

Policy Letter – Foreign Affairs 2026

1. Optimistic and realistic foreign policy

The world around us is changing rapidly. The role of rules and law is under pressure. We want to keep our Kingdom stable and prosperous. And we can, but to do so we need to change our foreign policy. We are the world's 18th-largest economy. Cooperation with the countries around us is our primary strength. Since the founding of NATO and the European Union we have been an important engine for the economic major power that is Europe. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to take a place at Europe's helm, to ensure we can safeguard our security, prosperity and free way of life. We need geopolitical and geo-economic awareness in all areas, and a global presence based on both self-confidence and realism.

Our ability to operate at national and EU level depends on the strength of our own position. That means we need to boost our earning capacity and at the same time reduce high-risk strategic dependencies in the areas of security, energy, critical raw materials and technology (including digital technology). Strengthening our position at home will also help guarantee our place at the geopolitical negotiating table. A world in which a major power like China is growing more assertive and the position of the US is changing underlines the need for such an approach. To this end we will deploy all the instruments of foreign policy. We will form lead groups within the EU and NATO to ensure that we get more done, more quickly. We will work on the basis of shared interests to broaden and deepen partnerships and alliances, including with new partners.

The rise of autocrats around the world means that, increasingly, pure power politics is gaining the upper hand. Like-minded countries will need to be more united in seeking to strengthen democratic forces, protect the open world economy and promote the international legal order. We will stand up for our interests worldwide. We will do so on the basis of our values – democracy, the rule of law and individual freedoms – and in the knowledge that not every partner will always share our values. This means that, more than ever before, the Netherlands will have to use its influence and instruments – diplomacy, trade, development cooperation and defence – as a coherent whole, and do so more strategically, whether out in the spotlight, behind the scenes, bilaterally, at EU level or indeed in the multilateral arena. In short, we must be realistic about the changing world and the choices the Netherlands will have to make within it, and optimistic that together with our partners we are powerful enough to continue to protect our freedom and prosperity.

In this policy letter we will set out how we aim to pursue this realistic, values-based foreign policy in the years ahead in order to promote the interests of our Kingdom in the wider world.

2. What we aim to do

Take responsibility for our own security

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine is the greatest direct security threat facing Europe and thus the Netherlands too. The Netherlands and Europe must take charge of their own security. We therefore need to strengthen the combat power of Europe's armed forces and the resilience of our society. This requires a fundamental change in our thinking about European security and our own role within it, including about the defence of the Caribbean part of the Kingdom. We will continue working to strengthen our transatlantic relationship; the US is the global power with which we share the most interests. At the same time, we will use diplomatic channels to call the US to account if its actions undermine our values and interests, while remaining mindful of our relationship and our critical security interests. The position of the US has changed, and against that backdrop we will reduce one-sided dependencies and continue working to strengthen the transatlantic relationship, for example in areas such as defence, software and critical raw materials. We will step up cooperation not only within the

existing security organisations but also on an ad hoc basis, such as in the Coalition of the Willing formed in the context of the war in Ukraine.

We will continue supporting Ukraine

We will continue providing military and non-military support to Ukraine. Ukraine is fighting for our security and freedom too. Support will still be needed if a truce is agreed, so that Ukraine can deter and withstand any future aggression. The Netherlands is playing a central role in pursuing justice for Ukraine. The Netherlands is supporting Ukraine on its irreversible path towards future membership of NATO and the EU (subject to compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria).

