

## **Government statement of policy on taking office, 25 February 2026**

Mr President,

One of the wisest people I ever met was Jan Terlouw.

He combined mildness of manner with a razor-sharp wit, a combination that became more pronounced the older he got.

Talking to him often felt like taking a warm bath and sitting an exam at the same time.

And in recent weeks I've found myself reflexively wondering what Jan would have thought of the outcome of the coalition talks.

No doubt he would have been highly critical of certain aspects.

But I hope too that he would have recognised in the outcome something of the wonderful remark he made after his famous speech warning that social trust was disappearing along with the string we used to hang from our letterboxes.

He told the young people in the audience: 'I have had a marvellous life. And I want you to have the same.'

For me, that is the essence of what politics should be.

Politics should be about the future, and about how we face that future with optimism and realism.

Politics should be about ensuring a good life for everyone, and the hopeful promise that children will be better off than their parents were.

It's true that people may have different ideas about what constitutes a good life, and what political choices are needed to make it a reality.

And yet I firmly believe that, at the end of the day, those differences really aren't so great.

Because people basically all want the same things.

A home and an income.

To be able to participate in society, whether it's studying, working, or starting your own business.

A safe community.

The knowledge that you won't immediately go under if you face a setback in life.

Good, accessible healthcare and good education.

A sustainable, liveable country for the future.

I could go on.

But the bottom line is: we all want to help build a better Netherlands.

A better Netherlands for the teacher in the classroom, the police officer on the beat, the young farmer in the milking shed, the first-time buyer on the housing market, the shopkeeper in the neighbourhood, and so on and so forth.

Our task is to bring us closer to that reality in the years ahead.

Setting clear priorities, introducing concrete changes, and hopefully making rapid headway.

The coalition agreement sets out the choices we are making to that end.

First and foremost, it means opting for investment in a strong and innovative economy, in good education, in defence and security, and in climate action and sustainability.

We will also make major choices to break the deadlock on nitrogen policy, migration policy, the housing market – so that the Netherlands can start moving forward again.

This means we must have the courage to make difficult choices.

We must stop kicking the can down the road.

We must ensure our finances are in order, and not pass on our bills to future generations.

And we must be honest about those choices.

So that in the future everyone still has access to good healthcare, a robust social safety net and a decent retirement.

Mr President, the question, of course, is how best to achieve all this.

We believe there is only one way: by working together.

Working together within the political sphere and with representatives of employers and employees. Working together with civil society organisations and the other countries of the Kingdom. And working together with subnational authorities: provinces, municipalities and water authorities.

Working together is the best way to achieve results that are good for everyone in the Netherlands – including those who did not vote for one of the three coalition parties.

Taking due account of the deeply held views of other parties.

Because democracy should be more than ‘half plus one’.

That is how we want to work.

We won’t get anywhere if we in The Hague spend all our time navel-gazing.

We’ve tried that for long enough already.

We need to move beyond the politics of splitting hairs, the politics of bickering, the politics of judging one another.

We will have to learn to listen again. To each other, and to society.

We aim to harness the power of society.

There is so much energy and engagement in the people of the Netherlands.

This is a country of volunteers, clubs and associations, community initiatives and helpful neighbours – we should cherish them and give them space to flourish.

The government should not get in the way. It should be a facilitator, creating the conditions for success.

Our goal is a decisive, streamlined government that is straightforward and dependable.

A government that speaks in clear, understandable language and has a human face.

A government that works not in opposition to the people, but among them.

Mr President,

I would mainly like to use this government statement of policy to answer a single question: what kind of government do we want to be?

I've already given the short answer.

We want to be a government that makes big choices for the future, based on clear priorities.

We want to be a government that enacts reforms and takes necessary decisions, even if they are difficult.

And we want to be a government that works with partners to achieve our goals. A *collaborative* government.

But before I say more about that, I would first like to offer a few words of thanks.

To Sybrand Buma and Wouter Koolmees, and especially Rianne Letschert, who led us through a complex process with humour, candour and a firm hand.

Thanks also to all the staff of the House of Representatives and the Government Formation Office, who were always willing to go the extra mile.

And of course, thanks to the members of the previous government for all their hard work, right up to the end of their term, and especially my predecessor.

At an extraordinary moment in our parliamentary history, Dick Schoof took responsibility and bore it to the very last day.

This proves once again that long-distance runners know what it means to persevere.

I wish him all the best, and good luck in the Sydney Marathon.

Mr President, I don't think many would dispute the fact that international security should be a major – and perhaps even our first – priority.

For the first time in decades, we have realised that our freedom and security are not set in stone.

Nor do they come free.

In Ukraine, for four years now, Russian bombs have been falling daily on residential areas, power plants and hospitals.

This is not some distant war on the other side of the world, but a concrete threat on Europe's doorstep.

For the government it is absolutely clear that the Netherlands and Europe need to arm themselves against this threat, together with our NATO allies.

