



THE DUTCH REFERENDUM ON THE EU-UKRAINE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

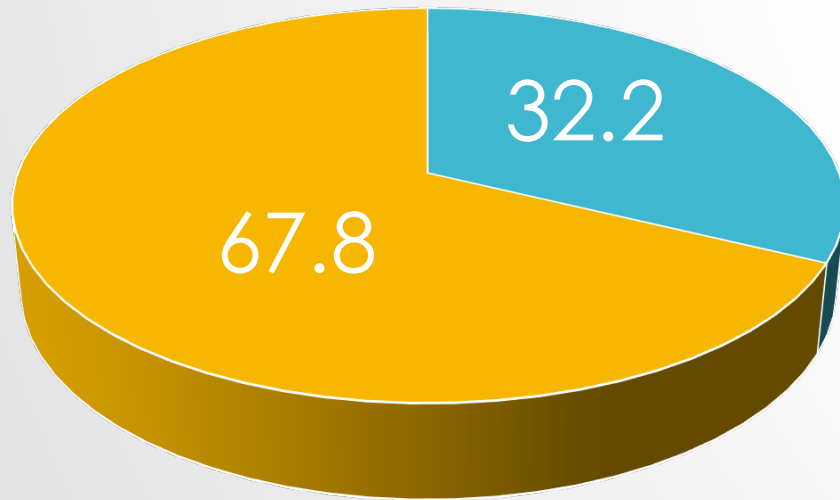
Michiel van Hulten, 27 April 2016

TIMELINE

- 1 July 2015: new Dutch consultative referendum law comes into effect
- 10 July: GeenPeil launches Ukraine referendum petition
- 27 September: GeenPeil announces it has collected 440.000 signatures
- 14 October: Electoral Commission announces referendum
- 6 November: Stem Voor Nederland ('yes' campaign) founded
- 1 February 2016: 'Yes' campaign launched
- 6 April: referendum

