

Dutch vision of the EU: principles or pragmatism?



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Brexit has ‘added a new twist’ to the Netherlands’ traditional diplomatic role in Europe, where it has long mediated between the big continental powers - Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said recently. With the UK heading towards Brexit and the Franco-German integration motor running, the country, which arguably punches above its weight, has increased the stakes. It recently led a group of 7 smaller member states against Franco-German plans for Eurozone reform. Prior to this, the Dutch Prime Minister had shied away from EU visions. Reluctant to brand himself pro-EU, he on occasion flirted with Eurosceptic rhetoric. However, on 3 March Rutte laid out his vision in his “Under-promise and over-deliver: fulfilling the promise of Europe” speech, which was considered one of pragmatism by some. This analysis scrutinises Rutte’s vision in the light of this speech, earlier comments and actions made by him and his government(s) to answer how pro-EU he is and whether his vision and ideas can be considered more based on pragmatism or principles.

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Flying Dutchman

Despite being one of the smaller European states, Holland ruled the seas during its Golden XVII Century and became a colonial empire.¹ Although these are foregone times, it still punches above its weight in the EU and internationally. A country of only 17 million people, the maritime Dutch are a nation traditionally based on international trade: it is the 5th largest exporter of goods in the world and 2nd in the EU.² In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it is the 18th largest economy in the world, and 5th largest in the EU without the UK.³ It maintains a global approach to world issues, is the 7th biggest development aid donor worldwide⁴ and contributes importantly to the EU budget as one of its highest net contributors.⁵

Holland is also the 4th most competitive economy in the world⁶ and one of the least corrupt countries.⁷ Overall, it is a good place to do business, hosting several major multinationals such as Royal Dutch Shell, Unilever, ING Group, Airbus Group, Royal Philips, Heineken and many more.⁸ The Netherlands is also attractive for its, sometimes controversial, favourable tax regime. It has many agreements to avoid double taxation, which gives its companies a good legal base for doing businesses all over the world (and cutting corporate tax bills).⁹ In addition, it is also one of the most

¹ Holland's colonies included for instance Dutch India (Indonesia today), Cape Colony (South-Africa today), New Netherland (now parts of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Delaware), Dutch Guiana (Surinam today). In addition, it also had many trading posts in countries such as China, Japan and India.

² WTO. 2017. *World Trade Statistical Review*. Link.

³ World Bank Data. 2016. Gross Domestic Product. Link.

⁴ OECD. 2016. DAC member profile: The Netherlands. Link.

⁵ Statistics Netherlands. 2016. *Netherlands largest net contributor EU this century*. Link.

⁶ World Economic Forum. 2018. *The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018*. Link.

⁷ Transparency International. 2018. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2017*. Link.

⁸ Fortune. 2017. *Global 500, Netherlands*. Link.

⁹ The Guardian. 2011. *Dutch masters of tax avoidance*. Link.

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popular tax havens in the world,¹⁰ with over 14,000 so-called “mailbox companies” used for tax avoidance.¹¹

EU position

The strong EU position of the Netherlands is illustrated by the senior EU jobs it has acquired. Frans Timmermans, current First Vice President of the European Commission and right-hand of Jean-Claude Juncker, is one of the main architects of the EU-Turkey migration deal, and currently handles the rule of law dispute with Poland. Furthermore, former finance minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem managed the Eurogroup (2013-2018) and took a leading role in the Euro crisis.¹² The country has also had influential Commissioners in the recent past, including Neelie Kroes, responsible for competition (2004-2010) and the digital agenda (2010-2014). She was known for being bold during the financial crisis and was once dubbed the most powerful woman in Europe with a nickname of Steely Neelie.¹³ Commissioner Frits Bolkestein, responsible for the internal market (1999-2004), drafted the so called “Bolkestein Directive”¹⁴ for establishing a single market for services in the EU. The document was heavily criticised by left-wing political groups at the time for enabling cheap labour across the EU.¹⁵

¹⁰ The Correspondent. 2017. *Bermuda? Guess again. Turns out Holland is the tax haven of choice for US companies* Link.

¹¹ SOMO. 2018. *Dutch efforts to combat letterbox companies have no effect*. Link.

