

A CENTURY OF HALF-HEARTED GOVERNANCE – *institutional pathology*

Why Dutch politics is neither fish nor fowl

1. Bottom Line

The current growing crisis of confidence in Dutch politics is no longer an isolated incident, but rather the manifestation of well over a century of the nation's central administrative culture. Since the beginning of the last century, the Dutch administrative centre has been characterised by the evasion of fundamental choices through successive mechanisms of pacification, institutionalised compromise, and process management. This structural indecisiveness, driven by short-term electoral logic, has resulted in a substantial loss of governmental control over societal transitions. This administrative culture has evolved into a vicious circle entirely devoid of self-cleansing capacity. Consequently, an implosion of the system has become inevitable.

2. Strategic Frame

The Dutch governance system has functioned for over a century as a complacent, risk-averse consensus apparatus:

- *Pacification (early to mid-twentieth century)*: Consensus was bought by distributing public funds proportionally across the pillars without resolving ideological deadlocks.
- *Consociational Corporatism (mid-twentieth century)*: Sharp choices were politically smoothed over within endless compromise structures to preserve coalitions.
- *Management Culture (late twentieth century to the present)*: Political vision was replaced by technocratic process management and an obsession with media perception.

Each period builds upon the previous: risk-averse consensus has evolved into the golden standard of governance, rendering self-correction utterly impossible.

3. Blind Spot

Within this vicious circle, the political-administrative system functions in conceptual isolation. Whereas within the system internal process control or institutional consensus accords are deemed solutions, society perceives this as nothing more than structural symptom management. This fundamental gap in perception deprives the system of the societal legitimacy that is indispensable for effective crisis management.

4. Strategic Advice

Establish that an implosion of the national governance system is inevitable. Rather than internal repair, an entirely new generation of capable politicians and administrators, unburdened by historical baggage, must emerge post-implosion to lead the way:

- Recognise that restoring trust and aligning societal perception necessitates a generational shift.
- Select new administrators not on the basis of political party loyalty or media-friendly behaviour, but on substantive expertise, a moral compass, and the capacity to deliver sound governance.
- Ensure that political conflicts are henceforth fought out openly in parliament, thereby making choices transparent and traceable once more.