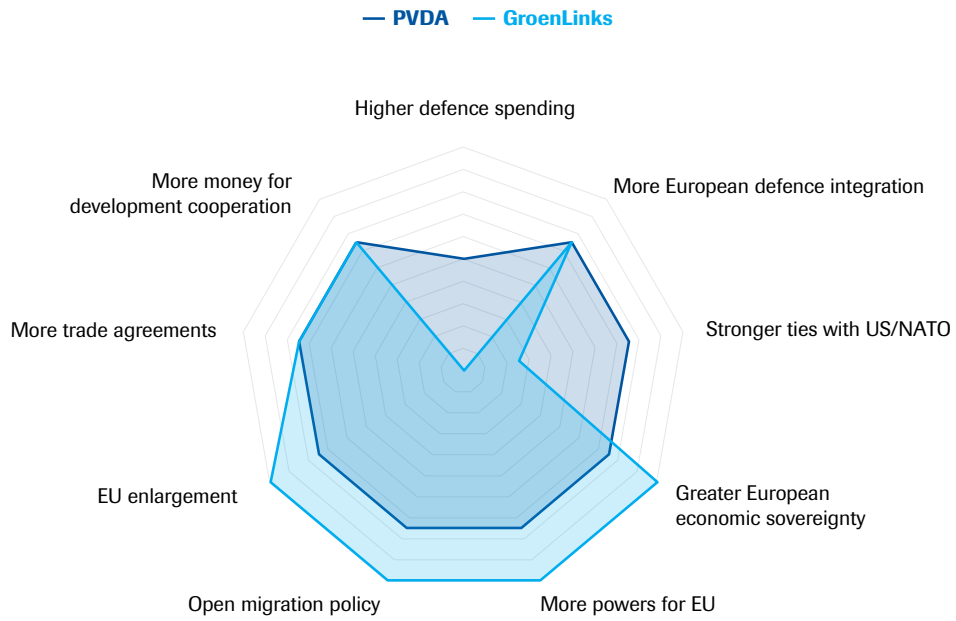
**PvdA vs CU**

- CU and the PvdA have similar views on European defence integration, relations with the US, trade agreements and development cooperation.
- The PvdA supports European enlargement under certain conditions. CU says nothing about it in its manifesto.
- The PvdA wants a more open migration policy than CU: the PvdA wants migration to be shaped by the needs of the Dutch labour market, whereas CU wants to set strict quotas.
- Both parties want greater European economic sovereignty and both want to scrap the Nordstream2 gas pipeline. But CU wants to see “a robust industrial policy on a European and national scale” while the PvdA aims for sovereignty mainly in the digital field.



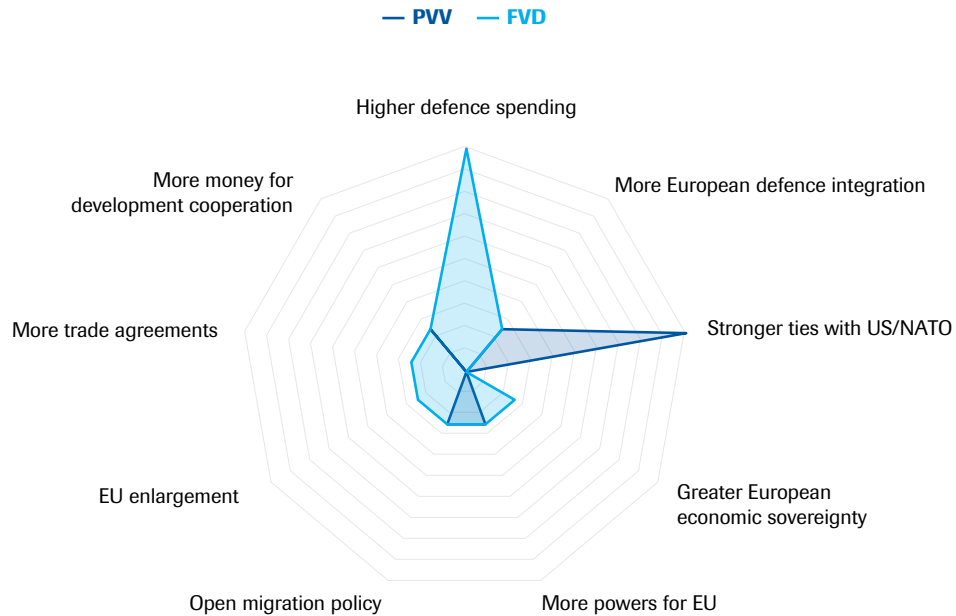
**PvdA vs D66**

- D66 and the PvdA have similar views, but in a number of areas D66 is more ambitious – or less reticent – than the PvdA.
- D66 wants to give the EU more powers, and is more enthusiastic about enlargement, European defence integration and European trade policy than the PvdA.



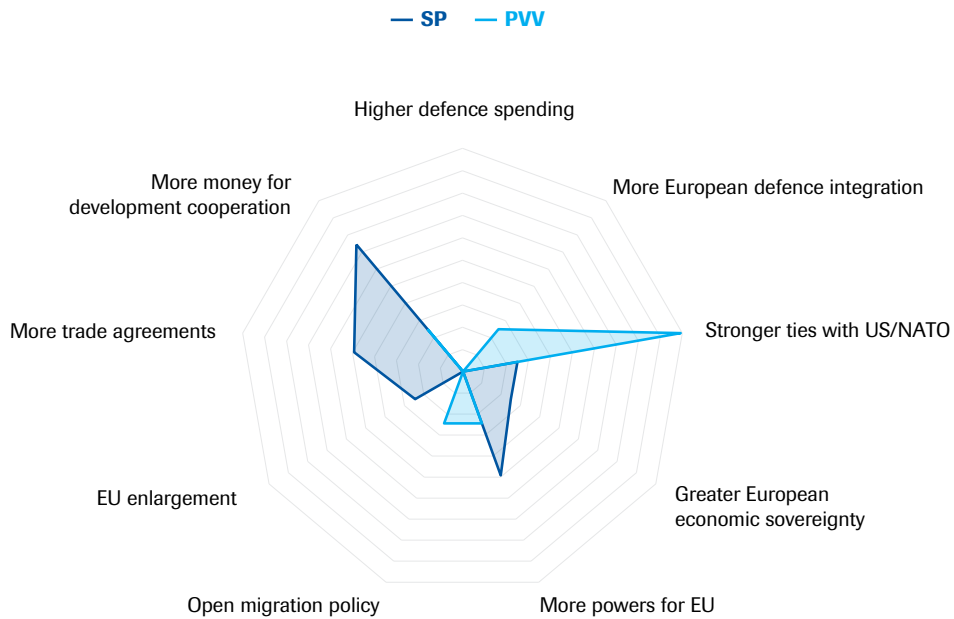
**PvdA vs GroenLinks**

- The PvdA wants to increase the defence budget, whereas GroenLinks does not mention the subject.
- GroenLinks is much more critical of the transatlantic relationship than the PvdA.
- GroenLinks is a stronger supporter of European economic sovereignty than the PvdA.
- GroenLinks seeks more powers for the European Union and a more open migration policy. GroenLinks is also more enthusiastic about possible EU enlargement than the PvdA.



