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CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - Netherlands

[version 1; peer review: 5 approved]

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v1 **First published:** 09 Jul 2026, **6**:241
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24218.1
Latest published: 09 Jul 2026, **6**:241
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24218.1

Abstract

This country report, prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action, discusses populist Euroscepticism in Dutch party politics, as well as its limited consequences. Criticisms of the EU's functioning notwithstanding, mainstream parties as well as a large majority of Dutch citizens continue to support membership of the European Union. The salience of European integration as a campaign issue has generally been low. Two far-right parties have – in one case temporarily – taken 'hard Eurosceptic' positions, voicing support for a Dutch exit from the EU. Yet the report suggests that populist parties in the Netherlands have been characterised by an 'instrumental Euroscepticism' whereby the EU is brought up as a theme insofar as it is seen to help emphasise a political actor's message and underlying ideological agenda.

Keywords

Populism, Euroscepticism, Netherlands

This article is included in the COST Actions gateway.

This article is included in the Linking Euroscepticism and Populism (EUPopLink) collection.

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

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Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the European Union's Framework Programme for Research & Innovation as part of the COST Action CA23102], as supported by the COST Association (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

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How to cite this article: van Kessel S. **EUPopLink Country report - Netherlands [version 1; peer review: 5 approved]** Open Research Europe 2026, **6**:241 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.24218.1

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1. Introduction

This country report, prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action (Andreadis & Vasilopoulou, 2026), and following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026), discusses populist Euroscepticism in Dutch party politics, as well as its limited consequences. Since the turn of the 21st century, Dutch politics has seen the rise and decline of various populist parties, particularly on the socio-cultural right. A few of those have adopted hard-Eurosceptic positions. Both Geert Wilders's Party for Freedom (PVV) and the more extremist Forum for Democracy (FvD) expressed a desire for the Netherlands to leave the European Union – though the PVV has shifted back to 'soft Euroscepticism' more recently.

With such calls these parties did not echo widespread public rejection of EU membership. Historically, the Dutch population generally showed more enthusiasm for EU membership compared with other (founding) members states (Aarts & van der Kolk, 2006). Eurobarometer data from Spring 2019 suggested that only 8% of the Dutch would vote 'leave' in a hypothetical referendum on EU membership (below the EU average of 14%), and that 84% considered Dutch EU membership to be a good thing – only Luxemburgish respondents answered more positively (European Parliament, 2019: 16; 21). That is not to say that the Dutch have always been overly enthusiastic about the specific course and nature of the EU – the popular rejection by referendum of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and the EU-Ukraine association agreement in 2016 are cases in point. Eurobarometer data from Spring 2026 showed that, while still more positive than the EU average, only half of Dutch citizens had a positive image of the EU (versus 21% who had a negative image) (European Commission, 2026: 16).

This data is congruent with the observation that for many decades there has been a 'permissive consensus' among the Dutch population – which generally entrusted political elites with managing the European integration process – although there have also been signs of a 'constraining dissensus' at various occasions since the start of the 21st century, whereby many citizens rejected the elites' drive for more integration (see Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Certainly at the time of the Eurozone crisis, the EU also received increased public attention, and the PVV, for a limited time, aimed to explicitly capitalise on disgruntlement with potential Dutch bailout contributions and 'diktats from Brussels'. The subsequent migrant crisis and Brexit also kept the EU in the news. Yet the salience of European integration in the eyes of the public has generally remained low. In a poll of June 2025, only 5% of respondents mentioned the EU amongst their top three political topics they thought deserved priority (van der Schelde et al., 2025: 9). 'Europe' was close to a 'non issue' in the latest parliamentary election campaign of autumn 2025. This suggests that, while recent key events in world politics – not least the war in Ukraine and the second term of U.S. President Trump – have boosted the salience of international politics, they offer no obvious scope for reinvigorated populist Euroscepticism.

2. Populist political actors

The most successful populist party family in the 21st century – the period this report focuses on – has been the populist radical right (PRR). As the following overview demonstrates, the Dutch PRR is also marked by remarkable fragmentation.

