

# New Dutch PM sworn in with mission to curb asylum

AFP- Dutch King Willem-Alexander swore in former spy chief Dick Schoof as new prime minister Tuesday, at the head of a right-wing coalition cabinet with a mission to implement the country's "strictest-ever" immigration policy.

Two hundred and twenty-three days after far-right leader Geert Wilders swept to an election victory that stunned Europe and the world, Schoof took over from Mark Rutte after 14 years in power.

Schoof presented his ministers to Willem-Alexander in the ornate "Oranjezaal" in the royal palace, who each stepped forward to swear allegiance to the king and the constitution.

"I am very much looking forward to getting to work as prime minister," Schoof wrote on X, formerly Twitter, under a picture of him signing decrees alongside the king.

"For a safe and just Netherlands with social security for everyone. A grip on migration, dialogue, making choices and being clear about it. You can count on me," he added.

Wilders was forced to shelve his own ambitions to be prime minister to keep rocky coalition talks on track – some negotiation partners considered his anti-Muslim and eurosceptic statements too extreme to lead the nation.

Instead, the four coalition partners agreed their party leaders would not be in government, compromising on Schoof, 67, who was previously running the Dutch Secret Service.

Keen marathon runner Schoof will need all his stamina and experience in the halls of power in The Hague to keep the shaky coalition partners on track.

Schoof "will have a lot of work keeping ideological and

personal conflicts under control”, Sarah de Lange, professor of political pluralism at the University of Amsterdam, told AFP.

He has vowed to implement “decisively” the coalition plans for the “strictest-ever admission policy for asylum and the most comprehensive package for getting a grip on migration”.

The 26-page coalition agreement, titled “Hope, courage and pride”, also called to examine the idea of moving the Dutch embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Schoof has said he aims to be “a prime minister for all Dutch citizens”, adding: “I am without a party. I don’t see myself kowtowing to Mr Wilders”.

De Lange said Wilders will have plenty of work keeping his own PVV (Freedom Party) in check and Schoof would be given space.

“Given his extensive experience leading government agencies, he will surely know how to defend his position,” she said.

“It is still an open question though, how he will respond if Wilders tries to put him under pressure by voicing public criticism of his functioning on X”, formerly Twitter.

A new Ipsos I&O poll published Tuesday showed confidence in the government had increased to 42 percent from a low of 29 percent in September 2022.

– ‘Little Tower’ –

Schoof has played a key role in crisis situations, leading the Dutch probe into the downing of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014 over war-torn Ukraine.

All 298 people on board were killed – 196 of them Dutch – by a Russian-made BUK (medium-range) missile fired from territory held by pro-Russian fighters.

A former Labour Party member, Schoof has won the backing of left-wing opposition leader Frans Timmermans, who nevertheless described him as “emphatically Wilders’ candidate”.

The Dutch lurch to the right comes as far-right parties in several European countries have seen their popularity rise.

In France, the far-right National Rally (RN) party of Marine Le Pen won a resounding victory in the first round of parliamentary elections on Sunday.

The handover brings down the curtain on 14 years of Rutte in the “little tower” prime ministerial office – a national record.

Rutte, known for riding his bike to work, often crunching an apple on the way, will be the next secretary-general of the NATO alliance, based in Brussels.

His term was marked by a series of scandals that brought down his government, but he remained in power, earning the nickname “Teflon Mark” for his survival skills.

In a solemn farewell address Sunday, he apologised for a scandal in which thousands of parents were wrongly accused, in some cases after racial profiling, of fraudulently claiming child allowance.

**AFP**