

1 **Government statement of policy on taking office, 3 July 2024**

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3 (This statement was delivered in Dutch. Check against delivery,)

4

5 Mr President,

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7 Just before she embarked on her first marathon, in London in April 2023, one my greatest
8 Dutch sporting heroes, Sifan Hassan, admitted that while training she had often wondered
9 what on earth she was letting herself in for. She was full of nervous tension. But she also
10 said she was fascinated to see how far she could go. ‘I just want to experience the journey
11 that comes with this distance,’ she said. So, for her, this first marathon was a new experience
12 that she was looking forward to.

13

14 I stand here today with a similar feeling, and a similar rush of adrenaline, at the start of
15 something very new. Something new not only for me personally, and for various other
16 members of the government, but also for Dutch politics. A government without political party
17 leaders – for the first time in over 50 years – that is setting to work on the basis of a
18 framework coalition agreement. It’s a tense moment, but at the same time we’re keen to
19 finally get started. Put simply, we’re looking forward to it. And as you may remember, Sifan
20 Hassan won that first marathon convincingly. As a marathon runner myself, I plan to draw
21 inspiration from that, in the hope and expectation that we will succeed in doing something
22 good for the Netherlands. And let me be clear from the outset: I mean something good for *all*
23 Dutch people, and *everyone* in our Kingdom.

24

25 The framework coalition agreement of the Freedom Party (PVV), the People’s Party for
26 Freedom and Democracy (VVD), New Social Contract (NSC) and the Farmer-Citizen
27 Movement (BBB) contains all the necessary ingredients for achieving that. Let me mention a
28 few of them here. There will be tax cuts, and a reduction in the health insurance excess,
29 easing the financial burden not only on people in difficult circumstances and working people
30 with middle incomes, but on businesses as well. The agreement sets out very strict policy on
31 asylum and migration that is in keeping with our country’s absorption capacity and meets the
32 needs of our economy. It contains the necessary proposals for agricultural and nature policy,
33 which will give farmers and fishers renewed autonomy and fresh prospects, while ensuring
34 food security for us all. It invests in areas that are important both to ordinary people and to
35 our business climate – areas like security, housing, infrastructure and the energy transition. It
36 also ensures more say for the public, while strengthening the rule of law, in part by

37 introducing a new electoral system and making it possible for Acts of Parliament to be
38 subject to constitutional review.

39

40 In this way, the framework coalition agreement seeks to reflect the outcome of the election of
41 22 November 2023. On that day, speaking through the ballot box, the people of the
42 Netherlands gave clear instructions to the country's politicians. They said: *listen* to us. Listen
43 to our concerns. About asylum and migration. About the severe housing shortage. About the
44 price of groceries, energy and rent. Listen – and *do* something about it. The government
45 presenting itself to the House today takes those instructions very seriously.

46

47 The greatest of these concerns is asylum and migration. Whichever way you look at it, that is
48 issue number one. Many people share the conviction that year upon year of migration, for
49 work, study or asylum, is putting too much pressure on our country. And not only on the
50 availability and affordability of our public services. But also on the social cohesion and sense
51 of community in our neighbourhoods, villages and cities.

52

53 And this concern is a real one. Imagine living in Ter Apel or Budel. Or being a student with no
54 chance of finding a room to rent. Or being surrounded by buildings that house labour
55 migrants in the most appalling conditions. We must therefore take these concerns very
56 seriously. Because the asylum and migration figures *are* high, and so is the pressure this
57 puts on our society. Any solution, and any strategy, must begin with recognising this reality.
58 Not least to ensure continued public support for the reception of genuine refugees. The strict
59 policy on asylum and migration contained in the framework coalition agreement thus sends a
60 clear message to people: we *hear* you. We hear you and we are taking action.

61

62 Many of these concerns stem from the very human need for connection, reassurance and
63 security. Yes, there is polarisation in society. But the idea that Dutch people these days
64 spend all their time in angry opposition to each other is not accurate. People do not *despise*
65 each other. The overwhelming majority do their best every day to make something of their
66 lives and to help others too. But they do want their concerns to be *heard* by the government.
67 Basic concerns, such as how to make ends meet every month. But also more visceral
68 worries relating to international tensions and threats, which already confront us and continue
69 to mount. Just look at the war in Ukraine and the danger posed by Russia. People are asking
70 themselves: how will all this affect our lives, *here*? How will it affect my children's future? And
71 it's only logical that they should look to the government for answers.

