

## Political Briefing #20/2017

### POLITICS & POLICY

Yesterday, [Dutch voters went to the polls to renew the composition of their national Parliament](#). The Conservative Liberal Party (VVD) led by outgoing Prime Minister Mark Rutte, won the elections, gaining 33 seats out of 150. Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) ranked second, obtaining 20 seats, followed by the Christian-Democratic (CDA) party with 19 seats. On the basis of the country's proportional electoral system, parties will now need to engage in talks to form a new government coalition. All of them reject the idea of allying with the PVV. Given that an alliance between liberal and conservative forces (VVD, CDA, and D66) would fall short of an absolute majority, some party from the Left might eventually have to join a coalition guided by Mark Rutte.

**The Presidential elections in France are now considered to be the next key test for the stability of the European Union.** On Wednesday, former Prime Minister and member of the Socialist party (PS) Manuel Valls said that he will not back the party's official candidate Benoit Hamon. [Valls accused his colleague](#) to be paving the way to a sort of "sectarism", which will eventually lead the socialist party to lose the Presidential race. Meanwhile, the [Front National \(FN\) suspended Benoit Loueillet](#), a party member from the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, on the basis of his negationist statements. At the same time, the far right party continues to be at the centre of judicial investigations regarding the illegal use of EU funding. In relation to this, Manfred Weber, the leader of the European People's Party (EPP) group in the European Parliament, said that [the EU should stop financing anti-EU parties](#).

After the Social Democrats (S&D) and the EPP broke their alliance in the European Parliament, [the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, seems to be willing to engage in constructive talks with the opposition parties](#). On Monday and Tuesday, Juncker met with both the S&D group and MEPs from the Green party group. According to official sources, Juncker tried to exchange views on the Commission's recent White Paper on the future of the European Union.

**In other news, the refugee crisis continues to make the headlines in Germany and elsewhere in Europe.** On Wednesday, [Ansgar Heveling, a German Conservative MP from the Christian and Democratic Union \(CDU\)](#), stated that the Dublin regulation--which mandates that migrants who are not granted refugee status must be sent back to the country of entry into the EU--should be put on track as soon as possible. On Tuesday, the European Court of Human Rights slammed the Hungarian government for having [illegally detained some refugees along its borders](#).

**Scotland is under the spotlight as Prime Minister Nicola Sturgeon has recently announced the intention to hold a second independence referendum in 2019.** However, [a new poll released by the ScotCen't Scottish Social attitudes has revealed some new and partly surprising information about the preferences of the Scottish electorate](#). First of all, 46% of voters

would prefer to leave the UK (a percentage twice as high as 2012). At the same time, however, Euroscepticism is on the rise, as two out of three Scottish citizens claim that they wanted “either the UK to leave the EU or to have EU’s powers reduced”.

Meanwhile, Sturgeon’s words [provoked reactions among other devolved administrations](#). Members of the Sinn Fein party claimed that the people of Northern Ireland should be given the chance to choose between the UK, on the one hand, and a reunification with the Republic of Ireland, on the other. Likewise, Leanne Wood, leader of Wales’s Cymru Party, said that if Scotland leaves the UK, Wales too will need to face the issue of a potential exit from the United Kingdom. On Wednesday, on the occasion of a meeting of the exiting the European Union committee, Brexit secretary [David Davis said that the Government had not yet conducted an extensive analysis of the cost of a Brexit](#).

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## THE STATEMENT

**“After Brexit, after the US elections, the [Dutch] people have said no to another country where the domino stone of the wrong side of populism would topple over”.**

Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the Netherlands

Source: [The Guardian](#), 16.03.2017

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## NUMBERS

5.4 million

The number of British public sector workers expected to suffer a decrease in income levels over the rest of decade, due to rising inflation and a pay squeezes.

Source: [The Guardian](#), 15.03.2016

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