EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

(Not) all right

In an unforeseen turn of events, the right-wing populist Party for Freedom headed by Geert Wilders won the Dutch parliamentary elections, sparking joy in the far-right camp and grave concerns due to the Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-EU rhetoric of the winning campaign.

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On the right-hand side

The one-man Party for Freedom (PVV) of the right-wing populist Geert Wilders secured 37 out of the 150 mandates of the Dutch Parliament, doubling its numbers in the list of MPs. Coming in second with 25 seats is former European Commissioner Frans Timmermans' left-wing alliance. Having vowed to provide anything but freedom to the Muslim population of the Netherlands as well as to refugees and migrant workers, Wilders is now tasked with building a coalition of the willing to secure the legislative majority. According to *Kurier*, the list of prospective "partners in crime" includes the right-wing liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the recently founded New Social Contract (NSC) and the Bauer Citizens Movement (BBB). The electoral victory attained on the promises to ban mosques and the Koran, close the borders, get rid of climate protection provisions and leave the EU sent waves of glee amongst European right-wing populists, including AfD leader Alice Weidel, the EP representative of the Austrian FPÖ Harald Vilimsky, and the honorary members of the club – Viktor Orbán and Marine Le Pen. Biographer Meindert Fennema warned back in 2017 that Wilders "is someone who wants to abolish the rule of law through democratic means" and the alert rings true as ever.

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Two rights make one wrong

The *Spiegel* provides an interesting collection of reactions from the international press after the shock of Wednesday's Dutch elections. Two Dutch outlets underline that the election results are a surprise that will force the right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV), the main winner of the vote, to form a coalition. *De Volkskrant* hypothesises that the previous ruling party People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) will most certainly agree to work with the far right, as it didn't rule out joining forces before the election. Belgian newspaper *De Standaard* stresses that migration was what allowed PVV leader Geert Wilders to win; considering his longstanding anti-migrant stance, he was considered the most credible candidate on that topic. *The Guardian* also lists the extreme measures the newly elected prime minister wants to implement: the reintroduction of Dutch border controls and of work permits for workers from within the EU as well as the detention and deportation of illegal migrants. Italy's *Corriere della Sera* recalls that while the previous Dutch government took nine months to form, it is not a possibility this time around as a coalition needs to be created before the EU elections in June.

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Avengers, assemble

After 25 years in the world of Dutch politics without managing to hold office, Geert Wilders finds himself in particular company amongst the leaders of Europe's various far-right, nationalist, and Eurosceptic leaders. According to *Novi List*, following the surprise success of Wilders' Freedom Party in Wednesday's elections, the politician who has been called the Dutch version of Donald Trump has a good chance of becoming prime minister following upcoming coalition negotiations. With his policy priorities and his open admiration of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, it should be no surprise that congratulations are flowing in from familiar faces on the right. Orbán wrote words of support on X and even called Wilders on the phone to be the first to congratulate him. In France, Marine Le Pen called the victory "spectacular", citing Wilders' "support for the defence of national identities." Wilders also received kind words from Matteo Salvini of Italy's Lega Party, Santiago Abascal of Spain's Vox party, and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland, with throughlines emphasising national identities and, more broadly, "change."

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Fan the flames

Following the sweeping victory of the far-right party in the Dutch parliamentary elections, *RTBF* keeps a wary eye on the possible boost it might give to the Belgian Vlaams Blok in the June 2024 elections. While some reassurance might come from the fact that Flemish politics, including the populist right, tend to be less receptive and relatively independent from the shifts in the Dutch political landscape compared to their French counterparts, the litmus test for the future of the far right in the region will likely be the ability of Geert Wilders to form a government. *RTBF* predicts it to be a formidable task accompanied by a long and complicated period of uncertainty, the chaos of which might, hopefully, provide a counter example and a warning to the voters during the Belgian electoral campaign. Alternatively, if Wilders manages to quickly take strong and symbolic measures on immigration, or deliver on any of his audacious promises, it might well add fuel to the fire. One thing is certain - Flanders will have a particularly attentive eye on what is happening in the Netherlands, but predicting beyond that is a shot in the dark.

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