72

73 The best response to uncertainty is trust. A government that offers trust and receives it in
74 return. By standing side by side with people, instead of in opposition to them. Unfortunately,
75 all too often in the past, antagonism has resulted from government decisions that were
76 basically well-intentioned. Take the serious failings in the childcare benefits system. Take the
77 situation in Groningen. And as a consequence, a lot of public trust has been lost. That trust
78 can be won back only by a government that truly listens. It won't happen overnight. It will be
79 a gradual, step-by-step process that involves engaging with society. The government
80 considers *that* to be perhaps the most crucial task for the coming period.

81

82 Restoring trust starts with making policy that is actually feasible in practice. Working together
83 with public service providers and implementing agencies. Together with provinces,
84 municipalities and water authorities. Together with companies, trade unions and civil society
85 organisations. And of course, first and foremost, together with you.

86

87 Another key ingredient, however, is the courage to make choices. To chart a course. That
88 too is something this government believes in. Naturally, the Netherlands is a coalition country
89 and we have to compromise. And often this results in sensible policy. But sometimes, when
90 there's too much talking and too much discussion, real solutions fail to materialise. The issue
91 of asylum and migration is a good example. The debate on the future of agriculture and the
92 natural environment is another. Or take the debate that has been going on for years about
93 improving our governance culture and strengthening the rule of law. So much has been said
94 already, and so little has actually changed. In all these areas, we need to move from inertia
95 to action, change and improvement. Even if that means making difficult choices.

96

97 The House has already considered the substance of the framework coalition agreement – in
98 the debate of Wednesday 22 May. It has also discussed the first task that awaits us as the
99 country's new government: elaborating the framework agreement into a detailed government
100 programme. Tomorrow, we will set to work on that task, taking the most practical approach
101 possible. The House can expect the government to offer specifics relating to the key topics
102 set out in the framework agreement, giving insight into our objectives, approach, schedule
103 and resources. Naturally we will also take account of factors such as public support and
104 feasibility. We aim to ensure that the government programme can be considered during the
105 Parliamentary Debate on the Speech from the Throne.

106

107 It would serve little purpose to run through the entire framework agreement again here today.
108 Instead, I would like to take this opportunity to consider the substance and process of this
109 endeavour. What kind of government will this be? How do we view our task in the light of the

110 framework coalition agreement? And what will we do to shape and develop those efforts
111 further?

112

113 But before I get to that, a few words of thanks. First, to the ministers and state secretaries of
114 the previous government, who have worked tirelessly up to the very last moment in the
115 interest of the Netherlands. I think that everyone will agree with me that the leader of that
116 government deserves a special honourable mention. Over a period of almost 14 years, Mark
117 Rutte has been the face of four Dutch governments. With his talent for uniting people, his
118 ability to find solutions where others could not, and his incisive political insight, he has gained
119 great authority that extends from the Netherlands to the wider world. He would be the first to
120 admit that by no means everything went perfectly during his tenure. But let me emphasise
121 today that it is hard to overstate his enormous service to our country. I'm sure I speak for
122 many people when I say that the Netherlands owes Mark Rutte a debt of enormous gratitude.
123 As he takes up his role at NATO, I wish him every success, not least with a view to our
124 national security.

125

126 I would also like to thank the individuals who explored the options, and then mediated the
127 talks, concerning the formation of the new coalition – the *verkenners* and *informateurs* – and
128 especially Richard van Zwol, who agreed to accept the role of *formateur* and oversee the
129 conclusion of the process. Together, they ensured that on 16 May the four parties – the PVV,
130 VVD, NSC and BBB – were able to conclude a framework coalition agreement, enabling the
131 formation of this new government. And they were supported by a fantastic group of staff and
132 an excellent team from the House – as I can personally attest. I thank them all for their
133 exhaustive efforts, whether out in the spotlight or behind the scenes.

134

135 I would also like to personally thank Caroline van der Plas, Dilan Yeşilgöz, Pieter Omtzigt
136 and Geert Wilders. I thank them for the confidence and trust they have placed in me by
137 asking me to take on the role of prime minister. And I would like to mention Mr Wilders in
138 particular. Following a convincing election victory, the leader of the largest parliamentary party
139 did everything he could to make a successful partnership possible. I am only too aware –
140 having witnessed them for myself – of the restrictions he has faced in his private life over
141 many years in order to get to this point. I have great respect for his fortitude. For Mr Wilders
142 too, today must be a true milestone.