Our security is our own responsibility.

So, in our coalition agreement we are committing fully to ongoing support for Ukraine and major investment in defence.

And we will enshrine that investment commitment in law, because strong defence is impossible without long-term certainty.

If we take a broader view, too, there is no denying that, in a short space of time, geopolitics has transformed into power politics.

The postwar international order is being attacked and dismantled at breakneck speed.

Old alliances are now less certain.

The Netherlands and Europe are facing major challenges:

Dependence on big tech.

A complicated relationship with China.

Autocratic tendencies around the world, and even within Europe.

And the question is: do we just sit back and let things run their course?

As far as I'm concerned, that's a rhetorical question.

The European Union has proved in the past that a strong democracy and the rule of law are guarantors of peace, security and prosperity.

Legal certainty is the basis of a strong European economy in which companies can invest with confidence, enabling 450 million citizens to live good lives.

In Europe, values and prosperity go hand in hand.

So there is no reason whatsoever for us to play the powerless victim.

Europe is learning to speak the language of power, and not a moment too soon.

We believe that a strong Europe and a strong Netherlands are extensions of each other.

And within that strong, united European Union, the Netherlands must again become a driving force, as befits one of the Union's six founding members and its fifth-largest economy.

Equally essential is a greater focus on our global presence, including more funding for our mission network and development cooperation activities.

If you want to be part of the conversation, you have to be at the table.

We will also invest in our national security, and in the power of our democracy under the rule of law.

Everyone has a right to feel safe, both on the street and in their own home.

This requires not only a well-equipped police force, but also more focus on combating domestic violence and femicide.

It requires extra effort on cybersecurity and societal resilience – people collaborating at community level and helping each other out in times of need.

We cannot and will not accept the rule of law being undermined from within by organised crime, nor journalists, lawyers and politicians being threatened.

Nor can we accept people in our country feeling excluded, as is currently still too often the case.

The government will vigorously tackle this issue, and hopefully we will not be alone.

Because in the Netherlands it shouldn't matter where you live, what colour your skin is, where you or your parents were born, what you believe, or who you love.

That is the foundation on which we stand.

Mr President,

In politics, setting priorities and making big choices also means making funds available for the things you believe are important.

We can see that in the agreements concluded on housing and infrastructure, on agriculture, nature conservation and nitrogen-emissions strategy, on energy and climate policy, and on the economy and education.

But of course, more money alone doesn't mean everything will be solved overnight.

There are no simple solutions to difficult problems. And I firmly believe that people understand that.

More money is often not the only or the entire solution.

But it can bring us closer to the solutions we need.

Especially in combination with fewer rules, fewer procedures and fewer obstacles for businesses and members of the public.

That is what our approach will be in the coming years, and here too our motto will be 'working together'.

So, together with businesses and knowledge institutions, we will work to promote a stable business climate that invites investment and innovation.

For example, by working to boost capacity on the electricity grid and investing in infrastructure.

By making it easier for small – often family-run – businesses to take on personnel.

And by setting up a national investment bank.

We need to prepare for a new economy, not least because of the rapid advance of AI.

And climate action, which will be so crucial to our young people's future, demands new knowledge and new ways of applying it.

Today's startup could be tomorrow's ASML.

That's why we need to create space for talent.

Why we need to create space for self-employed persons.

Why we need to create space for enterprise.

Because businesses provide the jobs and earn the euros that allow people to buy their groceries and pay their rent, and that fund our healthcare, education and other public services.

To maintain those services we need healthy economic growth.

A bigger pie means a bigger piece for everyone.

And just as important: a job provides a person with development opportunities, self-confidence and social contacts.

We will therefore do all we can to give as many people as possible the chance to participate in the labour market and the new economy.

The Netherlands still has a severe labour shortage, even as one million people are on the sidelines, receiving benefits.

Don't get me wrong: a good social safety net is essential. And an important achievement.

At the same time, there are plenty of people who are eager to work, but are trapped in a maze of rules and regulations.

We want to address that mismatch. We want to untangle those knots.

We need to move from dysfunctional systems to people in work.

And that starts in the home, with support for families.

It needs to be easier to combine work with raising children. We want to give parents more peace of mind and certainty by combining various child-related schemes.

And by extension, Mr President, we will also be investing in education.

Because a healthy labour market and a strong economy begin with good education.

Children and young people deserve to have the best possible start.

The Netherlands of tomorrow will be *their* country.

That is why we will invest in their future across the board: from basic reading and writing skills and a stronger position for secondary vocational education to increased funding for science and research.

Mr President,

There are two areas in which the Netherlands has been at a standstill for far too long: nitrogen emissions and housing.

With all the consequences this entails, not least for young people.

For the young farmer who wants to take over the family business.

But also for the first-time buyer or renter who can't wait to start an independent life.

If ever there were issues on which we urgently need to roll up our sleeves and get to work, it is these two.

