

Beat: Vips

Dutch MP quits party after anti-Moroccan remarks by Geert Wilders

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USPA News - A Dutch member of parliament quit the Party for Freedom (PVV) on Thursday after its controversial leader, Geert Wilders, led a crowd into a chant against Moroccan immigrants in the country, prompting outrage and a criminal investigation. Wilders, 50, made the remarks on late Wednesday evening while addressing supporters in The Hague where the PVV party scored second place in municipal elections.

The right-wing party, which has repeatedly made headlines for its fierce stance against immigration and Islam, participates in only two cities at the local level. "Do you want, in this city, and in the Netherlands, more or less Moroccans?" Wilders asked his supporters after exit polls showed the PVV party won eight seats in The Hague's municipal council, a loss of one seat when compared to 2010. His supporters responded with chants of "Less! Less! Less!" After the chanting, Wilders responded: "Then we'll arrange that." The disturbing scene provoked a storm of criticism, with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) saying it had left "a bad taste in my mouth." Other leaders across the political spectrum also condemned the remarks, saying a line had been crossed. The Public Prosecution Service said it had received more than 100 complaints from across the country by Thursday afternoon, but it was not immediately clear whether Wilders' remarks could be deemed discriminatory or inciting hatred. The controversial figure was acquitted of inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims in 2011 after comparing the Koran to Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf. "Complaints of discrimination have been filed in various places in the country against PVV politician Geert Wilders," the Public Prosecution Service said in a statement. "We are aware of more than 100 complaints so far. In addition to that, more than 500 people have made a report of discrimination on the police website and dozens more have called police to let them know they wish to file a complaint." The prosecutor's office said it had yet to see a full overview of the complaints but said it will study them. "To what extent the statements of Geert Wilders are punishable, is legally complex. Therefore, the National Expertise Center Racism of the Public Prosecution Service will be involved," the statement added. "This requires a careful assessment which will take into account that there is freedom of speech in the Netherlands, but at the same time recognize that this right is not unlimited." In a letter to Wilders, published by De Telegraaf newspaper, member of parliament Roland Van Vliet said he had decided to quit the PVV party over the remarks. "I have reached a point at which I have to justify to myself what is happening at the PVV. Your statements yesterday about the Moroccan community have led me to cancel my membership of the PVV party in the House of Representatives and to continue as an independent member of parliament," he said. Responding to the criticism, Wilders said he did not understand the outrage, claiming he was only referring to Moroccan criminals. The PVV is the fourth largest party in the Dutch parliament but leads most national opinion polls, with European Parliament elections scheduled for May. The next general election will take place no later than March 2017, but all cabinets for more than a decade have failed to complete their full four-year term.

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