

ChristenUnie

LOOKING AHEAD

CHRISTIAN SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

Summary of the ChristenUnie Election Programme for 2010-2014

FOREWORD

Dear reader,

The ChristenUnie (literally Union of Christians) is a Dutch political party that is based on Christian convictions. For the upcoming elections for the Dutch House of Representatives elections of 9 June 2010 an election programme was written and adopted by the party. The plans of the ChristenUnie for the coming period are outlined in this programme, which makes for a quite extensive document. For those who cannot read the Dutch language, we compiled this summary in English

We hope and pray that this programme may contribute to building a Netherlands:

- where you want children to grow up;
- that can deal with differences;
- that works on a social and sustainable economy.

Menno van Hulst

Director national office

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IT IS ALL ABOUT CONFIDENCE

The ChristenUnie is a Christian party. Our aim is to be followers of Jesus Christ and we want to demonstrate that through our political decisions. Politics exist to allow society to prosper, to defend the freedom of the nation and to protect the vulnerable. In the Balkenende cabinet (2007-2010), the ChristenUnie showed that we want to fulfil our words through actual deeds. We made our country a bit more family and child friendly through various measures; we focussed for instance on renewable energy, clean water and safe dikes. We also took steps to reduce unemployment among our youth. The ChristenUnie intends to continue down that path.

The next few years will not be easy. The financial crisis of the past few years compromised the confidence citizens had in banks, the business world, and the authorities. The government must work hard to restore that confidence by being open to its citizens and society. The economy cannot recover without confidence. It is all about confidence.

THE CHRISTENUNIE IS WORKING ON A HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

We must take austerity measures in order to restore the financial health of our country. We cannot burden future generations with huge amounts of government debt. The ChristenUnie sees the crisis as an opportunity to build a sustainable economy, not at the expense of nature and the environment and not at the expense of people. But that is only possible if the government and its citizens work together. It all starts with austerity policies on government level, i.e. it starts with government officials, but also includes healthcare, benefits, and mortgage interest deduction. People that cannot manage it on their own are thereby taken into consideration. Everyone is expected to make a contribution during the next few years. This is possible in a rich country like ours. This is possible when the strongest shoulders carry the heaviest burden.

THERE MAY BE DIFFERENCES

The next few years are not only concerned with finances, but also with how we deal with differences in the Netherlands. Many people from different origins, cultures, and religions live in our country. We are therefore all required to allow everyone sufficient space to be different. Everyone can have his own faith and beliefs. This is one of the greatest treasures of our country. This is then also the reason why we have all kinds of broadcasting channels, care institutions, and programmes such as youth development. Giving everyone the freedom of choice is the best way to properly deal with differences.

THE CHRISTENUNIE STANDS FOR A POLICY OF HOPE

There is no such thing as a perfect society. But we must do everything we can to make society and the world a more peaceful and righteous place. The policy of the ChristenUnie is a policy of faith and hope. Our faith in God gives us hope for a new start for society and ultimately the arrival of His kingdom of peace. With this hope in mind, we have to roll up our sleeves and do what we can do.

In the coming period of government, the ChristenUnie will work on three goals:

- PROSPEROUS SOCIETY
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY
- A GOVERNMENT THAT DELIVERS

ChristenUnie

A COUNTRY WHERE YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO GROW UP

CHAPTER 1 PROSPEROUS SOCIETY

Nobody lives for him- or herself alone; as humans, we always rely on each other. Many people are active in volunteer organisations, sports clubs, churches, they support charities, they contribute to the education of their children, and the care provided to their elderly parents. A prosperous society is a society where people are actively contributing.

NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE BECOMING SAFER

A clean, safe, and therefore liveable neighbourhood is a neighbourhood where young people can safely go to school, where children play in the parks, where their parents can live, work and shop with complete peace of mind and where senior citizens can enjoy their retirement. If people do not feel safe, they make less contact with others or they become disengaged from their neighbourhood. The ChristenUnie considers safety on the streets and in residential neighbourhoods to be very important. Everyone must make his or her own contribution by watching, by doing and by stimulating local businesses and shops. The government must help young people, where needed, to obtain a good basic qualification, to find good schools, internships and careers. Young people need places to relax and exercise, which in turn reduces the risk of them becoming the cause of annoyance or trouble.