The oldest case that is still represented in parliament, however, has a left-wing socio-economic ideology. The **Socialist Party (SP)** was founded in 1971, but entered Dutch parliament only in 1994, after it departed from staunch communist doctrines and adopted a more populist discourse, which blamed the political establishment for subscribing to neoliberalism and the free-market ideology, thus ignoring the voice of the ordinary (economically marginalised) people. The party reached its electoral high point with 16.6% of the vote in the 2006 national election. While the SP is still habitually identified as a populist party, populism has become a less regular element in the party's discourse during the past decades (van Kessel, 2015; Rooduijn et al., 2023, 2024). Meanwhile, its electoral results have deteriorated quite sharply since the mid-2010s; in the October 2025 national election the party received less than 2% of the nationwide vote.

The first right-wing populist party that entered Dutch parliament after the turn of the 21st century was the **List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)**, named after its founder who was murdered in May 2002, just over a week before election day. Fortuyn was highly dismissive of the Dutch political elite, especially the incumbent government, and managed to place the issue of immigration and cultural integration of Muslims firmly on the political agenda. Even without its undisputable figurehead, the LPF gained 17% of the vote in 2002, and entered a short-lived and chaotic governing coalition. The electoral appeal of the LPF declined quickly, not least due to continuous infighting, and the party eventually disbanded in 2007.

After the rapid demise of the LPF, Geert Wilders' **Party for Freedom (PVV)** has established itself as a more radical PRR force in the Netherlands, becoming the dominant PRR party since its entry into parliament in 2006. Wilders blamed political elites for disregarding the concerns and interests of ordinary citizens, and for a raft of social problems, not least related to the spread of multiculturalism and 'Islamisation' of Dutch society. Between 2010 and 2012 the PVV provided

support for a right-wing minority coalition, in exchange for the implementation of stricter immigration measures. The party reached its high point with 23.5% of the vote in the 2023 national election, becoming the largest party in parliament. The PVV subsequently joined a governing coalition in July 2024 – with Wilders remaining seated in parliament – that lasted less than one year. As in 2012, the PVV leader withdrew support from government after tabling demands that were unacceptable to his coalition partners. With a vote share of 16.7%, the party faced a considerable loss in the early election of October 2025, and the PVV suffered a split in January 2026. Seven MPs broke with Geert Wilders, forming **Group Markuszower**, named after the leading dissident.

Another far-right party represented in Dutch parliament (since 2017) is the **Forum for Democracy (FvD)**. It progressively radicalised its positions, starting to propagate the 'great replacement theory' and various other conspiracies about elite control of government and society. The party benefited from the PVV's recent decline: it more than doubled its vote share in 2025, receiving 4.5% of the vote, and also expanded its nationwide presence considerably after local council elections in March 2026. A more moderate split from the FvD, **Right Answer 21 (JA21)**, similarly benefited from the PVV's setback, gaining almost 6% the vote.

Finally, the **Farmer–Citizen Movement (BBB)** has also flirted with radical right ideology but can perhaps best be classified as more unusual case of 'agrarian populism'. It was founded in 2019 as a response to widespread farmers' protests against nitrogen emission restrictions. It has rhetorically contrasted the cosmopolitan and unresponsive elites with farmers but also 'ordinary people' in rural areas more generally, whilst also favouring stricter immigration policy. The BBB performed particularly well in the March 2023 provincial elections (attracting one fifth of the vote), but received less than 5% of the vote in the November 2023 parliamentary election. It then entered the short-lived cabinet in which the PVV also took part, and only received 2.7% of the vote in the October 2025 election.

In terms of international collaboration, those of the above parties that gained seats in European Parliament (EP) have collaborated in transnational Groups. PVV and BBB are represented in the current EP, and are affiliated with the far-right Patriots for Europe (PfE) and the 'mainstream' conservative European People's Party (EPP), respectively. Longstanding PVV leader Wilders has furthermore been a prominent figure in international far-right circles, as illustrated by his appearance at the May 2025 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest, Hungary (hosted by his political friend Viktor Orbán). FvD and its leader Thierry Baudet have connections with various alt-right groups and individuals abroad – Baudet for instance appeared in Steve Bannon's 'War Room' podcast. The party has also been alleged to cultivate ties with Putin's Russia (Schaart, 2020), and it has continued to call for the lifting of sanctions against the country, and for the normalisation of (trade) relations (FvD, 2025: 75).