143

144 And now let me say a few words about the *character* of the team presenting itself to the
145 House and the country today. Because, what exactly *is* an extra-parliamentary government?
146 Both during the coalition talks and in the run-up to this presentation today, we have heard

147 many views on that subject. And from that I conclude that it is difficult to offer a clear,
148 unambiguous definition. From the government's point of view, the term 'extra-parliamentary'
149 means that the ties between the government and the parliamentary parties will be looser
150 than is customary in our country. The government will thus operate at a somewhat greater
151 remove from parliament, which means, conversely, that the House will be able to exercise
152 parliamentary scrutiny more effectively. The coalition agreement has not been hammered out
153 to the finest detail. This means less coalition-based pressure and more scope for shifting
154 majorities, creating more breathing space in the relations between the House and the
155 government. And if you were to ask me what exactly the process will entail, I'd say I believe
156 that is something we will have to discover and work out together as we go along.

157

158 As noted in the final report issued by *informatieur* Kim Putters, an *extra-parliamentary*
159 government means that its composition is different too. The political leaders of the
160 parliamentary parties that support this coalition will remain in the House as MPs. And some
161 members of the government have been sought out primarily on account of their knowledge
162 and experience, not solely because they are publicly affiliated to a specific political party. I
163 myself am an example of that, but I'm not the only one. In the government's section here in
164 the House, I'm surrounded by a broad-based team with a huge amount of expertise and
165 experience in society, and without exception they are deeply committed to the Netherlands.
166 So this is not a black-and-white picture of political and apolitical members of government, but
167 a balanced team.

168

169 Mr President, I agree with everyone who, over the past few months, has concluded that the
170 election result must above all be considered a call by voters for political leaders to do some
171 things *differently*. The framework coalition agreement, 'Hope, courage and pride', is the
172 result, and it provides the framework within which the government will operate. It is an
173 agreement that marks a clear change of course in a number of areas. I already mentioned
174 policy on migration, agriculture and nature, and the proposals for better governance and a
175 stronger democracy. It is an agreement that rests on a foundation of healthy public finances
176 and financial solidity. It will not have escaped anyone's attention that the framework
177 agreement itself contains a number of quite detailed proposals in these areas. That says
178 something about the importance the four parties that concluded the agreement attach to
179 these issues. And let me put it plainly: the government is bound by that. For us too, these are
180 key priorities.

181

182 On many other subjects, the framework coalition agreement leaves room for sensible
183 proposals from both the House and the government. Most of those other subjects are by no

184 means less urgent. The fact that the framework coalition agreement devotes fewer words to
185 them says nothing about the importance the government attaches to them. I'd like to illustrate
186 this with reference to the oft-heard term 'socioeconomic security'. A concept that begins with
187 income and spending power, as it does in the framework agreement. Take for instance the
188 principle that work should pay, one of our main focus areas for the coming years. But
189 socioeconomic security means so much more than that. It is inconceivable without physical
190 security, a basic need for every person and every country, and unquestionably one of the
191 core tasks of government. You won't be surprised to hear me express this opinion. But
192 socioeconomic security also means accessible, high-quality care and education for all. It
193 means a decent and affordable roof over your head. Housing is a basic need, and for all too
194 many people – and certainly for too many *young* people – renting or owning a home of their
195 own has become an unattainable goal. We must turn the tide where this problem is
196 concerned. Socioeconomic security means a labour market that works for people, with
197 sufficient certainty for employers and scope for those who want to be self-employed. It
198 means targeted measures to combat poverty. But it also requires policy that ensures that
199 individuals and businesses can truly achieve the energy transition, not least in financial
200 terms.

201

202 In other words there is a wide range of important and diverse issues for us to work together
203 on – as House and government, engaging closely with society. I hope that is how it will be,
204 and to be honest I'm rather counting on it, given that so many parties – from left to right –
205 made socioeconomic security a key theme of their election campaigns. What's more, history
206 teaches us that this government, too, will very likely be faced with unexpected events that no
207 one can predict right now. And in that case, too, we will have to find broadly supported
208 solutions, together and in consultation. That is my appeal to you today, and in return I pledge
209 that the government will extend its hand to *all* parties in this House.

210

211 Mr President, fleshing out the framework coalition agreement involves three important
212 parameters: the international context, the financial framework and the rule of law. In the past
213 few weeks there have been concerns and criticism regarding that last one. For me that is all
214 the more reason to be perfectly clear again today. As you know, I personally have devoted
215 much of my working life to the protection of our democratic state under the rule of law. And of
216 course the entire government is fully committed to the relevant agreements that the four
217 parties made at an early stage in this process. This means that for us democracy under the
218 rule of law is a given, and the democratic freedoms and fundamental rights laid down in our
219 Constitution are its primary anchors. We believe in that and we will safeguard it. Anything
220 else I could say about this now would only detract from the absolute clarity I want to give

221 *everyone* today. I'm simply asking you and everyone in the country today: judge us by what
222 we do. Judge us by our deeds.

