

OPINION PIECE

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GEERT WILDERS AND THE RISE OF THE EXTREME RIGHT



By Yara van der Hoeven

In November of 2023, over two million Dutch people voted for the extreme right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV) in the parliamentary elections. As a Dutch citizen, I was shocked by the ensuing election of Geert Wilders, their frontman, as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. It was so unexpected that even Geert Wilders himself appeared astonished in the video showing his first reaction to the news of his victory. Following the fall of the cabinet in July earlier that year, we held parliamentary elections in November, enabling the PVV to become the party with the most seats. Consequently, Geert Wilders will become our Prime Minister, indicating a shift towards populism in the Netherlands and likewise suggesting a similar trend on the European continent.

GEERT WILDERS AND HIS POLITICS

Geert Wilders began his political career at the end of the twentieth century as part of the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy). Eventually, he left and created his own party, now called the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom).

Throughout his political career, Geert Wilders has always been in the opposition, never in a coalition. This has always appeared to me as a key element of his politics. He criticizes the status quo without seemingly having any concrete and feasible plans to take action and improve our country. Known for his criticisms about Muslims and their presence in the Netherlands, he infamously asked a group of his supporters whether they wanted more or fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands. In their 2023 election programme, the PVV claims to prioritize Dutch citizens, advocating for measures such as closing the borders to migration, holding a binding referendum on our exit from the European Union and rejecting climate action.

To me, Geert Wilders is our equivalent of Donald Trump. A large portion of Dutch citizens never took Geert Wilders seriously before the election, mirroring the situation in the United States before the 2016 elections. The PVV softened its positions during the election campaign, making the statements resonate with a broader audience and ultimately allowing it to become the biggest party in the Netherlands.

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS SURROUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

At present, the parties who received the most votes (PVV, VVD, BBB (Farmer-Citizen Movement) and NSC (New Social Contract)) are engaged in a series of meetings with an informer to attempt to create a coalition. The informer aims to conclude this phase by early February at the latest. Particularly the VVD and NSC are cautious about cooperating with the PVV. For the rest of the country, this means waiting until we hear more about a possible coalition, which is perhaps going to be a lengthy process. The true consequences of Geert Wilders as Prime Minister are yet to be felt. I fear that the Netherlands will become less tolerant, while that is what we have always prided ourselves on.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE

People across the European continent are increasingly nervous about the state of politics in their respective countries. Right-wing parties are on the rise everywhere. This trend is expected to be reflected in the upcoming European Parliament elections. The political groups Identity and Democracy (ID) and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) are anticipated to gain significant amounts of seats.

What just happened in my country appears to foreshadow what may occur in many other European countries. Our post-COVID-19 times are complex and people seem desperate for consolidation and improvement. The extreme right can offer some consolidation through their words to certain people but whether they will be able to improve countries remains to be seen. Perhaps this is Europe's puberty phase: revolting against the status quo, angry at the world. In a few years, we will hopefully realise that rebellion is not something that can continue forever. We must appreciate what different actors, like the European Union, have offered us, acknowledging that they may not be as bad as we have portrayed them.

In conclusion, the election of the PVV shocked me and many of my fellow country people. Currently, there is an important period of cabinet formation. After this, we will start feeling the real consequences of Geert Wilders as Prime Minister, which frightens me. Throughout Europe, this same trend of rising support for the far right and populism is seen. This will likely lead to the election of more populist country leaders and a more far-right European Parliament.