3. Positions on 'Europe' and the Populism-Euroscepticism nexus

In line with its left-wing populist ideology, the SP has traditionally described the EU as an undemocratic and neoliberal project that served the interests of large companies, and which threatened working conditions and social rights. Yet the party has remained clearly soft-Eurosceptic, not shunning calls for cooperation to tackle cross-border problems and to improve labour rights. The party's position did not fundamentally change in response to significant political events of the past decade. Brexit was considered by its then leader Emile Roemer to be a 'wake-up call', and seen as an opportunity to make Europe less neo-liberal and more democratic; 'away from the Europe of mutual competition and [towards] building a slimmed-down EU' (SP, 2016). The Covid-19 pandemic offered no real scope for increased Eurosecpticism, while the SP in fact saw a role for the EU in increasing diplomatic pressure on Russia and Israel at the time of the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts. Yet it also continued to voice opposition to militarism and the creation of a joint European defence apparatus (SP, 2024: 21–2). Whilst expressing support for Ukraine, the SP remained sceptical of it accession to the EU, asking for a referendum on any EU enlargement (SP, 2025: 25). In its 2025 manifesto, the SP continued to call for a social and just (but non-federal and more democratic) EU. The party saw potential in European cooperation as a protective means against the 'aggressive power politics' of countries including the U.S. and Russia (SP, 2025: 24).

Turning to the populists on the right, the short LPF party manifesto notably lacked outspoken Euroscepticm; it declared that the LPF was a 'proponent of the EU' as long as national identity and sovereignty – where possible – could be preserved (LPF, 2002: 7). Whilst still emphasising economic benefits of free trade, the PVV has from the outset described the EU more pejoratively as an undemocratic 'super state', and lamented the handing over of sovereignty to 'Brussels bureaucrats' (e.g. Wilders, 2005). In the early election campaign of 2012 the PVV radicalised its position on the EU, associating the EU more loudly than before with unwanted immigration, corrupt, undemocratic and incompetent governance, and with large costs for Dutch taxpayers having to prop up insolvent Southern and Eastern European members states in the context of the Eurozone crisis (PVV, 2012). For the first time, the party proposed to end Dutch membership of the EU, thus moving from 'soft' to 'hard' Euroscepticism. This position was maintained in the subsequent years and election campaigns, including in the wake of Brexit, even though the PVV increasingly de-emphasised the issue

(van Kessel et al., 2020). In the 2023 national election campaign, the party still supported a binding referendum on Nexit. Its 2025 manifesto spent very little space on 'Europe', and did not mention any desire for leaving the EU. The document instead presented the idea to use vetoes to accomplish various opt-outs from EU policies and to 'overhaul the EU from within' (PVV, 2025: 30).

Similar to the PVV, FvD has lamented the loss of sovereignty in various policy areas as a result of EU membership. Yet it has continued to explicitly support a 'Nexit' through 'an intelligent withdrawal' from the EU, after which the Netherland should join the European Free Trade Association (now comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) and re-introduce its own national currency (FvD, 2025: 24). Re-gaining sovereignty and continuation of economic cooperation have also been key to JA21's discourse on the EU. But, in line with its positioning as the 'moderate' radical right alternative, the 2025 manifesto did not express any desire to leave the EU, instead calling for a 'much slimmer' and 'agile' EU (JA21, 2025: 59). BBB has similarly expressed the desire for the EU to return to its core tasks and limiting bureaucracy, while safeguarding the national interest (BBB, 2025). The party unsurprisingly called for the protection of the (national) agriculture and fisheries industry.

The responses of the right-wing populist parties to recent global political events have been mixed, but in these responses the EU's role was never a central reference point. PVV and, especially, FvD were vocal in blaming the Dutch government, rather than the EU, for alleged flaws in the approach towards the Covid-19 pandemic (though they did call for closing EU internal borders) (de Lange, 2022). The EU did not play a prominent role in reactions to the Ukraine War either. Wilders, who had previously hailed Putin as a 'true Patriot', has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but has mainly framed the war in terms of its consequences for the Dutch people (referring e.g. to inflation and gas prices) (Nijhuis et al. 2023). FvD has not explicitly supported Russia's invasion but has laid the blame on Western powers for provoking Putin's actions. BBB and JA21 have offered stronger (rhetorical) condemnations of Russia and support for Ukraine, but (like PVV and FvD) have not been supportive of Ukrainian EU membership.

Regarding the election of Donald Trump, Wilders has hailed the U.S. president as a 'brother in arms' at a conference of the EP Patriots Group (Klaassen, 2025). Yet he and other PVV politicians also voiced concern that Trump's policies may not always be aligned with the Dutch interest. BBB leader Van der Plas expressed the need for more EU member state collaboration in the face of the president's announced trade tariffs (Business Insider Nederland, 2024). In an April 2005 parliamentary contribution, former FvD leader Thierry Baudet conversely argued that EU membership was detrimental to the Netherlands as it hampered the Netherlands' freedom to strike a trade deal with the U.S. (Tweede Kamer, 2025). In its 2025 manifesto, JA21 (2025: 58) distanced itself from 'rising anti-Americanism', but did not link trans-Atlantic relations to the issue of European integration. More recent actions of the U.S. president – including threats to invade Greenland and the Iran War – are unlikely to have incentivised Dutch populist right-wing parties to increase their pro-Trump and anti-EU rhetoric.

Generally speaking, the positions of the Dutch PRR towards the EU have not been greatly affected or shaped by international events of the past ten years. These events may in fact have reduced the strategic appeal of a vocal (populist) Eurosceptic discourse, given that they highlighted the costs of leaving the EU (the Brexit process), or fostered the narrative that Europe needs to form a united bloc (versus Russia and Trump). But the PRR's Euroscepticism remains informed both by populism and nativism: the EU is seen as an undemocratic, unaccountable and elitist organisation that stands far removed from ordinary citizens, and as one that undermines *national* sovereignty or even cultural identity. Similar frames have been adopted by the left-wing SP, even though this party predominantly discussed the EU with reference to socio-economic rather than socio-cultural issues (Pirro & van Kessel, 2018). Different from the SP, Dutch right-wing populist parties have acknowledged the economic benefits of free trade with other European countries. As will be described next, (occasional) soft-Eurosceptic discourse without an obvious populist frame was primarily the prerogative of traditional mainstream parties.

4. Responses to Euroscepticism and consequences

The 21st century Dutch political field has been very fragmented, but there are only a few parties that attempted to politicise the issue of European integration (besides the PVV in 2012). The Euro-federalist Volt is the clearest example, and the liberal Democrats'66 (D66) – the surprise winners of the 2025 parliamentary election – have traditionally also supported a strong EU. These are parties that have favoured further European integration, and thus take an adversarial stance towards the fiercest Eurosceptics of the PRR. The three party families that have been dominant in the second half of the 20th century – the Christian democrats, conservative liberals and social democrats – have also traditionally supported the central tenets of European integration – albeit less vocally – and viewed EU membership as a cornerstone of economic prosperity, freedom and peace.

The collective support for these traditional party families has dwindled in the past 25 years, whilst particularly the radical right block has grown. As in many other European countries, the result has been that the issue of immigration has become firmly entrenched on the political agenda. Particularly the centre-right parties have adopted an accommodative strategy with regard to this issue, calling for stricter immigration policies (de Lange, 2018; van Kessel, 2021). But the PRR's growth has done less to alter the course of mainstream parties on 'Europe', both in terms of issue salience – which has remained low in national election campaigns – and concrete positions. In recent years, too, the conservative liberal VVD, social democratic PvdA and Christian democratic CDA remained firmly committed to Dutch EU membership and generally supported European cooperation on cross-border issues to safeguard economic prosperity and security. That is not to say there were no Eurosceptic notes in their discourse. VVD and CDA typically warned against too much supranational interference, and argued the EU should focus on 'core tasks'. PvdA has called for a more 'social Europe', one less based on the principles of market liberalism.

