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STUDENT FINANCING IN THE NETHERLANDS

BY Aliya Merimeche

Many Dutch political parties are currently advocating for more stable student financing in higher education, making it less dependent on the number of students. Internationalisation is the most prominent issue where critics argue that they lead to overcrowding, furthermore, some conclusions hold the idea that without financial incentives there will be fewer students. Ultimately, the financing of higher education still depends largely on student numbers. As long as that incentive dominates in the system, there will be an imbalance. Proposed solutions include balancing financial

gain with increasing student numbers, minimising losses during declines, making courses less competitive, and providing adequate funding for essential needs. Many universities are lobbying for this and want to decide the capacity of students within the university. Former rector of the University of Groningen believed 15% of students don't belong in the University of Groningen rather the university of applied sciences. Ultimately, internationalisation is at most a consequence rather than the direct issue.





DUTCH ELECTION 2023: The Victory of Geert Wilders

BY Nil Deniz Uder

Early general elections were held in the Netherlands on the 22nd of November 2023 in which the anti-islam populist Geert Wilders had a dramatic victory with almost all votes counted. After 25 years in the Dutch Parliament, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party(aka PVV) has won 37 seats. Wilders stated as follows "The PVV can no longer be ignored, we will govern." His win not only shakens the Netherlands but sends a shock across Europe due to the fact that the party is known as a hard-right populist group, crusading against Islam, immigrants and the European Union- along with current support for Israel. At a party meeting, Mr Wilders talks to BBC reporters stating that "of course" he was willing to negotiate and compromise with other parties to

become the prime minister. On the other hand, the left-wing alliance under ex-EU commissioner Frans Timmermans has come second with 25 seats in the Parliament. His words of "We won't let anyone in the Netherlands go. In the Netherlands everyone is equal" remarked once again the fact that he wants nothing to do with the Wilders-led government for Dutch democracy and the rule of law. While the far-right leaders around Europe praised Wilders' achievement, and called it as 'the growing attachment to the defense of national identities', a shockwave has been spread all around Europe as the Netherlands is one of the founding members of the European Union.





THE RISING RISKS OF DRINKING TAP WATER IN GRONINGEN

BY Frida Wilka Gonzalez

Recent findings and reports indicate that agricultural pesticide residues have been discovered in certain streams and rivers inside the Drentsche Aa National Park. Even though this park is well-known for its ponds, streams, and beaches, the water there is also used for drinking, particularly by the people of Groningen. Because of this, the water needs to meet a number of conditions, which aren't usually satisfied. It became evident in 2016 that these conditions aren't always satisfied. Numerous farmers, businesses, and environmental organizations in the region committed to improving the water quality as part of an experiment that

was initiated by the province of Drenthe, the Hunze en Aa water board, and the Water Company Groningen. The trial's objective was to cut the frequency of standard violations at the Groningen Water Company's intake-point by 95% between 2012 and 2023. The advisory committee's primary advice is to abstaining from voluntarily participating in more environmentally friendly policies. According to the committee, going forward, this would involve "clear and mandatory frameworks". If the soil and water quality is in jeopardy, this has to be enforced by provinces, municipalities, and water boards.





CAN THE PVV SUCCESSFULLY FORM A COALITION

BY Anna Mrazova

The Dutch and the international community witnessed an upset, when Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), dominated in the recent Dutch parliamentary elections. The PVV is set to occupy 37 of the 150 total seats in the Dutch parliament, which is 12 more than the PvdA which came second at 25 seats. The election victory will only convert into a tangible success if Wilders can construe a coalition, which will cover a majority in the parliament (76 seats). Wilders' extremely radical opposition to Islam, along with other controversial opinions on immigration, foreign aid etc. will likely act to his detriment when it comes to a potential coalition negotiation.

Several parties have already indicated hesitance, if not a full rejection of negotiating with Wilders. Nevertheless, there are still a number of potential coalitions which the PVV might be able to form, and there is also a possibility of a minority government, although this route is not preferable due to an inherent lack of stability. The Dutch people are now left to wait, as the negotiations continue on.





THE DUTCH FARMERS' REVOLT

BY Natasha Remba

For those of you who have not lived in the Netherlands for long, you may never have heard of the Dutch farmers' protests which consist of a series of demonstrations done by many Dutch livestock farmers in which they use their tractors to block roads or to occupy public spaces. Here is what led them to start doing this. The birth of these protests started late 2019 in October when the parliament, in wanting to limit agricultural pollution, proposed to halve the country's livestock. This proposal acted as the tipping point for the farmers, causing outrage in their community. Not only did they feel targeted, but this also caused them to feel a lack of respect and recognition by the Dutch government. This was their breaking

point, after having dealt with many other problems caused by the Dutch government, which led to further protests not only about this new proposal but also about prior issues they felt, e.g. less government regulations, a bigger voice for the farmers and more regulation on companies such as Shell for their contribution to the emissions. This caused the farmers to create the worst traffic jam in the history of the Netherlands. On the 1st of October 2019 more than 2000 tractors clogged up highways during the morning rush hour, causing more than 1000km of traffic. This year, negotiations have been opened between the farmers and the Minister of Agriculture Piet Adema to try and reach a meaningful agreement.



GRONINGEN GAS TAPS ARE SWITCHED OFF AFTER SIX DECADES

BY Tamari Vardiashvili

The main news echoing through Groningen this year revolves around the closure of the largest natural gas field in Europe after 60 years of operation. The Groningen gas field has been a crucial source of natural gas for the Netherlands, significantly impacting its economy. However, concerns about earthquakes triggered by gas extraction prompted a reduction in production. Despite production cuts, the region experienced its strongest quake in 25 years, measuring 3.1 in magnitude in 2022. This event resulted in over 1,100 damage claims from affected residents in the village of Wirdum. Originally scheduled for closure by 2030 following a powerful earthquake in 2018, the Groningen gas field's final deadline has been updated to October 1, 2024. However, possibility of an earlier shutdown in October 2023 was first mentioned last year in the speech of spokesperson for the State Secretary for Mining in the Netherlands.

While locals express concerns about potential seismic activities, the halt in gas production in October 2023 after six decades still has been met with widespread skepticism. Some residents fear that the closure may not be permanent, and production could resume after some time. Notably, local authorities in Groningen have not organized any events to mark the cessation of natural gas production, despite the historical significance of this event. The grassroots organization, Groninger Bodem Beweging (GBB), expressed disappointment that production had not been shut down permanently in 2023. As the Groningen gas field writes its final chapter, questions about the future and the lasting impact on the region's economy and energy landscape remain.



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