



Wilders Acquitted; Free Speech Prevails in Politically-Correct Holland

Geert Wilders (left), member of the Dutch Parliament's Party of Freedom who was criminally prosecuted for speaking out about the Islamic immigration and integration problem in the Netherlands, has been acquitted of "hate speech" crimes. During a public debate about Muslim integration and multiculturalism, Wilders had declared, "The core problem is the fascist Islam, the sick ideology of Allah and Mohammed as laid down in the Islamic Mein Kampf, the Quran." The presiding judge found that his remarks were "at the edge of what's legally permissible," "hurtful," "offensive," and of an "inciting character." But the court declared that, given the context of his comments, his speech did not constitute a criminal act.



The court observed of Wilders' short 2008 film about Islam, *Fitna*, that "Given the film in its whole and the context of societal debate, the court finds that there is no question of inciting hate with the film."

Wilders commented after the verdict:

It's not only an acquittal for me, but a victory for freedom of expression in the Netherlands. Fortunately you're allowed to discuss Islam in public debate and you're not muzzled.

Unsurprisingly, not everyone was happy with the acquittal. Aydin Akkaya, Chairman of the Council of Turks in the Netherlands, voiced his displeasure: "What surprises me is that the judge says that what's permissible is determined by the context of societal debate. In other words, if you just find a 'context' you can go nuts." Mohammed Rabbae, Chairman of the National Moroccan Council, warned of a lawsuit: "We will go to the United Nations Council for Human Rights in Geneva. The suit will be directed against the government."

Academia also quickly took sides against Wilders. Professor Leo Lucassen, Chair of the Social History Department at Leiden University, averred that the verdict "will further the inward-looking and to some extent xenophobic atmosphere in the Netherlands" and that it "fuels this idea of immigrants who are basically an alien element to the Dutch people." Andre Krouwel of Amsterdam's Free University called the decision a "incredible mistake" which "legalized populist rhetoric." He warned:

Inside the Netherlands and outside, politicians will now go the same way: to the edge of what is allowed. Right-wing politicians in other countries will be able to point to the Netherlands and say, "They can say it there — why not here?"

Many analysts believe that the case, in which even the Dutch prosecutors wished to see Wilders acquitted, is a perfect example of political correctness run amok. The Netherlands has a longstanding history of accepting immigrants who are willing to live as good citizens and to abide by Dutch law. The



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Jewish immigration from Iberia is an example of how that has worked well in practice. These Jews were more than happy just to be left alone, and the thought that some opinion by a Dutch Calvinist would “offend” the Jews and cause them to try to haul him before a criminal court would have been instantly seen as the worst possible thing these Sephardic Jews could do.

If a Dutch Calvinist was not free to say what he thought, then these Dutch Jews would know that their liberty was *also* in jeopardy. It was not the selective liberty of some people in the Netherlands that gave hope to all; it was the liberty of nearly everyone in the country to say nearly anything — provided it was not legally defamatory. But defamation is not a matter of painful truth being spoken any more than it is a matter of professed belief being expressed. So these Dutch Jews and Dutch Calvinists both had definite theological opinions of the error of the other. The elbow room of liberty allowed that.

What was not permissible? Defamation or libel. In the Middle Ages, for example, there was a “[blood libel](#)” that spread like dirty gossip among uneducated Christians. Jews, the libel went, kidnapped Christian children and used their blood to make matzo for Pesach. Unlike what Wilders said about Islam, this characterization of Jews was utterly untrue, and it led mobs to riot and even murder Jews. If Jews had spread the rumor that the Dutch Christians defiled the Torah or substituted pork for lamb in Kosher meat markets, the same crime would have been committed. Deliberate lying that has harmful effects is not tolerable in a free society.

Geert Wilders, of course, was not lying. At worst, he was expressing a negative opinion about Islam. If Christians in Europe hailed before the courts everyone who said something negative about Christianity, then the courts would have almost no time for anything else. Politicians constantly take issue with, or even attack, the policies and beliefs of others. When people can no longer argue with others and say what they think, then there is no freedom.

But the problem goes much deeper than simply a religious issue. When Andre Krouwel attacks “right-wing politicians,” many wonder why that not hate speech directed against conservative members of government. When Leo Lucassen talks about the “inward looking and to some extent xenophobic atmosphere in the Netherlands,” is he engaged in hate speech directed toward those Dutchmen who agree with Wilders? Liberal professors in Holland have spoken against capitalists, Catholics, and “conservatives” without prosecution. When a mullah in a Dutch mosque declares, “Death to Israel” or “Death to America,” would that be considered hate speech?

Freedom of speech won a solid victory in the Netherlands with the acquittal of Wilders. But the complaining of Muslims and academicians after the verdict demonstrates that though this battle was won, the politically-correct war is not over.

Photo: Dutch politician Geert Wilders is seen inside the courtroom in Amsterdam, Netherlands, March 30, 2011: AP Images



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