

Dutch Right-Winger Wilders Blames EU for Ukraine Crisis

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Freedom Party (PVV) leader Geert Wilders speaking during an interview in The Hague on Thursday.

Far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders has blamed the crisis in Ukraine on the EU, accusing it of inciting violence by dangling the "carrot" of EU integration.

Weeks ahead of European Parliament elections likely to hand big gains to rightists, Wilders also said British Eurosceptic party UKIP — which has so far shunned his own staunchly anti-Muslim Freedom Party, or PVV, — would choose to work with him after the polls.

"Europe is responsible for a lot of the mess here," Wilders said Thursday of Ukraine. "I would not have given them the carrot to give them the hope to wish for European membership. Everyone knows the country is divided," he said.

The crisis began when former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich fled after months of pro-Western protests by Ukrainians angry at his decision to turn away from closer relations with the EU and move the country towards Moscow.

Putin said Thursday that the annexation of Crimea, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, was partly influenced by the Western military alliance's expansion into eastern Europe.

"European politicians ... went to speak to people in Kiev, half of whom were fascists standing there, and said: 'We will help you, we will support you,'" Wilders said. "That was almost hate speech. It didn't really help."

New Cold War

His comments echo those of France's most prominent rightist politician, National Front leader Marine Le Pen, who said during a recent visit to Moscow that the EU had declared a new Cold War on Russia.

Wilders, whose party ranks second in recent Dutch opinion polls, said the EU had no business adopting a joint foreign policy towards its giant eastern neighbor and that EU sanctions against Russia would be ineffective.

"I believe the Russians should stay on their own territory: Ukraine is a sovereign country ... We should try to de-escalate," he said. "Make sure the Russian minority in eastern Ukraine is taken seriously without Russia interfering."

Wilders is one of the most prominent of a generation of populists in Europe who are united in their opposition to the EU, which they variously blame for low economic growth, too much immigration and an erosion of national sovereignty.

Anti-European parties are set to make a strong showing across Europe next month, with partner parties including France's National Front, Austria's Freedom Party and the Danish People's Party all polling strongly.

UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage has said he has no plans to form any alliance with Wilders, and a spokeswoman for UKIP on Thursday said this position had not changed — but Wilders was still optimistic.

"Farage is a terrific politician," he said. "I get that he can't say it before the elections, but I don't rule out him getting involved after the elections."

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