



▲ PVV leader Geert Wilders (2nd Left) arrives at a post-election meeting in The Hague, the Netherlands, on November 23, 2023.
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Israel isn't state for Jews

On March 11, 2019, the then-Israeli president, Reuven Rivlin, made a statement indirectly addressing Benjamin Netanyahu, asserting, "In Israel, we do not have second-class citizens." The media quickly suspected that Rivlin's remarks were a response to Netanyahu's explicitly racist statement: "Israel is not a country for all its citizens. According to the Jewish Nation-State Law approved by the Knesset, Israel is only the state of the Jewish people."

Meanwhile, Arabs constitute approximately one-fifth of Israel's population. Euro News Persian reports that the Arab minority in Israel has confronted significant social and economic disparities, enduring high poverty rates, residing in crowded cities lacking essential infrastructure, and attending educational institutions with minimal budgets for decades.

In August 2023, the Israeli Minister of Finance suspended the allocated budget for Arab areas and educa-

tional programs for Palestinians in East Jerusalem. In reaction, Yair Lapid, a former prime minister, accused the cabinet's finance minister of racism, stating, "Arab citizens are harassed and abused simply because they are Arabs."

This pattern of racial discrimination in Israel extends beyond Muslims and Arabs. In July 2019, thousands of Ethiopian Jews protested the killing of a black youth by a police officer in the occupied territories. During the 1980s and 1990s, tens of thousands of Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel. As reported by BBC Persian, they claim to have encountered "organized discrimination, racism, and a lack of solidarity with their problems" since settling in Israel. A protester told a French news agency, "We will do whatever we can to ensure the Israeli police do not kill others because of their skin color."

In 2015, when Jews of African descent protested against the racist conduct of a police officer toward

an Ethiopian Jewish soldier in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, Reuven Rivlin, then-president of Israel, remarked, "Society screams of its pain from racism, discrimination, and ignored cries. We must attend directly to this wound."

In August 2022, some 900 professors from various universities around the world, including Yale, Harvard, Chicago, Michigan, Washington, and Berkeley in the United States as well as Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Ben Gurion in Israel, denounced the discriminatory policies of the Israeli regime against Palestinians as racist. These university figures highlighted that, in the first eight months of 2022, Israeli forces killed over 190 Palestinians on the border of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and demolished more than 590 of their buildings. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers, despite committing theft, arson of Palestinian properties, and violence, remain immune from punishment. Palestinians continue to live under a racist regime to this day.

Crimes in Gaza war cry supremacy

The heightened manifestation of extreme right-wing supremacy in Israel has become more pronounced since October 7, 2023, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Israeli authorities openly express their intent to relocate the indigenous inhabitants of Gaza from this area. This racist supremacy has escalated to the extent that a member of Netanyahu's cabinet contemplates the use of atomic

bombs in Gaza as an option for racial and religious purification in this region. The extremist movement, which apparently considers itself the representative of Holocaust victims, appears unperturbed about instigating another Holocaust against Muslims.

The state of affairs we described in the occupied territories embodies all the fears and anxieties that Europeans harbor concerning the rise of the far-right in their continent.

The supremacist actions of Tel Aviv have claimed the lives of over 14,000 people in the Gaza Strip. It is noteworthy that the exposure of Israel's crimes in the Gaza Strip has sparked widespread protests in numerous European countries. Preoccupied with right-wing parties in their own nations, European governments have either maintained silence or aligned with one of the most extremist far-right cabinets there is in the world.



Right-wing extremism no threat to the EU Extremists forced to moderate their positions

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

The far-right Party for Freedom, led by Geert Wilders, has secured 23.5% of the seats in the Dutch Parliament, claiming a significant victory in the 2023 elections. Other right-wing groups in Europe have gone even as far as forming governments in Italy and Hungary. In France, a right-wing candidate reached the second round of the presidential elections but ultimately lost to Macron. So, is far-right extremism threatening Europe? We discussed the political phenomenon with Mehdi Zakerian, a university professor and international relations expert.

IRAN DAILY: What common characteristics do far-right or extremist nationalist movements generally share?

ZAKERIAN: Right-wing movements are primarily considered conservative groups. In Europe, these movements emphasize the European identity, highlighting various aspects such as race, language, art, culture, literature, and Christianity. In addition to this, they also emphasize enlightenment and being at the forefront of contemporary scientific advancements, arguing that these European aspects should receive more attention or be a priority in policymaking. Emphasizing these aspects as distinctive features of Europe, as opposed to other countries or cultures, has sparked opposition and concern within Europe. However, it's important to note that not all right-wing movements are necessarily against liberalism.