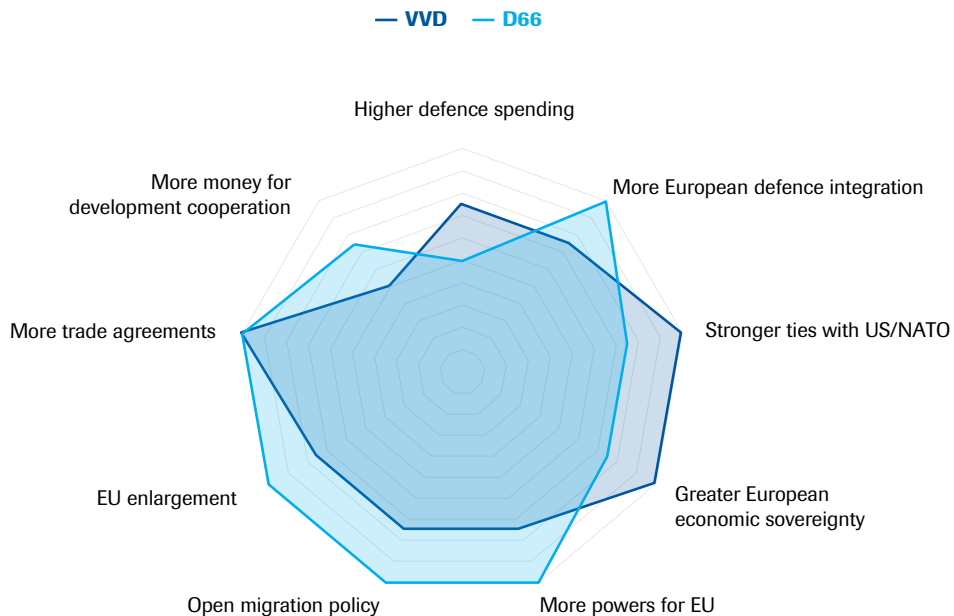
**PVV vs FvD**

- Both parties have little ambition on European and international cooperation.
- The FvD wants to raise the defence budget "at least" to the 2% NATO benchmark, while the PVV does not mention the subject.
- The PVV is a strong supporter of transatlantic ties, whereas the FvD omits the subject in its manifesto.



**SP vs PVV**

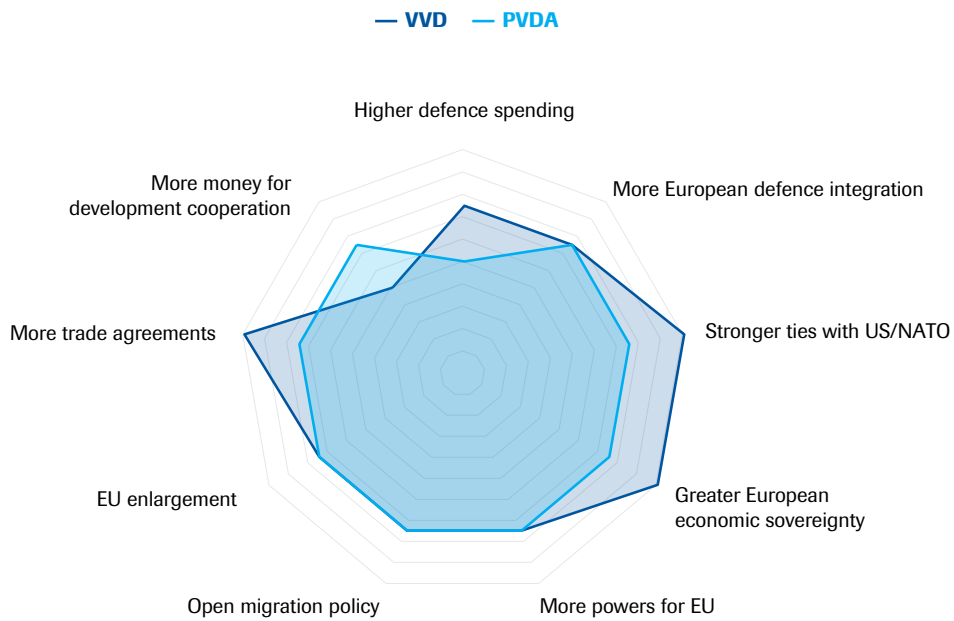
- The PVV backs strong links with the US and NATO, whereas the SP wants a fundamental revision of the relationship with NATO.
- The SP wants to reform the EU, but opposes 'Nexit'.
- The SP wants to devote 0.7% of GNI to development cooperation, whereas the PVV wants to abolish the development cooperation budget entirely.
- Both parties say nothing in their manifesto about defence spending.