SOCIETY NEEDS CLEAR BOUNDARIES

More police officers on the streets are nice, but that does not help to fight crime by itself. The government needs to be clear and set boundaries. There is no room for tolerance here: mistakes must not be condoned. The ChristenUnie wants to curtail criminality by speeding up the penal system and to address the drug problem. Coffee shops must disappear and people under 18 may not carry drugs on their person or use it. Smoking of cannabis must be prohibited and soft drugs must be treated in the same manner as hard drugs.

NEWCOMERS ALSO BELONG HERE

The arrival of immigrants to the Netherlands has enriched our society in many cases, but it has also underscored problems in problematic areas. Many people feel they do not belong in their own country any more and many newcomers feel like outsiders. Here too, we can only do something about it if we all work together. The most important part is that everyone must recognise that all people are equal, despite their differences. In our country every citizen enjoys freedom of religion and expression. This requires respect for each different outlook on life. A headscarf is therefore not a problem but if a burka should result in an unsafe situation we must prohibit it. The church and state are separate in the Netherlands. This means that

the government makes no distinction between different religions. We need to help newcomers to behave as good citizens of this country. This must not be limited to a naturalisation test, but also through participation in a career or volunteer work. This is also the best way to learn Dutch as quickly as possible.

REFUGEES DESERVE PROTECTION

Standing up for strangers is a Christian calling. The Netherlands must assist refugees, preferably close to the countries from where they came. The refugee policy has been very strict during the past few years and it is now time for a more human, more humane policy. After three months, Asylum seekers are entitled to language teaching and may seek employment. They also have the right to a speedy and scrupulous procedure. No one should be returned to their country of origin if that would constitute a threat to their lives or liberty. The living conditions for asylum seekers and, specifically children, must be greatly improved. Only in the extreme cases may asylum seekers be housed in a prison, and children definitely do not belong there. The only way to truly prevent more economic refugees heading in our direction is to ensure that the conditions in their countries of origin improve.

CHILDREN CAN GROW UP HEALTHY AND SAFE

Children need to grow up healthy and safe. This is the purpose of the Youth and Family Policy. Families must be supported wherever possible. Youth and Family Centres must be established in all districts or towns during the next few years, where parents can get all of their questions regarding the upbringing of their children answered. Families are given financial support with a budget per child and free schoolbooks. The ChristenUnie wants to tackle truancy and school dropouts, and strengthen both parents and children enabling them to approach their own problems better. Youth services must support families in this regard. The consumption of alcohol and drugs among young people must be banned. Young people should receive better sex education, focusing more on the importance of relationships rather than purely the usage of contraceptives. Young people should be made resilient against unwanted sex. The ChristenUnie wants to afford more parents the opportunity to combine work and family life, such as by extending parental leave and to encourage more people to work from home or at times better suited to the family. This allows people to make their own choices.

EDUCATION BECOMES MORE INSPIRING

Education is not an expense, it is an investment. The government must ensure that the quality of education is good, but should not interfere too much with the schools. This is the responsibility of school boards, teachers, and parents. Fortunately, we have freedom of education in the Netherlands. If the authorities have more confidence in the professionalism of teachers and impose fewer rules, there will be a lot more time for genuinely inspiring education. Social internship should be extended. This offers students a great opportunity to contribute to society and to become acquainted with career options. To reduce the number of early school leavers, Lower Secondary Professional Education and Intermediate Vocational Education must be linked and 6 years of vocational training must be included with Lower Secondary Professional Education. Intermediate Vocational education programmes must concentrate more on what they do best. The number of different training programmes and courses must be reduced, the quality must be increased, and the connection to practice must

improve. There are too few hours of lessons at many schools for Higher Vocational Education and classes are too big. Higher Vocational Education institutions should invest more in well-trained teachers who are given time to assist students individually. Basic grants must be retained. There must also be scholarships for students from developing countries.