¹² Interestingly, the Dutch government itself opposed an extension of his mandate in order to make the Dutch bureaucrat Hans Vijlbrief head of the Eurogroup Working Group that prepares the Eurogroup meetings, which is a more influential position according to some. See: EUobserver. 2017. *Dutchman to lead powerful euro working group*. Link.

¹³ The Independent. 2009. *The most powerful woman in Europe?* Link.

¹⁴ Directive 2006/123/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market

¹⁵ A symbol of the new directive was the “Polish plumber”, referring to the kind of basic manual cheap labour coming from the new member states in the Central and Eastern Europe to higher wage countries in West Europe. See: New York Times. 2005. *Unlikely Hero in Europe's Spat: The 'Polish Plumber'*. Link.

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A eurozone member from the beginning and, due to its position in the EU, the country is considered as an “essential partner” in discussions on Eurozone reform, outranking Italy and Spain and close to the position of France.¹⁶ Another power matrix also ranked the country as one of the most influential on Brexit and Eurozone reform after France and Germany.¹⁷ In addition, a 2016 expert survey showed the Netherlands was overall considered the most influential out of the smaller EU states.¹⁸ Generally, the country is eager to occupy the centre ground in the EU and is considered as authoritative, knowing how to play the political game, open to alliances and able to play a deal-broker role.¹⁹ Despite voices it might be badly affected by Brexit, it was able to secure one of the first Brexit booties: the European Medicine Agency, which will be based in Amsterdam.²⁰

Teflon Mark

The country’s Prime Minister Mark Rutte is one of the few EU government leaders left that has been in charge since 2010. He has been able to win (or survive) 3 parliamentary elections. For this, as well as for surviving many political difficulties in the past, he has been referred to as “Teflon Mark”.²¹ According to some, he has developed himself into the most prominent liberal voice in the EU and has a chance to take over the European Council Presidency from Donald Tusk in 2019.²² Therefore, the opinion of Rutte, chief of ‘the lowlands’, matters. Even more so now that the UK is leaving the EU, which has left a power vacuum, and due to which the Netherlands is pushing hard to become the EU’s number 3.²³

¹⁶ Janning, J. & Zunneberg, C. & Klavehn, C. 2017. *Exploring EU Coalitions*. ECFR. Link.

¹⁷ Politico. 2017. *Power matrix: Brexit and the eurozone*. Link.

¹⁸ ECFR. *The Netherlands: The EU’s hidden coalition champion*. Link.

¹⁹ Janning, Josef. 2018. ‘*Heel Europa wil zaken doen met Nederland*’. NRC Handelsblad. Link.

²⁰ Financial Times. 2017. *Amsterdam wins fight for EU medical agency*. Link.

²¹ Thole, Herwin. 2017. *De opkomst van Mark Rutte: hoe de protegé van Ivo Opstelten nu zijn derde kabinet mag leiden*. Business Insider Nederland. Link.

²² Politico. 2018. *Mark Rutte, the Man in the Middle*. Link.

²³ Volkskrant. 2018. *Nederland zet alles op alles om de nummer drie in Europa te worden*. Link.

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Under Rutte's leadership, the country has shown itself to be small but tough. During Greece's financial bailout discussions, the country was firm. In 2011, when the PM headed a minority right-wing coalition backed by the Eurosceptic Freedom Party, he broke a taboo and suggested the ultimate sanction for those not adhering to Eurozone rules should be a forced exit.²⁴ According to him, an agreement is an agreement and impunity from violating the rules must be avoided.²⁵ In the subsequent year, 2012, he promised in an election campaign that he would give "not one penny more to Greece" if elected, and challenged the notion in a debate that maximum effort should be made to keep the Eurozone together.²⁶ In the eye of the Greek financial crisis of 2015, it was Rutte that led a group of hawkish Eurozone northern and eastern EU member states demanding Greek Prime Minister Tsipras rollback legislation he had recently introduced.²⁷