We will help build a European pillar within NATO

NATO remains the cornerstone of our security. We want to play a leading role in strengthening Europe within NATO by accelerating the build-up of European defence capabilities and reinforcing European cooperation within the alliance. An accelerated drive to take responsibility for our own security means strengthening our military capabilities and therefore major additional investment. The government has decided to enshrine in law the binding NATO agreement to invest 3.5% of GDP in defence. Given the international security situation it is essential that NATO maintains a credible and effective nuclear deterrent. Together with European partners, the Netherlands will explore ways to achieve a stronger European dimension of nuclear deterrence within NATO and within the parameters of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The government has decided to accept France's invitation to enter into a strategic dialogue on European nuclear and conventional deterrence.¹

We will deepen European cooperation on defence and security

It is important that we strengthen the EU's geopolitical position and become more resilient. With a stronger European defence industry, research and innovation, supply chains and opportunities for the Dutch private sector and research community, Europe too can contribute to NATO's objectives. In doing so it will be essential to find ways to transcend national industrial interests. We will coordinate cooperation within NATO and the EU by means of demand bundling, co-production and standardisation, including via partnerships with countries such as Japan, South Korea and Australia, and NATO allies the UK, Norway, Canada, the US and Türkiye. The Netherlands is playing a leading role in ramping up the pressure on Russia by further strengthening EU sanctions: the government wants to tackle the shadow fleet and combat sanctions circumvention. It is working to ensure the rapid adoption of the International Sanctions Bill, which provides for a Central Sanctions Reporting Office. We will prioritise the establishment of a European sanctions institution to enhance the effectiveness of sanctions.

We will work to promote stability and security in the world

As the conflicts in Iran and the Middle East and the security situation in Venezuela and the Caribbean have shown, our Kingdom's security is closely linked to the wider world. Instability in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America affects us through irregular migration, terrorism and crime that undermines society. We will contribute to peace processes in places such as the Horn of Africa through support for disarmament, a focus on women and children, stronger justice systems and security sector reform. Military and civilian missions and operations on the one hand and development programmes on the other remain important instruments. Aid workers must be able to do their work safely in emergency situations. Enforcement of international humanitarian law is essential.

Boost our prosperity – worldwide

We will reduce our dependencies and bolster our economic security

Economic relations are increasingly being used as an instrument of coercion. The ambitions of China, a country with which we have major mutual economic

¹ In the first half of 2026 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will draw up an international security strategy that sets out the Netherlands' aims in the area of European security.

dependencies, affect our own interests too, particularly in the sphere of economic (and other forms of) security. In order to limit high-risk strategic dependencies, we will need to diversify trading partners, boost innovation and make targeted investments, at both national and European level. This will ensure we do not solely rely on abundant capacity in a limited number of countries. The Netherlands has high-tech companies with a strong focus on exports, and we have a strong scientific and research community. This presence has strategic value. At the same time, we also have a responsibility to prevent sensitive technology from falling into the wrong hands.

We will boost our international earning capacity

Foreign trade accounts for one-third of our prosperity. We must urgently follow up on the recommendations issued by Mario Draghi and Enrico Letta on further strengthening the EU's economic position. In doing so, the government will combine economic diplomacy with targeted industrial policy, with a view to further strengthening the Netherlands' position in a number of strategic markets.² International trade policy is an extension of this: the government will prioritise the internationalisation of sectors such as semiconductors, raw materials and maritime manufacturing. Invest International's investment activities contribute to our trade development interests. We will carefully explore how to ensure we preserve this strength as we introduce the new national investment institution. Where responsible business conduct (RBC) is concerned, the government will enhance the support provided to help Dutch businesses apply the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises as effectively as possible. We will align development cooperation and RBC policy more closely, both to ensure that countries in the Global South also benefit more, and to help level the playing field for our businesses.

We will work to develop new trade and investment agreements

We will encourage the European Commission to conclude new trade and investment agreements, including agreements on access to raw materials, because diversification will boost our resilience. We will promote a level international playing field, preferably at multilateral level (including the WTO), while taking account of developing countries' interests. These efforts will include trade measures to tackle practices that distort competition and markets. The Netherlands and Europe are investing in the future with green economic partnerships aimed at building resilient trading chains and stimulating local economies. Strong economic partnerships that take account of people and planet, generating growth and prosperity in the Global South, will allow Europe to provide a counterweight to the economic influence of other powerful blocs. In this connection we will work actively to advance the EU's Global Gateway strategy.³ The Dutch Diamond Approach will help drive these efforts, with businesses, financial institutions, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations bundling their expertise in areas such as climate adaptation, water management, food security, biodiversity, energy, transport, finance and health.

