



Far-right European politicians are talking about “making Europe great again”

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US president Donald Trump’s “Make America Great Again” is gaining traction in Europe. Hungary’s Viktor Orbán is the most recent figure to ape the infamous slogan, calling for making “Europe great again” during a speech on the future of Europe at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung’s European Office.

Orbán is not alone; Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party has also adopted the motto.

The day after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the US, and millions of people joined protests against him around the world, Wilders and many of Europe’s most divisive politicians descended on Koblenz, Germany for their “European counter-summit.” Among the attendees were presidential hopeful Marine Le Pen of France’s National Front, Matteo Salvini of Italy’s Northern League, Frauke Petry of Alternative for Germany, and Geert Wilders of the Dutch Freedom Party, who was convicted of hate speech last month.

With crucial elections in France, the Netherlands, and Germany this year, Trump’s victory has given these far-right leaders hope for a united strategy to inflict Trump-like devastation on European political elites. Wilders declared 2017 to be “the year of the patriotic spring.” Le Pen told a cheering crowd, “2016 was the year the Anglo-Saxon world woke up. 2017, I am sure, the people of continental Europe will wake up.”

But for all their attempts to draw a connection with it, Trump's agenda isn't that easily applied in Europe. Mabel Berezin, from Cornell University, who has been studying European far-right politics for the last two decades, says Trump's brand of right-wing populism is very different from that of Le Pen and Wilders, who have been "operating for a very long time."

Three days after taking office, Trump, who has been described as a "pro-life president," rolled back funding for organizations that provide abortion services outside the US. By contrast, Le Pen has clashed with members of her own family and party, arguing that contraception should be "ring-fenced" and abortion not "cast into question."

Wilders' celebrated Trump's election. But one of his central themes is the threats the so-called "Islamization" of Europe poses to women's rights and LGBT rights. In the US, by contrast, the National Organization for Marriage—the anti-LGBT group behind California's Prop 8, which briefly banned same-sex marriage in the state—sent a jubilant email to supporters calling it a "bright and exciting time" after Trump's election.

Wilders' pro-LGBT and anti-Islam stance is a common rhetorical tool among the European far-right. While in the US immigrants are portrayed as a threat mainly to security and jobs, in the EU they are portrayed also as a threat to liberal, "European" values. This line of argument was popularized by Pim Fortuyn, the openly gay, anti-immigrant Dutch politician who was assassinated in 2002. When asked why he was so hostile to Islam, Fortuyn famously quipped, "I have no desire to go through the emancipation of women and homosexuals all over again."

In France, Le Pen's anti-immigrant stance seems to poll well with LGBT voters and she has alarmed traditional conservatives by including a number of gay people among her closest advisers. (Her niece, also a rising star in the National Front, is less gay-friendly, though.)

Even mainstream European politicians, under pressure from the rise of right-wing populism, are starting to adopt the socially liberal but anti-immigrant stance. Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte wrote an open letter to the country's citizens earlier this week, saying the Dutch were "increasingly uncomfortable" with those who migrate to the Netherlands and enjoy its freedom, but still "harass gays, or whistle at women in short skirts, or brand ordinary Dutch people racists."

"I don't think he [Trump] has any relevance. But what he does give them as president of the US is a rhetorical frame," says Berezin. "If I was running and I want to persuade the people on the fence, I would say 'the US is the greatest nation in the world and they have done this, why shouldn't we?'"

Berezin points out that Trump himself made similar use of the UK's vote last June to leave the European Union (EU). Trump declared himself "Mr. Brexit" and vowed a "Brexit plus plus plus" in the run up to the US election.

And while Trump has made some attempts (paywall) to link his anti-immigrant agenda with LGBT rights, that's still at odds with a Republican party that, according to its electoral platform last year, wants to overturn the Supreme Court's 2015 decision legalizing gay marriage in all 50 states, make it legal to discriminate against LGBT people, and discourage same-sex couples from adopting children.

All the same, the pro-women, pro-LGBT, but anti-immigrant stance isn't universally popular in Europe either. Thousands of protestors demonstrated against ([link in German](#)) the far-right conference in Koblenz, under the banner *Koblenz bleibt bunt* ("Koblenz stays colorful"), and criticized the use of LGBT and women's rights as a smokescreen for anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim policies. Their protest coincided with the anti-Trump Women's Marches in hundreds of cities across the world, including France, Germany, and the Netherlands.