SPORTS, ART AND CULTURE ARE GOOD FOR PEOPLE

The ChristenUnie attaches great importance to both recreational and competitive sport. Sport brings people together and it is a means to promote public health and to combat obesity and diabetes. Sport clubs are becoming more involved in lessons in primary and secondary schools to encourage more young people to exercise. This also helps to develop talents for top sport. Top athletes can also be positive role models. Athletes with disabilities are given more room within existing clubs. The ChristenUnie also wants to stimulate the arts and culture in society. This contributes to the formation of a common identity and the development of talents. Through cultural education and amateur arts, children and adults alike can discover and develop their cultural and creative talents. This seems to be a good way to stimulate learning among children and young people and to keep older people active and healthy. Moreover, companies may be keener to open new branches in a region with an attractive cultural climate.

HEALTHCARE IS BECOMING BETTER AND MORE AFFORDABLE

Healthcare is properly regulated for everyone in the Netherlands.

This should remain so, even though the demand for care continues to increase as the population becomes older. More action is required to ensure financial sustainability. A precondition is that solidarity between people must be maintained so that people subsidise each other where necessary. Above all, healthcare must remain dignified. The cost of healthcare is reduced through better cooperation in healthcare and with a good first line of healthcare, such as GPs or the Centres for Youth and Families. The cost of health insurance and deductions must be in relation to income. Not all new medical treatments must necessarily be included in the basic package, but towards the ends of their lives, everyone has the right to proper care and guidance. More money and attention must be focussed on this aspect. Obesity and many diseases can be prevented by encouraging a healthy lifestyle.

EVERY LIFE DESERVES PROTECTION

The value of human life does not depend on performance, health status, age, or disability. All lives deserve full protection and care. The government has the duty to protect anyone not capable of doing that for themselves, such as unborn children or people coming to the end of their lives. The ChristenUnie wants everything possible to be done to offer people alternatives to abortion and euthanasia. This includes options such as relief for teenage mothers, extensive research into new drugs for serious diseases and to develop hospices, where people are given the care and attention they need when they near the ends of their lives.

VULNERABLE PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASSISTANCE

Poverty is on the increase in our society. One of the biggest causes of poverty is debt, especially among young people. Children need to learn better money management and they

need to learn to save. Vulnerable people also include the homeless, ex-convicts and prostitutes. They need help to find a proper place in society. They should be given proper guidance in schools, youth centres, and asylum centres. Pimps need to be weeded out and victims need to be taken better care of.

EVERYONE GETS THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE

Every person is unique. Every human life is worth as much as the next. Therefore, nobody can be excluded or discriminated against. Everyone should be able to participate in our society: men, women, immigrants, homosexuals and the disabled. To learn to appreciate differences, it is important that people meet each other and that they engage in conversation, even in schools. People with disabilities should be given the opportunity to become as independent as possible, in their lifestyle and, if it is possible, in their work. Violence against minorities must be punished. Targeted measures must be put in place to prevent discrimination and violence against homosexuals.

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A COUNTRY THAT CAN DEAL WITH DIFFERENCES

CHAPTER 2 SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

The Netherlands is an entrepreneurial country and a country of entrepreneurs. The crisis has greatly affected many businesses. Exports and the demand for products have collapsed and unemployment increased. Fortunately, the economy is starting to grow again. We must now seize the opportunity to switch to a sustainable economy.

EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM STRONG BUSINESSES

Even though we are so small, the Netherlands has the sixteenth largest economy in the world, because we do so much business with foreign countries. Enterprises are very important for our society. First and foremost, companies provide job opportunities, but they also ensure innovation: new products and smarter work methods. The Netherlands needs this to stave off competition from places such as China and Eastern Europe. A strong business community is good for all of us. If the Netherlands wants to continue leading in the field of innovation we must significantly increase our investment in knowledge. This is especially true in sectors where the Netherlands are very good already: Water (technology), agriculture, shipbuilding, inland waterways and the oil processing industry.

WE CAN NOW MAKE THE ECONOMY SUSTAINABLE

Industry has been hit hard by the economic crisis. We must now ensure that the industry itself can recover. But, economic growth is not an end in itself; it is a means to develop society. Fairness, solidarity, sustainability, and well-being are more important than economic growth. It is the opinion of the ChristenUnie that the global crisis is the perfect opportunity to switch to a sustainable economy. An economy that takes the welfare of humans, nature, and the environment into account. The Netherlands must strive to become the most sustainable and innovative economy in Europe.

DOING BUSINESS HAS TO BECOME FUN AGAIN

Rules on their own are often excellent, but there are now so many of them that they have become a hindrance. That must change. Redundant rules, complicated licensing procedures, too many mandatory surveys and excessive requirements must be abolished. And the same goes for the numerous subsidy regulations. The government must offer confidence and opportunities to entrepreneurs, so that they can do what they do best: Do business rather than paper work. Of course, supervision is needed, but very focused. The financial and economic crisis showed that banks and companies blindly hunt for more money and possessions. Top salaries and bonuses are an example of this. The government must become more vigilant to ensure that banks and companies make responsible decisions, also for the long term. Otherwise, the people will again carry the burden of the costs if things go wrong.

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COMPANIES ARE TAKING THEIR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

More and more companies understand that success depends not only on profit but also on the way the company treats its employees, society, nature and the environment. For sustained success, companies must be managed responsibly. An increasing number of companies are busy on that front, even when trading in or with foreign countries. Many companies no longer want to do business with companies that use child labour or that violate human rights. Consumers are also increasingly appreciative of this. More and more people want to see fair trade products for sale in shops at fair prices. They also want to know where products come from and how they were made. The ChristenUnie wants to stimulate responsible consumption and corporate social responsibility. Businesses need norms and values just as much as ordinary citizens.

A COLLECTIVE DAY OF REST IS GOOD FOR SOCIETY

Labour cannot continue without rest. The ChristenUnie attaches great importance to Sunday as a day of rest. Not only because more and more small businesses will become threatened if they are forced to open for business on Sundays, but also since the day of rest offers the opportunity to go to church. This is also a day when people have time for each other, because so many people are free on this day.

MORE PEOPLE ARE WORKING LONGER

In this time of crisis, it is very important to combat unemployment, but within a few years we will all need some strength. Because more and more people will go on pension and fewer young people will enter the labour force. To ensure that all of the necessary work is still being done more people need to work and for longer. To ensure that people can continue working until the age of 67, the ChristenUnie will introduce a talent budget: This is a budget for education, leave or an additional payment. The budget can also be used for early retirement for those in strenuous careers.

IT IS BECOMING EASIER TO COMBINE LABOUR AND CARE

The ChristenUnie considers it important for people to combine employment and care, but also for people to make their own choices. The government cannot force anyone to work, but they can make efforts to make the link between labour and care easier. This requires, for

example, the financial support of families, the extension of parental leave and flexible careers, so people have the opportunity to work from home or to ensure that working hours are more suited to their situation, for example during school hours or in the evenings.

THE HOUSING MARKET IS BECOMING FAIRER

Everyone wants to live in a nice house. The demand for housing is still exceeding supply, which makes housing expensive. The ChristenUnie wants to improve the housing market by, for instance, improving existing housing, thereby reducing energy consumption. This is not only better for the environment, it also reduces energy expenditure. The ChristenUnie also wants to make the housing market fairer. At present, people can list the costs of a mortgage for their home as an expense, whereby they pay less tax. This arrangement is particularly beneficial for people with high income that live in an expensive house. They can deduct large amounts of mortgage interest, and therefore enjoy a large tax benefit. This not only results in less tax money, it is also not fair. The ChristenUnie wants the rules to change so that it becomes more attractive to gradually repay mortgages, rather than leave them at as high levels as possible. This principle also creates scope for mortgage interest deductions to be limited to an amount of € 750,000 and over the course of 22 years to reduce it from a maximum of 52 to a maximum of 30 percent. The ChristenUnie does not intend to penalise first time homeowners through these measures. The tax on your own house (the notional rental value for owner-occupiers) can therefore disappear and property transfer tax, which is currently 6 percent of the purchasing price, may be scrapped for first time buyers. In time, the ChristenUnie intends to abolish property transfer tax completely.