Our freedoms are the foundation of security and prosperity

The international legal order is under pressure. Standing up for the international legal order is not some abstract concept. It means fighting for fundamental principles like territorial integrity and sovereignty, and involves very concrete issues that directly affect our democratic principles and prosperity, like the right of free passage. At EU level, for example, we work together in the framework of the European Democracy Shield to combat disinformation and the undermining of election processes. Advocating for human rights, the position of women, minorities, young people and LGBTIQ+ persons, freedom of religion or belief and media freedom are all examples of what we stand for, and therefore they are also part of our foreign policy agenda, as are cultural cooperation and sport.

² Parliamentary paper 29 826, no. 277.

³ The Global Gateway strategy is an EU initiative aimed at the global bundling of development cooperation, trade and diplomacy.

We will work to modernise international refugee law

With a view to offering future prospects to refugees and host communities, we will continue giving undiminished support to countries that provide reception in the region. The Netherlands will work with other European countries to develop a strict but humane migration model and modernise international refugee law. To this end, the relevant government ministries will jointly organise an asylum summit, and we will launch diplomatic initiatives. We will deploy the instruments at our disposal to conclude international agreements in the area of migration policy and return.

We will work to promote international law

The Netherlands works to combat impunity for violations of international law. We support the International Criminal Court and we are committed to the establishment of a tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. We will continue working to establish the truth, achieve justice and ensure accountability with regard to the downing of flight MH17.

In the Middle East, the Netherlands will work to advance a two-state solution: an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state alongside a secure Israel. The terrorist organisation Hamas can play no role whatsoever in this regard. Illegal Israeli settlements (and their expansion), acts of violence against civilians in Gaza, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid must all be brought to an end.

*We assist **our citizens** all over the world whenever it is needed*

Our diplomatic missions exist to represent the interests of the Kingdom abroad. The growth of instability and conflicts has a major impact on the functioning of the mission network and its staff, who in some cases have to work in extremely difficult circumstances. We want to express our support and appreciation for them. At a time of uncertainty, they serve as an anchor in the Netherlands' relations with other countries. The spending increases on the mission network announced by the government are intended to strengthen strategic partnerships in the field of security, in economic growth markets, in reducing dependencies and in improving human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Further elaboration of the details of the spending increases on the mission network as outlined above, including any missions to be opened and yet to be closed, as well as details of the retrenchment, will follow in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs draft budget for 2027.

Each year we issue travel documents to many international travellers. Travellers who, in a crisis, find themselves unable to rely on the help of travel organisations or who are insufficiently aware of the options available locally for escaping the situation can count on consular assistance (including emergency assistance) offered in close cooperation with the travel industry and other EU countries. In this connection it is crucial to have reliable data on the size of the target group, information on their precise needs, and effective communication. In order to provide even better service to the Kingdom as a whole, we will continue to invest in innovations aimed at further service improvements.

3. We will broaden and strengthen our partnerships

We will help build an effective and autonomous Europe

The European multiannual budget – the Multiannual Financial Framework – needs to be modernised and geared towards strategic priorities: strengthening Europe's competitiveness, a robust migration and asylum policy, security, defence and innovation. At the same time, we must avoid any deterioration in the Netherlands' net payment position. The European Commission should take swift action if the conduct of particular member states breaches our shared values or jeopardises the EU's effectiveness. Decision-making on the Common Foreign and Security Policy should take place on the basis of qualified majority voting.

We will enhance Europe's effectiveness through stronger partnerships with certain member states, for example using the enhanced cooperation instrument. In 2027, the Netherlands will hold the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of

Europe, the ideal organisation to exercise influence when it comes to strengthening democratic and rule of law values and compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights in Europe. In 2029, the Netherlands will hold the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This will enable us to set the agenda and to boost our reputation as a dependable and leading EU member state.