Rutte seems to be following a similar hawkish approach when it comes to the European migrant crisis, in which it has pushed hard to make sure the 2015 adopted refugee quota relocation mechanism²⁸ is respected by all member states. The Netherlands sided with Sweden and Germany on linking EU budget allocation with taking in refugees.²⁹ In doing so, Rutte and others attempted to pressure the Visegrad states, those that belong to the group of EU states that have profited most from EU funds, to make concessions. In a recent meeting, Rutte called a proposed plan by the Visegrad countries to refuse refugee quotas and focus on border control alone as "shameless", insisting there has to be solidarity and that otherwise a vote could be forced on the issue – suggesting they could be overruled,³⁰ as occurred earlier in 2015 with the refugee relocation scheme.³¹

²⁴ Financial Times. 2011. *Expulsion from the eurozone has to be the final penalty*. Link.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ RTL Nieuws. 2012. *Rutte: Geen geld meer naar Griekenland*. Link.

²⁷ The Guardian. 2015. *Three days that saved the euro*. Link.

²⁸ Council of the European Union. 2015. Justice and Home Affairs Council, 22/09/2015. Link.

²⁹ Financial Times. 2018. *Merkel plan to link EU money to migration policy hits opposition*. Link.

³⁰ Financial Times. 2017. *EU leaders spar over migration policy*. Link.

³¹ Politico. 2015. *EU forces through refugee deal*. Link.

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On other policy issues, Rutte has also pursued a tough approach. For instance, his governments have continuously blocked Romania and Bulgaria from joining the Schengen zone, stating they had joined the EU too early.³² This stance has continued. Recently, Rutte himself lectured Bulgaria's Prime Minister Borisov during an official visit. He made clear Bulgaria still has work to do to be ready for Schengen or Eurozone membership.³³ Rutte was also tough on Ukraine's association agreement with the EU and made sure other states accepted ruling out EU membership for Ukraine, or even allowing Ukrainians to move and work freely across the EU at some point.³⁴

The PM and his government is now attempting to form a counterweight to French President Emmanuel Macron's plans for Eurozone reforms.³⁵ The head of state has drawn clear red lines on how far these should go, and, above all, to not have fiscal transfers.³⁶ Recently, the country joined forces with 7 other northern EU countries, composed of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Ireland and the Baltic states, who have been keen to oppose the ambitious Eurozone reforms.³⁷ With the UK heading towards the exit door and the Franco-German integration motor running again, this has increased the stakes to play a bigger role. As Rutte said himself in an interview: *'Brexit has 'added a new twist' to the Netherlands' traditional diplomatic role in Europe, where it has long mediated between the big continental powers.'*³⁸

³² EUobserver. 2011. *Bulgaria and Romania's Schengen bid vetoed*. [Link](#).

³³ Euractiv. 2018. *Rutte pours cold water on Bulgaria's Schengen and Eurozone dreams*. [Link](#).

³⁴ Reuters. 2016. *EU agrees Dutch demands on Ukraine deal to avoid 'present for Russia'*. [Link](#).

³⁵ Such reforms include that include proposals for a standalone budget for the currency zone to raise money, invest and absorb economic shocks. See: EUobserver. 2017. *Macron calls for powerful eurozone budget*. [Link](#).

³⁶ Financial Times. 2018. *Dutch PM draws red lines on Macron eurozone project*. [Link](#).

³⁷ EUobserver. 2018. *Northern EU states to minimise euro reform*. [Link](#).

³⁸ Financial Times. 2018. *Dutch premier prepares to become EU's leading voice on free trade*. [Link](#).

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Dutch mindset

To understand the Dutch, one must also take into consideration domestic factors. Both enlargement and the Euro crisis has led to an increasing Eurosceptic sentiment in the country. A watershed was the lost constitutional referendum on the EU in 2005. Traditional pro-European political parties backtracked due to the rise of the extreme-right, which favours leaving the EU, as well as the socialists, who are equally sceptical and want to see it replaced by a social union.³⁹ From being a predominantly Europhile country, the Netherlands has transformed in a rather Euro-pragmatic country. Due to this change of sentiment, it has been rewarding for Dutch politicians to criticise the EU in one way or another with statements like those of ‘not one penny more to Greece’. Most Dutch people at the time opposed additional financial assistance to Greece, according to public opinion polls.⁴⁰