SPACE MUST BE PROTECTED

The Netherlands is a small country. The available space must be well distributed and arranged to ensure that there is enough room to live properly, to work and for recreation and to conserve as much natural environment as possible. This, for instance, influences the manner in which we deal with transportation. The ChristenUnie specifically intends to invest in (regional) public transport, cycling traffic and inland shipping and secure dikes. As we will be dealing with financial limitations during the next few years, the ChristenUnie gives preference to the management and maintenance of existing roads over the construction of new roads.

THE KILOMETRE LEVY HELPS REDUCING CONGESTION AND IT BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The only real option to reduce traffic congestion is to introduce kilometre levies. This means that motorists will no longer need to pay road tax, but instead will pay for actual trips made. During peak periods, higher tariffs will be charged in congested areas than during other times. Environmentally friendly cars will also pay a lower rate than other cars. The purpose of the kilometre levy is not to collect more tax from people, but for them to pay in a different manner. The ChristenUnie wants this system to be implemented between 2013 and 2018. The number of kilometres travelled are only registered and kept for a limited period to protect the privacy of motorists.

THE DIKES WILL RISE

More than one quarter of our country lies below sea level. The maintenance of the dikes and dunes demands a lot of attention and will also require additional investments during the coming years because the sea level is rising, soil is eroding, winters are wetter and sometimes intense rainfall results in great volumes of water that must be dispersed quickly. We therefore need to continue with the Delta Act and the Delta Programme. All dikes and dams must be improved, also in the light of climate changes that are slowly but surely taking place. The water boards must make an additional contribution and take great effort to ensure that our dikes and flood defences are kept in good order. Our extensive knowledge of water can also be used to solve water problems elsewhere in the world. This offers opportunities for Dutch corporations.

WE SYMPATHIZE WITH FARMERS

The ChristenUnie has a strong involvement with Dutch farmers. We support a strong agricultural sector, and we are trying to find a good balance between the economy and nature and the environment. We must prevent our farmers from having to produce at the lowest rate possible and thereby be forced to keep investing in expansion. The ChristenUnie does not want to go down that road. This requires proper agreements throughout the European Union. The government encourages farmers to invest in improving animal welfare, while consumers are encouraged to buy sustainable and animal-friendly products. Farmers can also play an important role in protecting the landscape. The value of the landscape is increasingly being recognised. The need for sustainable production also includes fisheries. The ChristenUnie is concerned about declining fish stocks, but we have also seen with the fishermen that good management leads to improvements. The preservation of the fisheries sector must continue, throughout Europe and worldwide. The Netherlands must make efforts in this regard.

WE WILL SWITCH TO RENEWABLE ENERGY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

Fossil fuels like oil are finite, and are also harmful to the environment. The ChristenUnie therefore wants the Netherlands to switch to renewable energy as soon as possible. Non-renewable energy is significantly more expensive, the consumption of renewable energy enjoys financial incentives and is also partially compulsory. In order to reduce energy consumption consumers also need to change their behaviour. The government contributes to this by introducing energy savings reductions for individuals by supporting socially sustainable initiatives and measures such as proper cycling facilities and improved public transport. The ChristenUnie wants no new nuclear plants to be constructed until a permanent and reliable solution to the problems of safety and waste has been found.

A COUNTRY THAT IS WORKING ON A SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

CHAPTER 3 A GOVERNMENT THAT DELIVERS

The government is there for its citizens, not vice versa. Administrators and politicians who realise that fact are suitable to serve the nation. They honestly and sincerely report their activities. A service-oriented government ensures good governance.

