

Beat: Politics

Prime minister Rutte from Holland apologises

healthcare commotion

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USPA NEWS - Prime minister Mark Rutte on Monday evening apologised for the confusion over his new cabinet's plans to introduce income-related healthcare insurance, saying "I have made a mistake". I apologise to everyone for the commotion, the prime minister said at a news conference in The Hague.

The unprecedented statement, coming just weeks after the new cabinet was formally sworn in, follows major unease over the effect of the plan on middle incomes which led to it being abandoned on Friday.

Regret

Labour leader Diederik Samsom also said he regretted the commotion. Samsom said he had wanted to restore faith in politics after 10 stormy years.

"To my regret, I have to admit that trust has taken a sharp knock over the past 14 days, and that hurts me," Samsom said.

Labour and Rutte's VVD Liberals agreed to form a coalition government just 54 days after the general election, despite the wide political gulf between them, and hard talking during the campaign.

Bridges

Yet just two weeks after the coalition agreement "Building Bridges" was first published, a weekend of crisis talks resulted on Monday evening in a new agreement which will lead to a "slower" adjustment in incomes. Reducing the gap between rich and poor is one of the Labour party's main aims.

The new plan is described as a "classic compromise" by commentators. It involves reducing the amount high-income households can earn before they have to start paying tax while expanding the tax-free base for low income families.

In addition, €250m is being shifted from the infrastructure budget to the unemployment benefit budget. And money raised by gradually reducing mortgage tax relief will be used to expand the third tax band so it takes longer for people to reach the top tax rate of 52%. This, the coalition hopes, will cushion the blow of reducing the tax-free base for middle incomes.

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