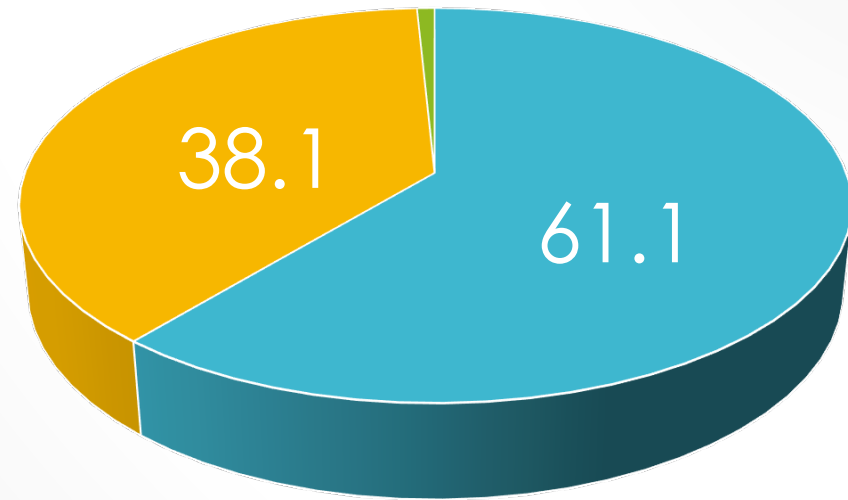
THE RESULT

TURNOUT



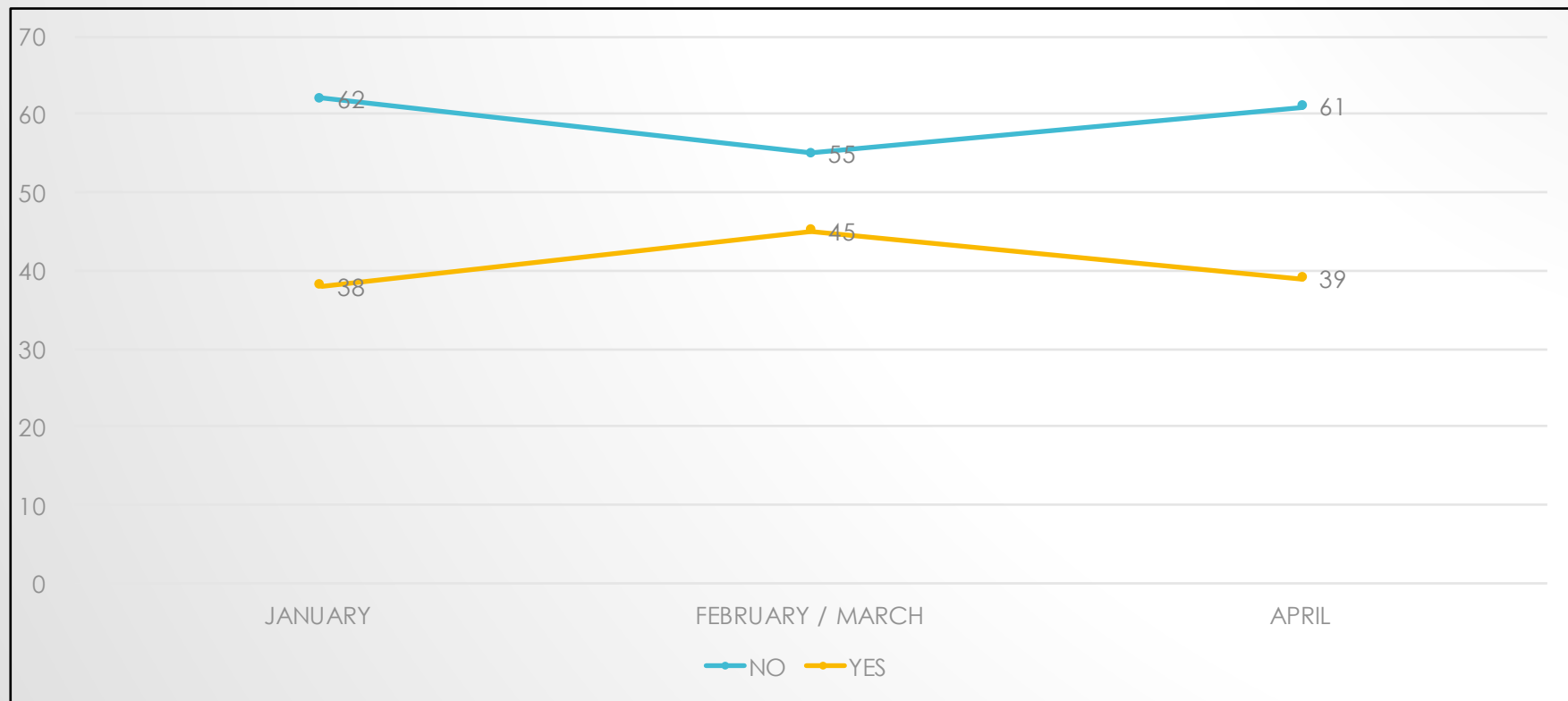
■ VOTED ■ DIDN'T VOTE

VOTES



■ AGAINST ■ FOR ■ SPOILT

POLLS



WHY DID THE DUTCH VOTE 'NO'?

1. Distrust of Brussels and the Hague
2. Perception that Association Agreement would be stepping stone to EU membership
3. Concerns about state of Ukrainian politics, corruption, "civil war"
4. Whipped up fears about visa-free travel, migrant workers
5. Opposition to 'military cooperation', fear of provoking Russia

WHY DID 'YES' LOSE ?

1. 'Strategic' non-voting
2. 6 month head start for 'no': issues already framed
3. Government and most opposition reluctant to get involved
4. Lack of a central command structure
5. Process issues: fewer voting booths, allocation of subsidies
6. Impact of external events (Ukraine government crisis, Brussels attacks, Turkey deal, Panama papers)
7. On- and offline trolling

WHAT LESSONS FOR BREXIT ?

- Very different campaigns about very different issues
- Brexit campaign already in final phase; unlikely that major lessons can be learned by either side at this point
- Dutch 'no' vote provides psychological boost to 'leave' but also reminds 'remain' that victory can't be taken for granted

WHAT LESSONS FOR BRUSSELS ?

- The era of concluding politically sensitive deals via diplomatic treaties is over
- Future treaties with major political consequences are almost certain to be subjected to referendum, eg. TTIP
- So treaties must be able to withstand public scrutiny
- Public diplomacy and campaigning needs to be part of any deal-making from the start (as it has been for TTIP)
- Member state governments and civil society must be prepared to stand up for decisions taken in Brussels



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