***TRUST BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CITIZENS MUST BE REPAIRED;
THE “MANAGERIAL RENEWAL”***

Trust between the government and its citizens is currently at a worrying level. To restore confidence, it is necessary for politicians to be honest and fair, and to be accountable for their actions. They can also only gain trust if they trust themselves more. This means: fewer rules, allowing more freedom and engaging the people more in the planning of their own environment. In this way, the government provides a service to society. This does not mean that the government must take everything over. Every citizen is first and foremost responsible for pulling up their own sleeves within their community. The government is there to do those things that people and institutions cannot do themselves. The government is first and foremost an ally of its citizens, and it must assist its citizens in taking their own responsibility. The ChristenUnie wants to draw up a Charter for being a responsible citizen that states what the government and its citizens can and should do to keep society liveable. Citizens do not only have rights, they also have obligations.

WE KEEP DEMOCRACY CLOSE TO THE NATION

The administration of the Netherlands is divided into three layers: State, provinces and municipalities. Municipalities are the closest to the citizens. The core task of municipalities is to take care of the immediate environment of the people. Municipalities must ensure that the people's living, working, and social conditions are good. The provinces are responsible regional administration, and they are primarily responsible for traffic and transport, landscape, recreation and nature, the provincial area and the regional cultural policy in the province. The Government is limited to matters of national importance. The Kingdom as well as the provinces and municipalities will have to make do with smaller budgets during the next few years. This means that they will be unable to perform certain tasks. Less supervision, more trust and an easier licensing system could result in significant savings. The coming years will certainly be about communal reorganisation, because the amalgamation of municipalities reduces costs and may lead to improved services. The ChristenUnie is not against such a step, but the redistribution should not only concern efficiency. The opinions of the citizens are also important in decisions about cooperation and mergers between municipalities and local democracy may not be removed from citizens.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE MUST NOT BE DISCONTINUED

As a rich country, we cannot only be involved with ourselves. We share the responsibility for global problems such as poverty and inequality. We can help to combat poverty through development cooperation. If we look back, we see that development cooperation has worked in certain instances, while it did not in other instances. We need to learn from this. One of the

lessons is that poverty alleviation must be approached on a broader platform than through development cooperation alone. Poverty reduction requires, above all, fair international trade, cross-border investment and money from migrants in the Netherlands for example, by them sending money to relatives in their homeland. The ChristenUnie is of the opinion that the budget for development cooperation must not be reduced. This must remain at a minimum of 0.8 percent of the Gross National Product and in the long-term it must be increased to 1 percent. The government must ensure that the money ends up at specific aid organisations that are close to local populations. The government must also promote fair trade with developing countries. The economies of developing countries are enhanced when their products end up in European markets. Europe must also stop dumping products at low prices in developing countries because local entrepreneurs can never compete with that.

WE NEED A VERSATILE ARMY

We need a flexible army, capable of performing various tasks in different parts of the world. This includes peace missions, as well as disaster relief and rescue operations. We need a versatile force to protect Dutch interests against threats such as piracy and terrorism. If our soldiers are deployed for crisis management and peacekeeping operations, the ChristenUnie require a mandate under international law, e.g. from the United Nations. The Lower House must also be well informed about the issue. A versatile military needs sufficient funding, but it should also remain affordable. For example, decisions must be taken regarding the follow-up on the F-16 aeroplanes in the next cabinet period. There have been numerous deliberations about the JSF in this regard. The ChristenUnie prefers the JSF, but the devices must comply with noise standards and the price must be acceptable. We also do not need as much of it as we thought we did a few years ago.

THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS ACHIEVED MANY GOOD THINGS

European cooperation during the past sixty years has brought peace, stability, and prosperity. The European Union is of great importance for a small country with an open economy like the Netherlands. Yet, we can never give up our sovereignty as a country. In European context, we act together on issues where we as a country cannot stand alone. Europe is thus not about the Dutch education system, health, family law and taxation. European cooperation is very desirable when it concerns issues such as justice, combating human trafficking, terrorism and asylum policies. This is also true in the field of the economy and in improving the environment and climate. In these areas, we can only make progress if we as European countries, work together.