**VVD vs D66**

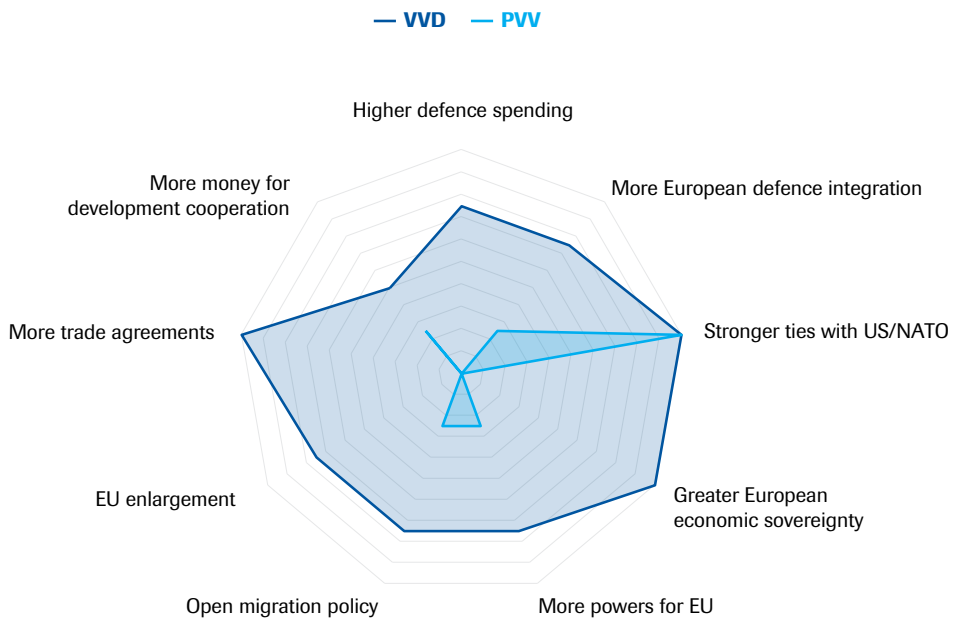
- Both parties are strong supporters of an active trade policy.
- D66 is a stronger supporter of European defence integration than the VVD.
- The VVD is Atlanticist, whereas D66 wants the EU to adopt a more independent stance towards the United States.
- D66 supports labour migration, wants to give the EU more powers, in principle favours EU enlargement with the Western Balkan countries and wants to devote 0.7% of GNI to development cooperation. The VVD is more hesitant on these points and seeks cuts to the development cooperation budget.
- The VVD is more ambitious with regard to the defence budget and greater European economic sovereignty.





**VVD vs PvdA**

- Despite key differences of emphasis, the foreign affairs views of the VVD and the PvdA are similar with regard to EU enlargement, European defence cooperation and the extent to which the Netherlands should be open to labour migration.
- The VVD is more committed to strong ties with NATO and the United States than the PvdA.
- The VVD is more enthusiastic about European economic sovereignty and trade agreements than the PvdA.
- The PvdA wants to meet the OECD standard of 0.7% of GNI for development cooperation, whereas the VVD is critical and seeks cuts.



**VVD vs PVV**

- The VVD is a stronger backer of European and international cooperation than the PVV.
- The PVV and the VVD both emphasise the importance, and primacy, of a strong transatlantic relationship as the basis of Dutch security policy.

		Seats (according to Peilingwijzer 19-2-2021)		
Name	Parties involved	Minimum	Maximum	Main problem areas
<i>Rutte-3</i>	VVD.CDA.D66.CU	74	84	Migration policy, asylum/refugee policy and possibly EU enlargement
<i>Right-Left</i>	VVD.CDA.GL.PVDA	79	89	Transatlantic relations, migration policy, asylum/refugee policy and possibly defence budget
<i>Liberal-progressive</i>	VVD.D66.GL.PVDA	74	84	Transatlantic relations, asylum/refugee policy and possibly defence budget
<i>Christian Purple</i>	VVD.D66.PVDA.CU	68	78	Migration policy, asylum/refugee policy and possibly EU enlargement
<i>Blue-Green</i>	VVD.CDA.D66	69	77	Migration policy, asylum/refugee policy
<i>Blue-Green-Red</i>	VVD.CDA.PVDA	68	76	Asylum/refugee policy
<i>Christian Right</i>	VVD.CDA.CU.SGP.50+	64	76	EU enlargement, possibly defence budget, possibly trade agreements, possibly European economic sovereignty, possibly migration policy
<i>GreenRight</i>	VVD.CDA.GL	67	75	Transatlantic relations, migration policy, asylum/refugee policy and possibly defence budget