Yet in contrast to the PRR's *nativism*, its *Euroscepticism* has been fairly inconsequential in terms of influencing political competitors. The same applies to concrete policy impact – and this is perhaps best illustrated by the lack of resistance to joint European measures by the previous Dutch government (2024–2025), in which the PVV took part as the largest coalition party. Research by the investigative journalism platform *Follow the Money* suggests that PVV ministers were hardly active in seeking to block or amend EU policy, while supporting several pieces of supranational legislation in the Council of Ministers (Teffer, 2025). There was a botched attempt of PVV immigration minister Marjolein Faber to seek a Dutch opt-out from EU migration and asylum policy, but this was not seriously considered – illustrating a more general decline of Dutch influence during the government's tenure (Hekster & Ockhuijsen, 2025). Fierce Euroscepticism by the PVV was mainly voiced in national parliament. The party (together with JA21, FvD and BBB) for instance opposed joint European loans to support Ukraine's military efforts, but this ultimately did not affect the government's course of action (support). The subsequent government that was installed in February 2026, a minority coalition between D66, VVD, and CDA, has embarked on a more traditional EU-oriented course again.

5. Conclusion

Similar to other countries, populist parties in the Netherlands have voiced Eurosceptic rhetoric compatible with their broader ideological nature. The SP has often framed the EU as a neoliberal organisation that furthered the interest of multinationals and the rich, at the expense of (underprivileged) ordinary citizens and workers. Its Euroscepticism has remained 'soft', however, and the EU has been portrayed as an organisation that could be reformed into something more benign. The far-right PVV and FvD expressed more radical Euroscepticism, even though the former has recently abandoned its 'hard' Eurosceptic position. The fact that the PVV has noticeably changed course (both in terms of position as well as salience), indicates that the EU has not been a stable core issue for the party, even though it has been consistently framed by means of the PRR's nativist and populist arguments. The issue of immigration has been much more central to the discourse of the PRR, and indeed to the 'mainstream' parties which have felt its electoral pressure.

These observations suggest that we can speak of an 'instrumental Euroscepticism' whereby the EU is brought up as a theme insofar as it is seen to help emphasise a political actor's message and underlying ideological agenda. This idea is further reinforced by the observation that, in the Dutch context, the salience of EU membership or European integration has been low: Euroscepticism has been primarily elite-driven, rather than emerging from widespread and active public hostility towards the EU. In the context of Russian aggression and unpredictable foreign policy under the Trump administration – in which calls for more conjoint European action have become louder – it is unlikely that populist actors see much point in further amplifying their hostility towards the EU.

That said, there are clear nuances in terms of the 'hardness' of Euroscepticism across the various Dutch populist actors. In a crowded field in which far-right parties have to distinguish themselves from like-minded competitors in order to be electorally successful, 'Europe' serves as a potentially useful issue (see Taggart, 1998). Rather than being a topic of key importance as such, the issue of European integration can be used by parties to signal their general position on the ideological spectrum, and their distinctiveness from one another.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

No primary dataset is associated with this paper. The study is based on secondary sources, all of which are appropriately cited in the text and listed in the bibliography.

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔

Version 1

Reviewer Report 28 August 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26224.r77398

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✔ **Pieter de Wilde**
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This is a great overview of Dutch partisan Euroscepticism, with a particular good focus on Euroscepticism among populist radical right parties. I congratulate the author on a highly accessible and concise overview. A notable question remains how strategic parties are. Just from the observation that parties change position from hard to soft Euroscepticism, it remains hard to conclude that this is because they no longer see electoral gain in hard Euroscepticism. We would ideally have data on the motivation of party ideologues, but since this hard to come by in reliable ways, the inference from behaviour to motivation may stand, though I would qualify it more. The excellent general character of this report not withstanding, a few critical remarks and suggestions for further reflection remain, which I briefly present below.

How true is the claim that the Dutch population has generally showed more enthusiasm for EU membership compared with other (founding) member states? While I certainly see this for the late 1980s and 1990s, there are also clear arguments by Vollaard about Dutch protestant led opposition to the integration process in the 1950s against what was seen as a papal plot to unite Europe and the Dutch government's footdragging in the early 1950s which ultimately led to a delay in the vote on the EDC in the French Parliament, allowing a newly elected French Parliament to vote it down in 1954 (see Milward, The European Rescue of the Nation State).