NO EXTENSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ANY TIME SOON

The European Union has expanded significantly in recent years. Now is the time to reduce the pace of enlargement. Let us first concentrate on ensuring cooperation between the current 27 member states improves and find ways to increase the speed with which decisions are taken with so many member countries. If the European Union should permit new members in future, these countries must always be located on the European continent, such as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and the countries of the Western Balkans. The ChristenUnie is of the opinion that due to geographical, historical, and cultural reasons Turkey cannot be permitted as a member of the EU. Turkey resorts under the European Neighbourhood Policy, however, and as such is eligible for special ties of cooperation and

support. However, Turkey will then need to meet certain requirements: Freedom of religion, freedom of association and the freedom to establish political parties.

THE MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM REQUIRES A PEACE-ORIENTED STANCE FROM ALL PARTIES

The Middle East has been a hotbed for tension and violence for many years. There still seems no prospect of peace and stability in the region. In many countries in the Middle East there is no religious freedom. The Netherlands must take an active stance in this regard. We call for special attention to the protection of Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities. Israel occupies a special place in the Middle East. There have been efforts to find a solution for the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians since the Oslo-agreements of 1993. However, it is clear that a sustainable peace regulation is only possible when Israel has safe and recognised borders and when the Palestinian's wish for their own state is recognised. If both parties cooperate, especially regarding economy and security, both countries will obtain a new perspective. We ask of Israel and the Palestinians to adopt constructive and peace-oriented attitudes. This means that Israel must adopt a reasonable settlement policy and that the Palestinians must recognise the state of Israel without any ifs and buts.

WE WILL LEARN FROM THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

The financial crisis has caused problems for many, but it offers us the opportunity to implement reform, whereby the economy and public finances will be much better off in future. In this manner we want to improve employment, housing and healthcare approaches, push back red tape and make great strides in the areas of sustainable production and consumption. We should not burden future generations with an enormous debt, nor with poor public facilities such as roads, schools and public transport. This requires choices. The ChristenUnie wants to reduce the annual budget deficit in 2015 by about 16 billion Euros. That certainly is achievable by making cuts, increasing the statutory retirement age, limiting mortgage interest deductions and avoiding money being wasted by the state, municipalities and provinces, and in healthcare and education. All of these measures will ensure that people with low levels of income or people in vulnerable positions, such as the disabled, are spared. In order to comply with the 2013 financial requirements of the European Union, the ChristenUnie proposes a temporary Crisis and Restitution Tax in the form of an increase in VAT of up to 1 percent.

INCREASING THE RETIREMENT AGE TO 67

People are living and staying healthy longer. Life expectancy in the next few decades will increase by about 3.5 years. Even though that is a blessing, it is also very costly: Higher costs for the AOW (an allowance based on the Old Age Pensions Act) and pensions. People need to work longer in order to keep retirement provisions sound. The state retirement age will increase in small steps from 2015 to the age of 67 years. During the first twelve years, it will increase by one month a year, then for the next six years by two months a year. There will be more opportunities for part-time retirement, and people in demanding careers can save for earlier retirement.

THE STRONGEST SHOULDERS MUST CARRY THE HEAVIEST BURDEN

Taxes are part of the game. Tax is used to pay for all public services: education, healthcare, police, army, roads, public transport and administration. The government needs to be as economical and efficient as possible with that tax money while keeping the public interest in mind. The ChristenUnie is of the opinion that the strongest shoulders should bear the heaviest burden. For this reason people earning higher income must pay more tax, this is also why we take familial situations and the size of the families into account and why we cast an eye on the positions of single people. The tax system must also be as simple as possible. Lower rates are needed instead of various types of charges so that less money is passed around. Tax must also be used to stimulate entrepreneurship.

The ChristenUnie is in favour of greening the tax system. This means that more tax is to be levied on environmentally unfriendly and environmentally harmful products, but environmentally friendly behaviour must be stimulated.

The text above is a summary of the entire election programme. The complete text as adopted by the ChristenUnie at their Congress is available in Dutch on www.christenunie.nl

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