### Possible coalitions and problem areas in foreign policy

Which views on foreign affairs could pose problems during the formation of the government or during its term of office? Possible majority coalitions can be identified on the basis of recent polling data. We used data from *Peilingwijzer* of 19 February 2021. Drawing on the above analysis, it is possible to assess the potential problems these coalitions may encounter in foreign policy terms.

The following parameters have been taken into account in formulating possible coalitions. The CDA, D66 and the VVD have ruled out cooperation with the FvD and the PVV. Also, coalitions of six or more parties have been disregarded.

The possible coalitions are set out below. The opinion polls conducted on 19 February clearly show that no majority can be obtained without the VVD. On that basis there are eight conceivable variations that result in a coalition of 76 seats or more.

The right-hand column of the table presents the foreign affairs issues that demonstrate the widest divergence of views among the

coalition partners. They are drawn from the three foreign affairs subjects about which the Dutch public is most concerned and the nine analysed foreign affairs themes. Since not all parties have a view on every issue, this column also highlights possible problem areas. This leads to six concluding observations:

- There is no coalition where the positions on matters of foreign policy are not a potential problem, either during the negotiations to form a coalition or throughout the coalition's term in office.
- In seven of the eight possible coalitions, the views on asylum and refugee policy are far apart. The CDA, and particularly the VVD, support a much stricter asylum and refugee policy than parties such as the PvdA or D66. It would not be the first time that the issue of refugees would prove to be an insurmountable obstacle to form a government.
- In five of the eight possible coalitions, the differences on labour migration policy are substantial. Policy towards migrant workers could thus become a major bone of contention in the formation process.
- In three of the eight coalitions the views on ties with the United States and NATO are far apart. The question is, however, to what extent differences on this issue are mitigated by the Biden presidency's

conciliatory approach towards Europe. In a coalition of D66, GroenLinks, the PvdA and the VVD, the VVD's position on the nuclear role of the Dutch Air Force may, however, be a deal-breaker for GroenLinks or PvdA.

- In a five-party government with the CDA, CU, the SGP, the VVD and 50+, the views on EU enlargement are far apart. There are four other issues that could potentially cause difficulties but where uncertainty remains because 50+ has not adopted a position on these issues in its manifesto.
- The coalition that shows the lowest degree of variance on foreign policy positions is the one made up of CDA, PvdA and VVD. Although there are always differences of emphasis, they are not as wide as in other combinations of potential coalition partners. A stumbling bloc, however, could be asylum and refugee policy. But if agreement is reached on that point, than this coalition would have a chance of success in terms of foreign policy.

Foreign and security policy is becoming increasingly politicised. The views of the 13 largest parties on key questions of foreign policy differ substantially. The election campaign will nevertheless be dominated by other subjects and foreign affairs will only feature to a limited extent. It is clear, however, that Dutch voters are truly offered a choice to determine the direction of Dutch foreign and security policy when they cast their vote on 17 March.

### Sources: List of party manifestos

- |                              |                        |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| - <a href="#">CDA</a>        | - <a href="#">PvdD</a> |
| - <a href="#">CU</a>         | - <a href="#">PVV</a>  |
| - <a href="#">DENK</a>       | - <a href="#">SGP</a>  |
| - <a href="#">D66</a>        | - <a href="#">SP</a>   |
| - <a href="#">FVD</a>        | - <a href="#">VVD</a>  |
| - <a href="#">GroenLinks</a> | - <a href="#">50+</a>  |
| - <a href="#">PVDA</a>       |                        |

### About the Clingendael Institute

Clingendael – the Netherlands Institute of International Relations – is a leading think tank and academy on international affairs. Through our analyses, training and public debate we aim to inspire and equip governments, businesses, and civil society in order to contribute to a secure, sustainable and just world.

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