

5 Reasons Why Mark Rutte Is Not the Right One to Lead NATO

It is no longer news that when it comes to the selection of the next NATO Secretary General, indicators such as the percentage of GDP allocated by his country to the defence sector and the support for Ukraine are essential. What I want to prove with this analysis is that these are not the only indicators we should consider when it comes to assessing Mark Rutte, who is in pole position to take over as NATO Secretary General at the much-anticipated summit in Washington in July this year.

There are at least 5 reasons the Dutch leader is not fit to lead the transatlantic alliance in these turbulent times, and they all refer to Rutte's political profile, as it was shaped during 16 years of leadership. I plead for a global assessment of his political profile, beyond the U-turn of recent years, when he has branched out from a supporter of Nord Stream into one of the most vocal advocates of supporting Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression.

Why is Mark Rutte not the right one to lead NATO?

1. **Because he proved that economic interest, and not common security shall guide one's attitude towards critical infrastructure protection.** Mark Rutte was one of the political architects and most fervent supporters of the Nord Stream project, which has plunged Europe into an instance of energy interdependence vis-à-vis Russia. In his speech for the launch of Nord Stream's second pipeline in 2012, it was Rutte who [claimed](#) that "All the partners in the Nord Stream project have shown that international cooperation is crucial to energy supply security across national borders".

Throughout his successive terms as European leader, Rutte has been insensitive to the security concerns of NATO's eastern flank states. For example, in 2016, the Netherlands rejected the [EU-Ukraine](#) partnership deal, and Rutte as prime minister did not play his part in promoting this initiative.

On China, Rutte also delayed a firm response to combat economic dependence on this player with its opaque global agenda. Only recently has the Netherlands started to take steps to impose restrictions on Chinese operators (in the case of chips), and the move was only one of national interest. In 2022, [almost half](#) (47%) of 4G technology in the Netherlands was operated by Chinese firms, according to Real Institute ELCANO. During this year's visit to China, Rutte [said](#) that "decoupling and breaking industrial and supply chains" is not a policy choice of the Dutch government. This lack of ambiguity only favours China, not the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

2. **Because he believes that the alliances of the Euro-Atlantic world should be redrawn depending on who's in government.** He proved this kind of emotional judgment in 2021, when he declared that Hungary should [leave](#) the European Union following the adoption of a controversial law limiting the teaching of LGTQ content in schools. And a

lthough the law itself was controversial and against the humanist values of the European Union, Mark Rutte's statement was even more misplaced, as it aimed to punish an EU member state for adopting a piece of legislation in an area of national competence (education) by excluding it from the EU. Making an analogy with what is happening today, we could say that the Netherlands that Rutte led for so long should also be removed from the European Union since in the last elections their citizens voted in a [majority with the anti-Islam populist party of Geert Wilders](#).

Because I am originally from Transylvania, a region of Romania that Viktor Orbán's revisionists target with their [anti-European speeches](#), I could never be accused of sympathizing with Hungary's gestures on the international stage. Nor would I consider the Budapest government the model of European leadership. However, I believe that urging a member country of the European Union to leave the European construction because of an internal law is a misguided decision, which, if materialized, would have enormous security implications. Neither the European Union nor NATO could afford a power vacuum at the heart of the continent, not when the war in Ukraine is still unfolding, not when the Western Balkans remain a [playground](#) for state actors with strategic agendas that are contrary to our common Euro-Atlantic interests. In an increasingly fragmented geopolitical scene, NATO's next leader should be able to converse with each individual government, regardless of who leads it, leaving political convictions aside and focusing on building consensus.

3. **Because his internal security policy was mediocre at best.** As long as the Netherlands remains a hot spot for global [drug trafficking](#), can we say that Rutte has done a good job as prime minister? The Dutch criminal networks are considered to be one of the most dangerous ones on the continent, according to [Europol](#). The [Global Organized Crime Index](#) also shows us that the Netherlands (already a hub of financial crimes) has emerged as one of the leading countries for cybercrime in the past few years ("the country is likely to become a hub for cyber-dependent crimes, providing much of the transnational crime infrastructure necessary for these activities").
4. **Because he is still committed to the idea of a two-speed Europe, where some are more equal than others.** Despite fulfilling all legal conditions, the government led by Mark Rutte has continued to [block the extension of the Schengen area](#) to Bulgaria and Romania for more than a decade. The only impulse strong enough to trigger Rutte to change his position to stop vetoing this decision was his NATO candidacy - a transactional approach, but one that demonstrates the politician's attachment to the idea of a two-speed Europe.

Nor should we forget Mark Rutte's [reluctance](#) to support the enlargement of the European Union until 2030 to include Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkan states, a position that denotes a lack of strategic vision for post-war European security.

5. **Because he has no plan, except for securing a high-level posting after a long career at the national level.** Ever since he expressed his intention to seek the job of NATO Secretary General, Mark Rutte has shied away from presenting a concrete plan on his intentions in the context of the need to take the Alliance to the next level. He has been busy with international campaign visits, tailored to the opaque process of electing t

he new Secretary General of the Alliance, but has not offered specific answers that reveal how he sees, for example, a roadmap for Ukraine's integration into NATO, or how he will manage the complex interdependencies between the security of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. In contrast to this opaque approach, Klaus Iohannis, Romania's president, made public his [plan](#) for a military alliance fit for the future since the day he announced his candidacy. Kaja Kallas, Estonia's prime minister, has also made her [opinions](#) on issues of international security concern widely known through her numerous public interventions and keynote speeches.

Mark Rutte has shown us that he lacks in great respect the entrepreneurial vision needed to [lead](#) NATO. Furthermore, his political profile on the international stage seems to be frozen in the position of the "follower": first of Angela Merkel, and now, slowly, of the US President who supports his appointment, Joe Biden.

With no vision or entrepreneurial vocation, a track record for emotional judgments on the European level and a legacy of participating in initiatives that gave rise to Europe's strategic interdependence from its greatest enemy (Russia), Mark Rutte cannot be leading NATO in its most complex geopolitical era since its founding 75 years ago.