The report focuses on populist radical right (PRR) parties, which makes sense given that the most outspoken version of Euroscepticism can be found there. But is it not also relevant, particularly in light of the implications for the Dutch negotiation position in Brussels, that mainstream parties - PvdA, CDA and VVD - have become much more Eurosceptic over time? This has policy implications for the official Dutch government's position in Brussels. The VVD has shifted from being a liberal party at the heart of ALDE, to a conservative party that - in terms of ideology - should be part of the ECR rather than RENEW. The CDA followed suit for a long time, although its new leader - Bontenbal - is remarkably pro-European.

The report discusses the influence of Donald Trump on PRR Euroscepticism in The Netherlands, though staying mostly speculative as to its impact. I wonder first of all what the impact of Victor

Orban's long-successful hijacking of the EU was and what Putin's aggression was. Arguably, both of them turned hard Eurosceptics into soft ones. First, because the PRR saw with Orban that it was possible to successfully blackmail the EU and turn it into a cash cow for a far right autocratic agenda. Second, because too much open criticism of the EU might make PRR too vulnerable to be seen as fifth column for Putin. What is your view on this and are you aware of scientific evidence exploring these propositions?

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Comparative Politics, European Studies, Political Sociology

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 18 August 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26224.r78635

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Andrei Zhirnov
University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

The article seeks to describe and contextualise the views of Dutch populist parties on European integration. It reports that Dutch voters are largely pro-EU, but this issue is not of high salience to them; that Dutch populist right parties are hard Eurosceptics; and that mainstream parties do not

accommodate on this dimension. The report is quite detailed and informative; the text is easy to navigate and is well written.
There are a few steps that could strengthen the article.

1. At the moment, the arguments about voters are supported by 3 isolated data points. Public opinion fluctuates, and a single statistic may not be as informative as a graph or a table that how the statistic changes over time. There are a few recurrent questions in Eurobarometer that have been part of their questionnaires for decades and can be traced over time (e.g., whether the respondent considers the EU a good thing for their country).
2. Almost all of the report focuses on political parties and does not discuss voters, except in section 1. Section 1 reports that, on average, Dutch voters are quite positive about European integration and that European integration is a low-salience issue for them. I find this discussion quite interesting but somewhat incomplete: it would be useful to close the loop at the end of the report by discussing the implications of voters' pro-European attitudes for the Euroscepticism (or lack thereof) of the Dutch populist parties.
3. In section 3, the link between PRR's Euroscepticism and the election of Donald Trump (and, less so, other global events) could be made more obvious. It could be useful to clarify what the reader should expect or conclude from these parties' responses to these events.
4. There are a couple of places where "yet" is used to indicate a contrast between two statements, but that contrast is not obvious: e.g., in paragraph 3 of section 3, in paragraph 3 of section 4. This might well be the legacy of a previous version of this paper or something that needs further clarification.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: comparative politics, elections, populism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 18 August 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26224.r77396

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Ben Crum
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, North Holland, The Netherlands

This country report offers a solid overview of populist parties in the Netherlands, their stances on European integration, and their impact. As the author is a well-established expert on the topic, the paper is well-informed. It is also rather brief and sometimes almost telegraphic in its writing. But I take that to be intention of this series.

On the whole I have only relatively minor suggestions that may help to strengthen the paper a bit still.

I think the paper's overall conclusion that populist Euroscepticism in the Netherlands is mostly instrumental in nature is apt. However, if that is the conclusion, then the analysis in Section 3 might highlight the two main exceptions to that claim a bit more. The one is the PVV's attempt with its manifesto for the 2012 national(!) elections to indeed also include the EU as a target of its nativism. This episode is mentioned (on p.4) but could be highlighted more, especially since the party retreated from this strategy later on. The other (which remains more underdeveloped) is the fact that the FvD very much emerged from an outspoken Eurosceptic inclination (more so than the anti-migration sentiments to which the PVV appeals). The FvD has its roots in the No-campaign for the referendum on the EU -Ukraine association treatment and Euroscepticism has also been a primary intellectual driver of its leader Thierry Baudet (as is even reflected by his PhD dissertation). Frontloading these episodes (and the parties' subsequent reversals on this) a bit more in section 3 would reinforce the eventual conclusion.