Therefore we will work together with the farmers, provinces and nature organisations to do what's necessary to safeguard the future of the agricultural sector, restore nature and get the permitting system back up and running.

We can't put this off any longer.

The nitrogen policy fund will be replenished.

Because Dutch farmers deserve clear future prospects, and our country really has to get moving again.

We will also, working together with housing associations, building contractors and subnational authorities, do everything in our power to meet the construction target of 100,000 homes per year, with 30 large-scale new housing developments spread across the whole country.

With additional funding later in this term, and with shorter and simpler procedures, it *must* be possible to achieve this.

This will literally help to build a better Netherlands.

It is also true that the coalition agreement contains some tough reforms, such as the reduction of the duration of unemployment benefit, the raising of the state pension age from 2033, and measures to stem the rise of healthcare costs. We have already debated these issues at length, and I have no doubt that we will return to them today and tomorrow.

The point is this: if we don't make these choices now, they will only be more painful further down the line.

If you ask people if our children and grandchildren should be able to enjoy their retirement and receive good, accessible healthcare, everyone will say yes.

Of course we all want those things!

But no one likes having to make do with less now in order to achieve them.

And yet...

We have ensure that the costs of healthcare and demographic ageing remain manageable.

For years, all the experts have been imploring us: politicians, do something!

The best time to take action would have been a few years ago.

The second-best time is today.

Doing nothing would mean saddling today's young people with an impossible financial burden and unsustainable public services.

No one wants that.

That is why we want to be the government that shows resolve and *does* make those necessary choices.

We will be getting to work on this from day one, and will be engaging in dialogue with you, the healthcare sector and representatives of employers and employees.

Mr President,

Asylum and migration policy also demands that necessary choices be made.

It is no secret that the three parties in this coalition have quite different views on this subject.

But how long has the public and political debate been held hostage by this issue, without any real change?

How long have we known that the current arrangements are not working?

Something has to change.

In the years ahead we aim to bring stability to the asylum system by achieving three things: reducing the influx of new arrivals, providing decent reception facilities, and ensuring that asylum seekers with good prospects of obtaining residence status are able to participate in society from day one, by learning Dutch and taking up employment.

Our plans are both strict and aimed at building an asylum system that works.

But this starts with reducing the influx, because we recognise that uncontrolled migration is placing excessive demands on society's absorption capacity.

Naturally we will not be able to solve all problems overnight, but we will start tackling them immediately.

Implementing agencies such as the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA) need room to breathe, and they need to know where they stand.

Municipalities need to feel supported by the government in The Hague again.

And we need to work with countries within and outside Europe to tackle the problem as close to the source as possible.

The ultimate goal is to get migration under control, in a system where there is always room for people fleeing war, violence or persecution.

And that, Mr President, brings me lastly to the collaborative government that we wish to be.

We are well aware that primary responsibility in this regard rests with us.

We will need to come up with good proposals.

We will seek dialogue with civil society organisations, trade unions and employers' associations, subnational authorities and people across the country – and of course with you and the members of the Senate.

We will listen carefully, and we will talk ourselves hoarse.

And if we face setbacks or need to try a different approach, we will have to deal with the situation like adults.

Naturally, as coalition partners we stand by the plans we've made.

But let's be frank: we are all going to have to do business with each other.

So we welcome good ideas and smart alternatives.

As long as we are willing, together, to do what is needed.

As long as we are able, together, to recognise that the Netherlands gains nothing by politicians who care only about being right.

And as long as we are prepared, together, to work in accordance with Jan de Koning's maxim: 'If it can't be done the way it should, it should be done the way it can.'

I truly believe that people are yearning for that – a pragmatic politics that is willing to make compromises that move our country forward.

As I'm sure you can imagine, the coffee machines are already fired up and ready to go.

To conclude, Mr President, one personal note.

It matters a great deal to me that people in the years ahead come to feel once more that politics is there for *them*.

Especially those people who have completely lost that feeling.

And there are far too many of them.

I really hope that in the coming years we will succeed, step by step, in winning back some of the trust that's been lost in politics and government.

In that connection Jan Terlouw liked to speak of a 'democracy of trust'.

In his view, by voting for someone, you're giving four years' worth of your trust to people like us.

You're trusting them – *us*, that is – to you use your vote for good.

But Terlouw also felt that this cuts both ways.

Because, for their part, politicians also have to show that they have trust in society. That they understand that with trust comes responsibility.

That means politics has to work for *everyone*.

And I am well aware that's easier said than done.

But it must be our ambition.

Hopefully our *common* ambition, House and government.

I pledge that the new team here in the government seats will work with maximum effort to this end and that, as prime minister, I will take the lead in this regard.

So now let's get to work.

With optimism about the future of our country.

With realism, because not all problems can be solved overnight.

And above all, with full confidence that politicians can achieve more when we work together than when we work against each other.

Thank you.