Selective Intolerance: The Dutch Freedom Party

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Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Freedom Party) is a populist far right party with a virulent anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and neoliberal economic agenda. Since July 2012, PVV is advocating the Dutch withdrawal from the EU.

The party holds 24 seats out of 150 in the Dutch House of Representatives, ten seats out of 75 in the Dutch Senate, and four seats in the European Parliament. A November 14 Politiële Barometer poll shows PVV having 17.3% of the vote for the May 2014 European Parliament election, second after the Christian conservative liberals from Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD, The People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy) with 18.7%.

A TNS poll in February 2010 showed that 58% of PVV’s voters are male; 40% are aged 35-54 and 33% are older than 55; 85% have no college education (Bachelor’s degree or higher); only around 7% of the voters in major urban areas are choosing PVV. The party is getting slightly more votes from southern Netherlands than the north; with 20.6% at the 2011 regional elections, PVV is the top party in the southern province of Limburg.

PVV’s current president, Geert Wilders, is the son of a printing company director and hails from a Catholic background, although he states he is not religious. He worked in Israel for a few years at various companies, then moved back to the Netherlands where he worked in the health insurance industry. He joined VVD in 1989 and quickly became Frits Bolkestein’s personal assistant and apprentice. Elected in 1998 in the Dutch House of Representatives, Wilders left VVD in 2004, due to the party’s support for Turkey’s prospective accession to the EU. He formed a one-person party, Group Wilders, which became PVV in 2006.
Finances

PVV refuses the state subsidy entitled by Dutch law, and is the least transparent party in the Netherlands when it comes to disclosing its financial sources: “A Freedom Party-related foundation receives donations from Dutch or foreign sources, but these are modest amounts of money” wrote Wilders in an email in response to allegations of millions of dollars in donations. According to Reuters and Dutch daily NRC Handelsblad, the party received money from American Neoconservative groups such as the Philadelphia based pro-Israeli think tank “Middle East Forum” directed by Daniel Pipes, Los-Angeles based conservative groups run by David Horowitz, and “Stop Islamization of America” run by Pamela Geller.

PVV’s Agenda

- Promote Judeo-Christian and humanist tradition as the dominant culture in the Netherlands, which should be adopted by immigrants accordingly
- Ban burkas, the Koran, mosques in urban areas, minarets, Islamic schools, and foreign funding for mosques
- Withdraw the Netherlands from the EU, Schengen Agreement (and reinstate border controls), EuroZone (and reintroduce the gulden currency), ESM (European Stability Mechanism)
- Maintain the status as an EFTA member (European Free Trade Association) guaranteeing free movements of goods, services, capital, and people (except those from Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, etc.)
- Stop Turkey’s accession to the EU; rescind Turkey’s NATO membership
- Cut 20% from the salary for all public employees, from the Royal family to government officials, MPs, MEPs, and local administration public servants; reduce public employees by a fifth
• Scrap Art subsidies, grants to political parties, and multicultural organizations
• Lower regulation for businesses, lower individual and corporate tax, cut public services, and lower the deficit
• Strengthen law enforcement, introduce preventive searches, increase penalties, introduce group liability, eliminate parole, cut back on probation, and reverse the proof of self-defense
• Defend gays and increase sentences for violence against LGBT and Jews (especially from Islamists)
• Ban coffee shops within one km radius from schools
• Stop funding for all green projects, including CO2 reduction programs; stop the construction of windmills; rely instead on cheaper energy sources such as oil, coal, and nuclear energy
• Abolish the Dutch Senate; limit the number of MPs in the House of Representatives to 100 (from currently 150)
• Ban family planning programs
• Prioritize social housing to Dutch nationals; limit benefits to those who speak Dutch well and have worked at least 10 years in the Netherlands
• Defend equality of men and women
• Repeal anti-smoking laws in bars

Controversies

In 2008, Wilders released FITNA, a short film that mixes Koran excerpts and hatred speeches by various Muslim clerics with sequences showing the September 11 and other terrorist attacks. The movie argues that Islam encourages acts of terrorism, anti-Semitism, intolerance, violence against women and gay people, etc. Wilders frequently compares Islam with Fascism, and the Koran to Hitler’s “Mein Kampf.” The frequent anti-Islam and anti-immigration statements brought him numerous life threats, including a 2009 fatwa calling for his beheading. Since 2004, he is under state protection. He stood trial in the Netherlands for incitement for race hatred and discrimination and was acquitted in 2011 when a judge deemed his speeches “acceptable within the context of the public debate.” He claims that he is not racist since his wife is Hungarian, but defends the Dutch libertarian tradition by being “intolerant of the intolerants.”

He stated that his allies “are not [Jean-Marie] Le Pen or Haider” and he will “never join up with the fascists and Mussolini of Italy. I’m very afraid of being linked with the wrong rightist fascist groups.” Yet he did form an anti-EU alliance with Marine Le Pen’s Front National in November 2013. According to the Economist, their ideological differences (Front National has a left wing economic agenda and is against gay marriage) matter less for Wilders’s voters who “tend to be at the lower end of the informational spectrum.”

EuroPoint: Just like other populist far-right parties in Europe, PVV is cashing in on popular hostility to the EU by using immigrants and Muslims as scapegoats.

Many thanks to Dutch bloggers Tim de Beer and Chris Alberts for their help

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GSJ is published at Stony Brook University by the Stony Brook Institute for Global Studies (SBIGS)