Is it the identity concerns of far-right extremists that manifest in their anti-immigrant policies and calls to restrict non-Europeans? We have seen many such movements also voice concerns about the economic consequences of lenient immigration policies.

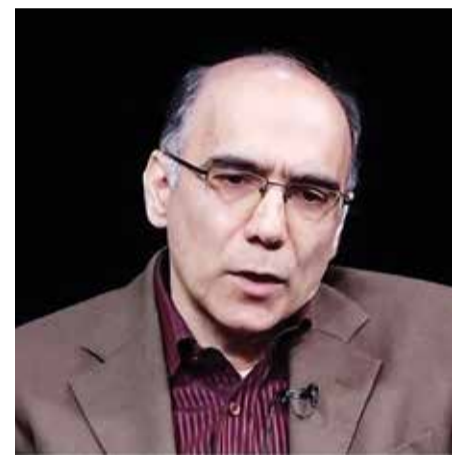
Yes, both aspects heighten their concerns. However, what stands out more is the issue of identity and the emphasis on being "a European". Europe is different from the United States in this regard. The US is an immigrant-friendly country, and identity doesn't have much impact on economic opportunities or adherence to American values. Although this is not an absolute rule, in the US, we don't see the kinds of restrictions on immigrants and narrow-mindedness that the European far-right stands for. Fundamentally, one of the differences between far-right extremists and liberals or socialists is that the far-right extremists claim that their respective governments tend to let those people in Europe who may not believe in European values and sometimes act against European beliefs but use European principles and values in their arguments. They also bring up the economic issue, asserting that migrants take job opportunities from European citizens.

Why are some concerned about the rise of far-right powers in European countries?

Their concern primarily stems from their bitter experience of extremist empowerment in Europe's history, which was based on racism and exclusivity and led to the onset of World War II and all of its devastating consequences for Europeans. Europeans are fearful of slogans that assert something along the lines of "others should not have a place among us because they are not like us." Such perspectives have given rise to Nazism and fascism in Europe and resulted in a world war. Liberals and human rights advocates see these supremacist views as contradictory to European democratic values and worry that extremists may undermine these values.

However, not all right-wing groups share the same beliefs. Some hold dangerous ideologies, such as neo-Nazis in Germany or the first generation of right-wing extremists in France — symbolized by Jean-Marie Le Pen, who openly espoused racist positions.

Geert Wilders, whose party recently won the most seats in the Dutch general elections, also holds strong views against religious minorities, as depicted in his controversial film on this subject. Therefore, some media out-



lets have labeled the victory of the far-right in the Netherlands as an earthquake in Europe. They are concerned that some events that were rooted in ideas of racial superiority may get repeated.

It is said that far-right movements are closely tied to populism and focus mainly on economic problems in elections, adopting populist slogans that may not be easily implemented into policies.

Populism does not have a significant presence in Europe. Far-right movements espousing populist platforms are more prevalent in other regions of the world that have weaker civil societies, such as the United States or Latin America. Europe, in contrast, has a robust civil society. Parties, unions, and the media actively participate in elections. Democratic values are stronger in Europe than anywhere else. Although economically lagging behind the US and Japan, Europe remains an attractive destination for migration owing to its democracy and stable civil institutions that can safeguard the interests of both native citizens and immigrants.

The victory of the far-right in some parts of Europe should not be generalized to the entire continent to suggest that Europeans are inclined towards extremism. Furthermore, even the winning far-right movements cannot necessarily implement their extremist plans. Strong political structures and civil society do not allow them to enforce their radical policies. For instance, Wilders, despite winning 26% of the votes in the Netherlands, knows that if he becomes the head of government, he must pursue policies that benefit the entire Dutch society, not just the 26% who voted for his party. Thus, right-wing extremists are forced to moderate their positions.

Since far-right ideologies are often nationalistic, they have sometimes opposed the European Union and advocated for the exit of their respective countries from the union. Can we argue that the inclination is gaining momentum in European countries?

Such a conclusion cannot be drawn. On the contrary, the European Union can still be considered dominant and successful. Many Englishmen who voted for Brexit and pursued it regret it now. They thought leaving the EU would provide more opportunities to solve their problems, but the situation in Britain has not improved compared to when they were still in the European Union. The Euro, as the currency of the EU, is now stable globally. Therefore, it cannot be said that the success of the far-right in the Netherlands poses a threat to the continuation of the European Union.