

Wilders Wins Big



THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS – NOVEMBER 23: Geert Wilders, the leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), celebrates in his party office after his party's victory in yesterday's general election, on November 23, 2023 in The Hague, Netherlands. The Netherlands' far-right, anti-EU leader Geert Wilders won the most votes in parliamentary elections on November 22, dominated by debate around rising immigration in the Netherlands. (Photo by Carl Court/Getty Images)

by Bruce Bawer

It's about time. On November 22, seventeen years after its founding by Geert Wilders, the Party for Freedom (PVV) won a huge victory in the Dutch elections. With 23% of the vote, the PVV went from 17 to 37 seats in the 150-seat House of

Representatives. The conservative British commentator Paul Joseph Watson [called](#) it “the biggest political earthquake in Europe since Brexit.” The lefties who’d shown up to follow the returns at the headquarters of other parties exhibited the same shock and grief that we saw in the faces of Hillary Clinton voters at the Javits Center on Election Night 2016.

Even as the final results were being tabulated, a group of “experts” on the Netherlands met at the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the American Enterprise Institute for a 90-minute discussion of the exit polls. There were five people on stage, but very little range in views. All five were unsettled by Wilders’s success. Erik Voeten, who teaches Geopolitics and Justice in World Affairs at Georgetown University, accused Wilders of “Islamophobia” and “xenophobia” and claimed that he “wants to do things that are contrary to current Dutch law, European law, and international law.” Stan Veuger of AEI called the PVV “extremely radical.”

How radical? Wilders, charged Veuger, “wants to ban the Koran, ban mosques, ban Islamic schools.” Echoing word-for-word Voeten’s observation that such moves would violate “Dutch law, European law, and international law,” Veuger pronounced that the very idea of Wilders as head of government was an “inconceivable option.” He even suggested that the “stringent security measures” that Wilders has to live with 24 hours a day might make it “difficult for him to function as prime minister.” And why exactly does Wilders live with “stringent security measures”? Because Muslims have repeatedly threatened him with assassination. Of course Veuger was far too discreet to mention that delicate detail.

Matthias Mattijs, a Belgian who teaches International Political Economy at Johns Hopkins, maintained that the likes of Wilders could not possibly become prime minister. And Arthur van Benthem, who teaches Business Economics and Public Policy at the Wharton School, worried that the election results would stall important action on “climate change” and

“energy transition.” The Dutch government, you see, has set itself the goal of eliminating all non-electric cars by 2030 and of cutting “cattle farming in half” to satisfy EU rules on nitrogen emissions. How, asked van Benthem, could the Netherlands attain these manifestly worthy objectives now that Wilders, that deplorable figure, has pulled such numbers?

Not until an hour and 26 minutes into the conversation did Brookings Institution fellow Constanze Stellenmüller, who is German, mention the recent events in the Holy Land – which of course explain why support for PVV leaped from 12% to 23% after October 7. How could a Dutch voter follow the news about the massacres in kibbutzim and at that desert dance party and not think about the angry young men in the Muslim enclaves in their own cities?

As long ago as 2004, 68% of Dutch people “felt threatened by ‘immigrant or Muslim young people’” and 47% “feared that in due time they would have to live according to Islamic rules in the Netherlands.” Since then, the Muslim population of the Netherlands has skyrocketed – for fourteen years, the mayor of its second largest city, Rotterdam, has been a Moroccan named Ahmed Aboutaleb – and concerns about where all this is leading have only intensified. Hamas’s assaults on Israel brought Dutchmen’s worst imaginings to life.

Yet get a load of how Stellenmüller framed it. The Dutch, she said, have “the largest per capita Turkish minority in Europe,” plus “significant Arab minorities,” and the Israel-Hamas war is consequently “translating into increasing tensions domestically.” This, she said, represents a challenge for Wilders: he “has the choice now of kicking this beehive or being a responsible politician.”

Get that? If Wilders wants to be a “responsible politician,” he’ll drastically tame his rhetoric about immigration and make nice with Muslims; if – assuming his victory translates into greater power – he keeps his promises by trying to rescue his

country from Islamization, he'll be "kicking a beehive."

Clearly, all five participants in this event were on the same page. Wilders, as one of them put it, is "out of the mainstream." But who's to define "the mainstream" – them or the voters? Wilders, pronounced Voeten, is "far out of line" on immigration. Yes – far from the political establishment's consensus. Mattijs recalled nostalgically the "brief moment" in 2020 when "cosmopolitan elites" assumed that the challenge of the COVID pandemic would lead voters to "want serious people in government" and would thus put an end to "populism." Of course, by "serious people," Mattijs meant people like himself and his fellow panelists; by "populism," he meant Wilders.

While I was watching this ridiculous AEI event, I kept remembering a one-day conference that I attended many years ago, also in Washington, D.C. The topic was the future of Europe. There were two or three dozen speakers – each of whom was more pompous and self-important than the next – and I was the only one, I think, who wasn't a diplomat or ex-diplomat. I was also the only one who didn't see Europe's future as bright and sunny. After I'd done my little song and dance – a half-hour lunchtime talk about the danger of mass Muslim immigration – I became the object of this crowd's unanimous contempt and condescension. Islam a danger to Europe? What a gauche proposition! Who let this lout in?

I left that conference thinking: *Well, the hell with them all.* And I felt the same way about the clowns at AEI. If mosques are preaching violence, by all means close them down; if madrassas are teaching Jew-hatred, close *them* down; and if Muslim immigrants have criminal records, send them home *tout de suite*. Is any of this against Dutch law? If so, change the law. Is it against EU law? Then quit the EU, like the Brits did. Is it against international law? Then the hell with international law.

For heaven's sake, the Netherlands is in an existential crisis. Twenty-one years ago, Pim Fortuyn – an eloquent sociologist turned politician whose number-one issue was the danger of mass Muslim immigration – was nine days out from an election that was expected to propel him into the prime ministership when he was brutally assassinated. On that day, the cause of preserving Dutch liberty in the face of Islamization took a disastrous hit. Years passed. Eventually Wilders founded the Party for Freedom, which over the years went up and down in the polls, coming tantalizingly close to power and then dropping away again, as the cause of saving the Netherlands from Islam competed in voters' minds with other issues of the day.

Then came October 7. It doesn't feel like a stretch to conclude from the election results that the news of Hamas's chilling butchery caused more Dutchmen than ever before to recognize just how fragile their freedom and safety are and, in consequence, to reject the feckless establishment – as represented by those panelists at AEI – in favor of Wilders. And for good reason. They want their country to be saved.

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