It has been equally rewarding domestically to be tough on member states in the east, as enlargement has proved to be unpopular, leading to enlargement fatigue, as in many EU states.⁴¹ One reason for the negative 2005 referendum result on the EU constitution was fear that Turkey would join.⁴² This explains partly why Dutch governments have been blocking Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession to Schengen for almost a decade. In 2013, it was the only EU member to block Albania’s candidate member status.⁴³ Even an association agreement with Ukraine was a bridge too far, as shown in the 2016 referendum, where a majority voted against.⁴⁴ Although hijacked by other political interests and an expression of other frustrations, the result was difficult to ignore.⁴⁵ It also

³⁹ Vollaard, Hans. 2012. *The Netherlands is euro-pragmatic rather than Eurosceptic*. Euractiv. Link.

⁴⁰ Het Parool. 2011. *Meerderheid: geen cent meer naar Griekenland*. Link.

⁴¹ Steenland, Robert. 2016. *Europe’s future after the British vote*. Centre for International Relations. Link.

⁴² Steenland, Robert. 2016. *The Ukraine-EU Association Agreement after the Dutch referendum*. Centre for International Relations. Link.

⁴³ Euractiv. 2013. *The Netherlands vetoes Albania’s EU candidate status*. Link.

⁴⁴ The Guardian. 2016. *Dutch referendum voters overwhelmingly reject closer EU links to Ukraine*. Link.

⁴⁵ Steenland, Robert. 2016. *The Ukraine-EU Association Agreement after the Dutch referendum*. CSM. Link.

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prompted the emergence of a new right-wing populist force that wants to leave the EU and introduce more direct democracy. It has polled second behind Rutte's liberal party.⁴⁶

No EU love affair

The PM has been rather ambiguous about the EU for a long while. If his relationship with the bloc could be encapsulated, "it's complicated" would be the most appropriate catch phrase. He never made big speeches with a vision or ideas for the future of Europe. Whenever he did speak about the value of the EU, he quantified it in terms of economic growth and jobs. He rather opted to view the EU pragmatically. As mentioned, he has also been known for Eurosceptic rhetoric, such as "not one penny more to Greece". According to former European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, Rutte threatened in 2012 to veto additional Eurozone reforms and even said his country would leave the Eurozone if it were to move towards a transfer union.⁴⁷ While this was arguably just a heated moment, he has generally backed away from a clear pro-EU stance.

On the other hand, he did agree on some Eurozone reforms, despite having continuously evaded questions of European integration or the transfer of national competences. Other examples include the expansion of Frontex's competences, as well as joining the European Public Prosecutor office. For this reason, he has been accused of having many EU faces.⁴⁸ A month before the European elections in 2014, he did not go further than stating that the EU is there for "jobs, jobs, jobs!".⁴⁹ However, on the same day he said that if the EU did not exist, he would invent it himself.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, what he did make clear is that he is not a federalist. In 2017, he dismissed the grand ideas

⁴⁶ Independent. 2018. *Forum for Democracy: New Dutch Eurosceptic party that wants EU referendum now polling in second place*. [Link](#).

⁴⁷ Volkskrant. 2014. *Geagiteerde Rutte dreigde in 2012 uit euro te stappen*. [Link](#).

⁴⁸ Volkskrant. 2012. *Rutte kent twee Europese gezichten*. [Link](#).

⁴⁹ Liberal International. 2014. *Keynote speech by Mark Rutte to the congress of the Liberal International*. [Link](#).

⁵⁰ Volkskrant. 2014. *Rutte: 'Als Europa niet bestond, zouden we het moeten uitvinden'*. [Link](#).

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proposed by Jean-Claude Juncker during his State of the Union Speech, to which he commented *“I am more of a: when you have visions, go see a doctor kind of guy”*.⁵¹

Berlin speech

Rutte’s speech in Berlin on 3 March 2018⁵² changed matters, as he came up with a vision after all, which he started as follows: *“You have had a choice today. You could have listened to a speech in the UK about a future without Europe. Or a speech in Berlin by someone who believes in Europe and wants to talk about the best way to move forward with Europe. I’m glad you’re here.”* He stated Dutch membership of the EU was a *“conscious choice”* and made clear he believed in a future of the Netherlands inside the EU, despite the UK’s decision to leave.