Another nuance is that I would emphasize the FvD's electoral volatility more in Section 2: it does not just benefit from the PVV's recent decline (as written on p.4) but had an earlier electoral peak at the 2019 provincial elections, after which it saw a sharp decline.

One observation that I would add as regards the "Eurosceptic notes" of the established parties (section 4) is the long and broadly shared tradition of a what may be called a soft Euroscepticism on EU finances, pooling of budgets, and other common EU financial facilities. This tradition goes (at least) back to the rather vocal position of VVD Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm in the 1990s and his haggling for a rebate for the Netherlands but was also very pronounced in the Dutch positions towards the EU handling of the eurocrises and the Covid-crisis, and in those years for instance prominently expressed by PvdA finance minister and Eurogroup chair Jeroen Dijsselbloem. In general, Dutch political parties share a strong commitment to enjoy their EU membership on the cheap (and arguably this takes the sting out of any potentially harder Euroscepticism).

While I completely subscribe to the conclusion about the "instrumental Euroscepticism", the other

point that is suggested remains more elusive to me. I am not convinced by the claim that the particular issue of European integration can be useful for “parties to signal their general position on the ideological spectrum, and their distinctiveness from one another” (cf. the last line of the abstract). If the author wants to stand by this claim, it will help me if he could back it up with a compelling example (even if only a hypothetical one).

A small question is why the introduction references the Spring 2019 Eurobarometer? At least for the question on EU membership being a good thing (or not), I am pretty sure there must be more recent Eurobarometer results.

Finally, a few minor phrasing issues;

- Some claims may benefit from explicitly specifying that they apply to the Netherlands rather than being stated in generic terms: “… they offer no obvious scope for reinvigorated populist Euroscepticism [in the Netherlands]” (p.3); “The three party families that have been dominant in the second half of the 20th century” – that is, the three-party families that have dominated Dutch politics …
- I don’t see why the second sentence in the second paragraph on p.5 would start with a “Yet”.
- I am not sure about the term “conjoint European action” (p.6); would not “joint European action” suffice?
- In the reference to the recent SP manifesto on “aggressive power politics” (p.4), I would specify that the reference is not just to [any] countries “including” the U.S. and Russia but rather that the manifesto specifically speaks of countries “like” the U.S. and Russia.

Is the background of the case’s history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: EU politics; politics of the Netherlands; populism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of

expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 17 August 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26224.r78638

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Márton Bene
ELTE Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest, Hungary

The paper provides a thorough and clearly structured overview of the characteristics of Euroscepticism among Dutch populist parties and its broader consequences. It convincingly argues that, for populist parties, Euroscepticism functions primarily as a political communication tool for signalling ideological positions and distinguishing themselves from mainstream parties ("instrumental Euroscepticism"). At the same time, however, Euroscepticism has become increasingly less salient and appears to have few substantive policy implications, while mainstream parties have shown little evidence of adapting their own positions in response. This is most likely related to the demand-side constraints discussed at the beginning of the paper: Dutch society remains relatively supportive of the EU, or at least of maintaining the status quo. While citizens may resist further deepening of European integration, there appears to be similarly little demand for reversing or substantially weakening existing integration. The paper also does an excellent job of demonstrating the nuanced differences in the Euroscepticism of individual populist parties. It is particularly commendable that the analysis considers not only parties' positions but also the salience they attach to the issue, which adds important nuance to the overall picture. I nevertheless had some reservations regarding two relatively minor points:

- The discussion of citizens' attitudes towards the EU, including support for leaving the EU, relies primarily on a single data point from 2019, supplemented by a brief reference to data collected in 2026. First, I find the 2019 evidence somewhat dated for assessing contemporary support for EU membership, particularly since attitudes and preferences regarding the EU are presumably measured regularly in public opinion surveys. Second, because the review of party positions covers approximately two and half decades, it would be useful for the demand-side discussion to adopt a similarly longitudinal perspective rather than focusing largely on a single point in time. Even if this is not the paper's primary focus, some indication of how attitudes towards the EU evolved between 2000 and 2026 would provide valuable context for interpreting changes in party-level Euroscepticism.
- As the first part of the paper notes, there have been several important instances in which Dutch citizens actively opposed further European integration, most notably the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty and the 2016 referendum on the EU–Ukraine Association Agreement. I suspect that these referendums also represented important moments in the development of Euroscepticism among Dutch populist parties. However, the paper does not discuss the roles these parties played in the respective campaigns, the positions they adopted, or the possible longer-term consequences of these episodes for their Eurosceptic strategies. Addressing these cases, even briefly, could strengthen the historical account of the evolution of populist Euroscepticism.

There is also a minor typographical error on page 5: in the discussion of Thierry Baudet's parliamentary argument, the date should be 2025 rather than 2005.

Overall, I congratulate the authors on this informative and well-executed overview.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: political communication, political behavior

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 31 July 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.26224.r77399

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Alexander Alekseev
University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

Having read the EUPopLink country report on the Netherlands, I am happy to congratulate its author on the high quality of his work.

Although the report is clearly bound by strict formatting and length limitations, it still offers the reader a thorough overview of populism, Euroscepticism, and the interactions between the two in

the Dutch context.

The report is clearly structured, well written, and covers all the key areas it intends to cover, which is important when it is used to develop policy recommendations or support students' learning process.

Therefore, my comments and recommendations focus on several comparatively underdeveloped areas that warrant attention to introduce greater clarity or enhance the analytical value of the piece.

- The right-left distinction needs to be conceptualised more clearly. In the Introduction, the author mentions that the right is defined in socio-cultural terms while the left is in socio-economic terms. This point needs greater attention as, at present, the left and right are structured along two different dimensions.
- The report focuses on the party system, and the primary political actors here are political parties. While it is fully valid from the standpoint of analysis, the role of individuals, like both party leaders like Geert Wilders and prominent activists like Eva Vlaardingerbroek. The latter play the central role in representing the Netherlands in the transnational illiberal right-wing movement and shaping mass attitudes toward the EU, which is crucial in the context of their active participation in the movement structured through opposition to the EU in its current shape
    - Maher, H. (2026). The neoliberal Great Replacement theory: On the racialization of markets and migration. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, *27*(1), 83–101. refer 1
- This observation leads me to another important point. While Euroscepticism as approached in the report seems to amount to outright rejection of the European Union as such, an important gap remains unaddressed if one does not look into the kinds of Europe that the mild Eurosceptics are willing to offer. What do the parties in question say and do to change the EU from within? What is the place of the concept of the Europe of Nations, arguably advanced by the political parties belonging to the ECR, PfE and ESN?
- In this context, the discussion of international stances would strongly benefit from an analysis of political positions on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the place of Europe in this regard: philosemitism has arguably become crucial for the PRR not only to target the Muslim Other in the Netherlands, but also to criticise the European Union and the European project in general on the civilisationist grounds.
    - Chryssogelos, A. (2025). Make the West Great Again? Ukraine, Israel and the appropriation of the West by European populists. *European View*, 17816858251330420. refer 2
    - Shroufi, O. (n.d.). A critical discourse analysis of Geert Wilders' pro-Israelism. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *0*(0), 1–18. refer 3
    - Brubaker, R. (2017). Between nationalism and civilizationism: The European populist moment in comparative perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *40*(8), 1191–1226. refer 4
- Finally, a minor comment from the point of view of readability. In the section **'Positions on 'Europe' and the Populism-Euroscepticism nexus', I would suggest a clearer distinction between LPF and PVV: currently, the discussion of both** parties is in the same paragraph.

Overall, the report is practically ready. Addressing my remarks will just strengthen its argumentation.
I wish the author all the best.

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4. Brubaker R: Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 2017; **40** (8): 1191-1226 Publisher Full Text

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No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: political science; comparative politics; political communication; party politics; discourse studies

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.