223

224 In the international context, the Netherlands is and will remain a reliable EU partner and
225 NATO ally – in the profound realisation that these two organisations are the cornerstone of
226 our security and our prosperity. For me personally it's crystal clear that protecting the things
227 we hold dear – our freedoms and our entire way of life – must be an absolute top priority in
228 international security policy. And yes, defence is a crucial element of that. But a resilient
229 society also requires strategic autonomy in other areas, such as energy, food security and
230 raw materials. We should not be naive in that respect. Just a few hours by plane from here, a
231 terrible war is raging in which, to the Russians, human lives count for nothing. Our country,
232 too, is faced with foreign hacking activities and other attempts at espionage, infiltration and
233 foreign influence. Russia, China, the Middle East – instability looms over Europe from all
234 directions. And the reality is that we must prepare ourselves for scenarios that were once
235 unthinkable. For that reason alone, a strong and prosperous Netherlands cannot operate in
236 isolation. And nor will we. Ukraine can continue to rely on the Netherlands' support: financial,
237 military and political. We will meet the 2% NATO target and enshrine it in law. And the Dutch
238 government will comply with all international treaties we have signed, both within the EU and
239 in other contexts. That is simply the right thing to do.

240

241 What we *won't* do anymore is add stricter requirements to national legislation on top of
242 international agreements, for instance when it comes to nature and climate policy. So we
243 won't interpret EU rules more strictly than other countries. We don't always have to strive to
244 be top of the class. And we can't afford to either, with such a large population, so much
245 enterprise and such an outstanding agriculture and fisheries sector in such a relatively small
246 country.

247

248 What we *will* do is start a dialogue in Europe, in areas where international agreements have
249 a disproportionate effect on our country or form an obstacle to reasonable solutions. The
250 framework coalition agreement refers to this option in the sections on migration and
251 agriculture in particular. I know that many of you, and many people outside this room, would
252 put that in the 'impossible, can't be done' category. And I've been around long enough to
253 know that calling international agreements into question and having conversations about opt-
254 outs does not automatically lead to success. At the same time, we must realise that EU
255 member states do indeed have room to decide for themselves *how* they want to go about
256 achieving certain goals. So it's certainly possible to have that conversation. What's more, I
257 grew up in a family where hard work and perseverance were the norm. 'You'll never know

258 unless you try,' I was told. So, will the government give you a cast-iron guarantee today that
259 we will get everything we want in Brussels? No, but we do make the cast-iron promise that
260 we will fight for the Netherlands' interests. And that we will find and use any room for
261 manoeuvre that exists.

262
263 I'd like to say the following about the final parameter, the financial framework. The most
264 important thing is that we opt for financial solidity, in the best Dutch tradition. In other words,
265 the central government budget deficit will not exceed the agreed limit of 3%. And if at some
266 point it looks likely to exceed that limit, we will take action accordingly. Not because Europe
267 tells us to, but to avoid saddling our children and grandchildren with excessive debt. We will
268 not mortgage their future.

269
270 Unfortunately the fact is that this government will have to tighten the purse strings more than
271 its predecessors. There are serious concerns ahead, for both the short and longer term. The
272 possibilities are not boundless anymore. And yet we want to ensure that people have more
273 money in their pockets, and reduce the burden on businesses. That inevitably means having
274 to make choices. After all, in the central government budget, any extra allocations have to be
275 made up for somewhere else. For instance the VAT increases, the cutbacks on development
276 aid, the discontinuation of the voluntary community service scheme, and the rigorous
277 cutbacks in the civil service organisation. There is a financial reality, and we must face it. The
278 government cannot and will not shirk that responsibility.

279
280 And therein, to conclude, Mr President, lies the answer to the question I've been asked the
281 most over the past few weeks: 'Why did you say yes when the four parties asked you to
282 become prime minister?' It is not something I ever aspired to – and to be in this position is a
283 strange twist of fate. In all honesty, of course it's difficult to turn down such an honour – after
284 all, I'm only human. But my deepest motivation is the public interest, which I have put my
285 heart and soul into for the past forty years. To be given responsibility for that is the most
286 wonderful thing ever. I could never have imagined that I would be standing *here*. But now
287 that I am, I cannot conceive of a more important job I could do.

288
289 In all the conversations I've had with the other members of the government, I sensed the
290 same drive to accept this responsibility. To achieve something good for the Netherlands.
291 Given the election result of 22 November. Given the framework coalition agreement. And
292 given the scope we have to turn good and sensible ideas into policy, working in close
293 consultation with the members of the House of Representatives, the Senate, and civil society
294 organisations, and engaging closely with society.