Rather than staunchly pro-EU or Eurosceptic, the speech seems more one of Euro-pragmatism, as illustrated by the following remarks he made: *“The European Union is not, in my view, an unstoppable train speeding towards federalism...I do not believe that we’ve been marching inevitably towards a federal system all along. Nor should that be our goal in the twenty-first century. (...) We should be working towards a more perfect Union, not an ever closer one.”*

This does not mean that Rutte’s speech was free of Eurosceptic rhetoric. He opposed a federal Europe, stating that *“...it begins and ends with the member states. Brussels serves the member states, not the other way around.”* Strangely enough, Rutte referred to the Coal and Steel Union (ECSC) in his speech as being a *“highly pragmatic”* example of cooperation and a translation of idealistic motives. However, the establishment of the ECSC had been rather one of urgency, given that the continent had just been rampaged with destruction and genocide. Sharing control over steel and coal was a bold and brave decision that implied a huge transfer of sovereignty: these were the resources that had just been used intensively for a world war. In any case, it was a necessity to secure peace and *“nie wieder krieg”* as Rutte mentioned.

⁵¹ EUobserver. 2017. *EU countries cool on Juncker’s ideas*. Link.

⁵² Government of the Netherlands. 2018. *Speech by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, at the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Berlin*. Link.

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But is Rutte in fact pragmatic? In a big contrast to the 1952 spirit he hails, he has so far opposed more ambitious Eurozone reform for a viable and sustainable currency zone, one in which countries are prevented from falling into economic misery and political instability, as Greece did and others almost also. This requires some form of fiscal capacity, as argued by most economists, to prevent asymmetric economic shocks.⁵³ However, all that is mentioned in the speech is an European Monetary Fund (EMF), which is merely an institutionalisation of the failed “too little too late” approach in the Euro crisis, and far from a structural solution.⁵⁴

Rutte made clear he opposes fiscal transfers under any circumstances, arguing each country should arrange their own national shock-absorption funds. He reiterated the country’s strict financial discipline approach by stating countries should keep their budget and national debt in order themselves. According to him, “*The recipe for a larger cake is not centralised bail-out funds and printing more money, but structural reforms and sound budgets.*” Throughout his speech, the prime minister repeated that existing contracts needed to be adhered to and that “*a deal is a deal*”, with little room for flexibility. While this could be just negotiation tactics, it is far from being pragmatic or finding middle ground. Principles are at play here.

A likewise principled approach seems to be followed in relation to the European migrant crisis, as he proposes a new asylum system in Europe that includes a permanent refugee relocation system. Implicit reference is made to the refugee relocation system that was voted on in 2015, and that countries should do their share. Moreover, he suggested that the EU budget could be linked to the rule of law and migration. While there is much to say in favour of the first part given the current state of fraud and corruption with EU funds, as well as democratic backsliding in some countries,

⁵³ In January 2018, prominent French and German economists with different views (e.g. either more financial discipline or risk sharing focused) reached consensus on what is needed to make the currency viable. This again included a fiscal capacity with strict conditions attached, see Bénassy-Quéré, Agnès et al. 2018. *Reconciling risk sharing with market discipline: A constructive approach to euro area reform*. Centre for Economic Policy Research. Policy Insight No. 91. Link.

⁵⁴ Baldwin, R. & Giavazzi, F. 2015. *The Eurozone crisis: A consensus view of the causes and a few possible solutions*. VoxEU. Link.

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more suggestions on how to coerce countries to take in refugees is something that has not worked and has caused a west-east divide in the EU.

Pragmatism or principles?

The Dutch PM's speech raised questions as to how he and his government will handle the EU's current challenges: based on pragmatism or principles? It is problematic that principled stances are what have caused the current polarisation and which has resulted in north-south and east-west divisions, whereas structural solutions have not been found.