Within the EU, it is Germany and France that set the tone. We will deepen our relations with them. The same applies to our strategic relationship with Poland. We have long enjoyed a deep collaborative partnership within the Benelux and that will remain the case. On security and innovation, we will be working even more closely with our Scandinavian and Baltic partners. Relations with Spain and Italy are also essential in terms of economics and political matters and with a view to cooperation on migration policy. We will seek closer ties with the EU's neighbours. The Copenhagen criteria will play a leading role: the faster that countries carry out reforms, the faster the process can go. We will work with countries such as Armenia and Moldova on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We will broaden and strengthen bilateral partnerships

We will deepen bilateral partnerships on the basis of mutual interests. These efforts will supplement the partnerships the EU forges with third countries, such as middle powers, countries that play a leading role in their own region or countries that are of specific interest to the Netherlands, for instance on account of security, economic cooperation, supply chains or migration. In order to achieve our various policy objectives, we will deploy the entire set of foreign policy instruments in an integrated manner: diplomacy, trade, development cooperation and defence.

In the region around the EU, we wish to further deepen relations with the UK, Norway, Türkiye, Switzerland and countries in the Western Balkans. The same applies to Canada. The NATO partners in the Indo-Pacific (Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand) are important in a number of respects. Countries such as India, Brazil, Vietnam and Indonesia have come to play a larger role in the global economy. Our partners in the Gulf region are essential to the future of energy and stability in the Middle East. Countries such as South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, with their growth markets and raw materials, will help shape our future. We will build equal partnerships through a broad Africa strategy.

The government will invest in development cooperation, thus taking a step towards reaching the international OECD target. Our partners in the Global South are seeking equal partnerships with us in the areas of security and stability, migration and displacement, and trade and the economy, at a time when ODA budgets are declining throughout the world and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is stalling. This requires that we rapidly develop a new international vision of development cooperation based on equality, in order to pursue material and immaterial interests. Development cooperation will have to become more strategic. We will step up efforts on democratisation and good governance, women's rights, humanitarian assistance, global health, equal economic partnerships, climate and vocational education, including scholarships.

Partnerships with civil society

In order to be effective, we work with civil society organisations across the world. They identify new developments and contribute knowledge, experience and feedback that is indispensable to the objectives of our foreign policy.

We will protect the international order

Reforms are essential so that the UN can play its role in relation to peace and security. This will also require better representation of countries from the Global South and elsewhere. Besides the UN, bodies such as the WTO, OECD and international financial institutions (World Bank, International Monetary Fund and regional development

banks) are essential parts of the international order. The Netherlands supports organisations that tackle global problems or set international norms, for instance in the areas of security, development, climate change, biodiversity, emergency aid, decent work, and health. The Netherlands will also advocate reforms to improve the functioning of these organisations. As the multilateral system's biggest and most dependable donor, the EU can play a key role in this respect.

4. Foreign policy for our future

The challenges are great, but if we make the right choices and weigh interests clearly, there will also be opportunities for the Netherlands and Europe. The government will focus on protecting and strengthening our security, our prosperity and our free way of life. It will do so on the basis of value-driven realism, both for now and for future generations.

The coalition agreement contains agreements on the measures needed to get the Netherlands moving forwards again. This does not alter the fact that the challenges facing the government require our public authorities to act as one, making clear choices, collaborating with others and delivering results. We must do so by working together and in the knowledge that, as a minority government, we will always need to seek majorities for our policy. Only then can we achieve the results that people are counting on. The commitment of the entire civil service, local and regional authorities and public service providers will be absolutely crucial. In this connection the government attaches great value to cooperation with the House of Representatives and Senate, local and regional authorities and civil society organisations, in the realm of foreign policy and elsewhere.