

Bloomberg

If Europe, of all places, hasn't become immune to the radical right, no place can

Wilders's political history is instructive. He entered politics in 1997 as a rabid champion of the free market. But as the years progressed, he swung to the left economically, realizing that the voters he was courting were more interested in protecting their pocketbooks than ripping up regulations. Most recently, Wilders has begun to cast the Dutch welfare state as something to be defended against immigrants.

He and Trump share a mastery of gutter politics and a gift for the well-timed insult. Wilders once described the head of the parliamentary opposition as "a corporate poodle ... yelping and peeing on a tree, but when the prime minister arrives he jumps up in his lap." In a Dutch political culture usually characterized by courtesy, he's dismissed speeches in Parliament as "diarrhea" and described mosques as "places of hate."

And then there's the hair. Wilders sports an immediately recognizable bouffant, with curly blond waves that look as if they were painted by Vincent van Gogh. "It's a really smart political tool for him," says Tom-Jan Meeus, a political columnist at *NRC Handelsblad*, one of the country's largest newspapers. "It brands him as a political outsider. He's one of the longest-serving members of Parliament in the country, but because of his haircut, nobody is going to notice."

Wilders, too, has endorsed Trump. On the day after the Republican presidential candidate proposed a temporary halt to Muslim immigration, Wilders tweeted: "I hope @realDonaldTrump will be the next US President. Good for America, good for Europe. We need brave leaders."

Europe may also offer a peek at what a Trump presidency could look like if he makes it to the White House and delivers on his campaign promises. In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government has become increasingly authoritarian. Recently, he's positioned himself as a defender of Christianity against an influx of Muslim immigrants, responding to the biggest refugee crisis since World War II by building a fence along the border with Serbia and passing a law that makes illegal immigration punishable by three years in jail. Once a champion of democracy—he called for the withdrawal of Soviet troops five months before the fall of the Berlin Wall—Orbán has swung far to the right. As prime minister, he's curbed press freedoms, undermined his country's checks and balances, and decried the failure of "liberal democracy."

To be sure, the political systems in the U.S. and Europe are very different. The system of proportional voting in many European countries, for instance, makes it easier for a small party to coalesce and survive. (As in a crowded presidential primary, proportional voting favors the emergence of strongly held minority views.)

And yet, the lesson for Americans from across the Atlantic is clear. Even if Trump doesn't win in November, the political ideology he's unleashed—or perhaps exposed—is unlikely to shrivel away after the votes are counted. If, of all places, the nations of Europe haven't developed antibodies to the radical right, no country can expect to be immune. Should Trump's bid for the presidency fall short, it's hard to imagine that he'll continue to campaign for decades, waiting for another shot. But the constituency he's building is likely to stick around.