Refusals to have risk-sharing, so far in the form of some fiscal capacity, arguably made the Euro crisis worse and almost broke the Euro. While the Greek drama is mostly the fault of its corrupt and inept political class, the narrow focus on fiscal discipline alone prevented a swift and structural resolution of the issue. The firm and principled approach of the Dutch and other hawks could have pushed Greece out of the Eurozone, with domino effects, if it had not been for Mario Draghi's "whatever it takes" pledge in 2012,⁵⁵ or if a last-minute deal had not been reached in 2015 between the radical left-wing Syriza-led government in Greece and the Eurogroup.⁵⁶

If Rutte and others continue to block needed Eurozone reforms, it might just fall flat again in case of another Euro crisis. It would leave room for speculation a country would be forced to leave the currency zone. Given the current risks of an international trade war and the recurrent political instability in Italy, this is not impossible. Recent parliamentary elections in Italy were also won by left-wing and right-wing populists, which was arguably thumbs down to both the national and the EU establishment by frustrated and disillusioned Italians. What would happen if let's say Italy with its current weak banks and high public debt of over 130% were to experience a Greek drama as well?

⁵⁵ Economist. 2017. *Five years of Super Mario, The euro's obituaries were premature*. [Link](#).

⁵⁶ The Guardian. 2015. *Three days that saved the euro*. [Link](#)

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The same logic can be applied to the migration crisis. The zealous push for coercion, pressure and enforcement of refugee relocations has not worked and has undermined EU unity. Talks on the matter have even been referred to as “fighting trench warfare”.⁵⁷ The relocation system has also been a failure, as many countries simply refused to take in refugees, or just a small portion. Furthermore, for many, these countries are also not the final destination. However, worse is that current talks about increased enforcement go as far as linking compliance with EU funds. Arguably, these are the kind of curing measures that have done and are doing more harm than the illness. An east-west divide and rise of populism has been the result.

Whether the refugee influx is an imagined threat or not, it is a vivid one in the eyes of the public. Migration was also an important reason for people in the UK to vote leave.⁵⁸ Therefore, it does not matter where the truth lies, but how people think and perceive things. Populist political forces have exploited this successfully. Apart from Brexit, this has led arguably to the victory of the Law and Justice Party in Poland in 2015 and the lasting dominant position of Fidesz in Hungary. Whereas many Poles for instance support the EU on the rule of law dispute, a majority of people side with the ruling government on refusing to let in more refugees.⁵⁹ As the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has said, he has no problem with linking EU funds to the rule of law. However, he does have a problem with migration quotas.⁶⁰

Rutte’s vision of Eurozone reform and how to deal with the influx of refugees seems to suggest the principled stance of the Dutch will continue. The Dutch PM might be right in rejecting federal EU dreams, however, he could be wrong in blocking needed Eurozone reforms on principle and pushing hard for a non-functional and divisive refugee relocation mechanism. Unfortunately, pragmatism is difficult to pursue in a political environment dominated by principles that prevent compromise. The observation of European Council President Donald Tusk is striking, when he said:

⁵⁷ Deutsche Welle. 2017. *EU reignites dispute over refugee quotas ahead of Brussels summit*. Link.

⁵⁸ Ironically, it must be said, the United Kingdom (together with Denmark and Ireland) has an opt-out in the area of freedom, security and justice in the EU, implying they cannot be bound by decisions on border control and asylum policies.

⁵⁹ Tilles, Daniel. 2018. *Forcing refugees on Poland will do more harm than good*. EUobserver. Link.

⁶⁰ Bloomberg. 2018. *Merkel Upsets Just About Everyone With Her EU Refugee Plan*. Link.

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“When it comes to migration, it divides [the EU] between east and west”. “Emotions make it hard to find even common language and rational arguments for this debate,” referring also to EU disagreements on monetary union.⁶¹ Therefore, pragmatism is needed, more than ever, to overcome current north-south and west-east divides.

Earlier in 2016, Rutte made a reference to the Roman Empire, stating that *“big empires go down if the external borders are not well-protected.”*⁶² However, one must also remember revolutions and wars rooted in ideological and religious divisions have caused many empires and monarchies to collapse as well.

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⁶¹ Financial Times. 2017. *EU leaders spar over migration policy*. [Link](#).

⁶² Politico. 2015. *Mark Rutte: Migration could bring about EU's decline and fall*. [Link](#).

Centre for International Relations (CIR) is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 which deals with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CIR is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CIR creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CIR's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2014, CIR was again recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

