
ANTI-ISLAM WILDERS FRONTRUNNER AS DUTCH ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINS

- 15.02.2017

EurActiv (15 February 2017)

Campaigning for the Dutch election kicks off today (15 February) with anti-Islam leader Geert Wilders frontrunner in a vote that will test the anti-establishment sentiment that swept Britain out of the European Union and Donald Trump into the White House.

Wilders, a Eurosceptic, anti-immigration fan of Trump has dubbed the 15 March parliamentary election the start of a Patriotic Spring in Europe, where French and German voters go to the polls in May and September.

Unlike Trumps win and the Brexit vote, it will not be a shock if Wilders and his Party for Freedom win, he has led in opinion polls for most of the past two years and the fragmented political landscape means a coalition government of four or more parties is all but inevitable.

ANALYST: DUTCH VOTE TO SET OFF EUROPE'S 'SUPER ELECTION YEAR'

Dutch voters head to crunch parliamentary polls in two months time, heralding the start of a super election year in three of Europes leading economies: The Netherlands, France and Germany.

EurActiv.com

His main rival, Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the conservative VVD Party, is banking on a strengthening economic recovery to restore popularity lost during the austerity years of 2012-2014.

Wilders party is expected to get 20% of the popular vote, compared to Ruttés 16%. A simple majority of just over half is generally sought to govern, but all but one party have ruled out sharing power with Wilders, whose policies are seen by many as offensive and sometimes unconstitutional.

WILDERS SAYS OTHERS WILL SOON FORGET PLEDGE NOT TO WORK WITH HIM

Anti-Islam Dutch politician Geert Wilders said on Sunday (12 February) that promises by other parties not to work with him would be quickly forgotten if, as expected, his far-right Party of Freedom gets more than 30 parliamentary seats in next months election.

EurActiv.com

There are 31 parties competing for votes, with 14 likely to win at least one seat in the 150-member Dutch parliament. The next three largest parties command no more than 10-11% of the vote.

The overwhelming majority of Dutchmen basically do not vote for (Wilders), said Kristof Jacobs, a teacher at Radboud University in Nijmegen.

No to Nexit

So a victory for Wilders is unlikely to lead to the Netherlands leaving the European Union, closing the border to Muslim immigrants or reinstating the Dutch currency, policies only his party endorses.

In December, Wilders was convicted of inciting discrimination against Moroccans for leading a chant of Fewer! Fewer! Fewer! at an election rally in 2014.

DUTCH POPULIST LEADER RISES IN POLLS AFTER CONVICTION

The party of populist anti-Islam Dutch MP Geert Wilders has risen strongly in the polls since the lawmaker was tried and convicted of discrimination, according to a survey published Sunday (11 December).

EurActiv.com

If Wilders PVV party finishes first but is unable to form a government, Rutte will be left trying to forge a centrist coalition with several parties that share little more than opposition to Wilders.

In that case we will stay put and manage the country until there is a new coalition, Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem said on Tuesday. That could even last for up to four years.

The Netherlands, a country of 17 million that relies heavily on foreign trade, in 2005 rejected the European constitution and last year voted down a treaty for closer EU ties with Ukraine.

A poll by Motivaction on Tuesday showed more than 61% of respondents see Dutch politicians as elitist, unreliable and dishonest.

Around 37% of likely voters said they were undecided about who to vote for.

I find it difficult to make a decision, said Renee Keijzer, from the town of Volendam. So much has happened in the world that it is hard to position yourself properly.

Kaynak/Source: