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Jelle Hiemstra - from Freedom Party to Frisian Route

Published on : 4 February 2012 - 9:11pm | By [Jacqueline Nolan](#) (Photo: [Leeuwarder Courant](#))

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"Every day new planeloads are arriving full of fortune-hunters. Islamic veils, minarets, social welfare dependants, crime: there's no end to it."

These are the words of Geert Wilders, a voiceover in a commercial on the website of his [PVV Freedom Party](#). Over his voice, we see images of planes arriving at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport, slowly dissolving to women wearing the Islamic veil, women at the market, on the street. The PVV's message is urgent: stop the Islamisation of the Netherlands.

Jelle Hiemstra is a politician in the northern province of Friesland. Until his resignation last October, he was the Freedom Party chairman for the provincial assembly. He was drawn to the PVV because of their critical stand on Europe and their demands for tougher prison sentences, a 130-kilometre speed limit and the upholding of mortgage tax relief.

Frisian issues

In the spring of 2011, he led the party's successful campaign for provincial assembly elections. Placing Frisian issues on the agenda - like a controversial waste incineration plant in the town of Harlingen or salt-winning in the Wadden Sea - was his ticket to a successful campaign. Surprisingly, one issue got struck off: Islamisation.

For Wilders, Islam is "an ideology of hatred", for Hiemstra, "Islam is a religion. Period." How did he justify this to his PVV voters? He dismisses it a non-issue. "I always say it's like selling a bikini in a shop that sells ice skates."

Hiemstra's wife is originally Lebanese, arriving in the Netherlands as a six-week old victim of civil war. She doesn't know whether she comes originally from a Muslim or Christian background. "My wife didn't object to my joining the PVV. 'It's your hobby,' she said, 'as long as you don't start going on about Islamisation.'"

And if he was married to a - typically Frisian - Femke? "Wouldn't have made any difference."

Hiemstra says he informed the PVV of his stance on Islam during his intake interview, which the PVV denies in Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*.

No talking to the media

This tall, broad-shouldered politician with a resounding voice likes to talk. "I noticed that when the PVV came together, only Geert Wilders was allowed to talk. Everyone else had to keep his mouth shut. And no talking to the media, only issues that are important to the national PVV."

But Hiemstra wouldn't be gagged. When he informed his PVV campaign colleagues of the benefits of befriending the Dutch-language regional newspaper *Leeuwarder Courant*, there were gasps all round.

"The *Leeuwarder Courant* has a circulation of 93,000, the *Friesch Dagblad* 13,000...When the PVV said the *Leeuwarder* was the 'Pravda of Friesland,' I told them then we had nothing to lose. We could only win."

Cohen lapdog scene scripted

In his internet spot, Wilders also delivers a blistering attack on one 'leftwing' leader. Over a close-up shot of a yawning Job Cohen, leader of the Labour Party (PvdA), and a shot of Cohen entering a mosque, Wilder's voiceover says the PvdA leader "is 100 percent pro-Islam."

Acting locally

In our series [Acting locally](#) we are looking at people who make a difference at grassroots level. Forget ministers and MPs - what impact do city councillors, provincial representatives or village aldermen have on our daily lives?

Jelle Hiemstra's political career



The youngest of eight children, Hiemstra was born on a farm in Friesland.

When he was a boy, the family moved to the town of Sneek where he lives today.

Sometimes, if his parents were out working in the evening, he'd watch *Kojak* on television, but also loved listening to Hans Wiegel, a former conservative

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Last September during a parliamentary debate after Budget Day, Wilders lashed out at Cohen, calling him the lapdog of Prime Minister Mark Rutte: "Mr Cohen runs around the prime minister's yard, yelping and peeing on a tree, but when the prime minister arrives he jumps up in his lap."

The Dutch media had a field day.

"It wouldn't have been my tone. I would have put it another way. In Friesland, we do things differently," Hiemstra said to the media.

Just retract

That evening, when Hiemstra came out of a meeting, he saw he missed some 20 calls from PVV MP Fleur Agema. Something was awry.

The following day, Hiemstra was contacted by the leader of the PVV in the Upper House, Machiel de Graaf, who explained to him that Wilders had been rehearsing the whole lapdog scene for a month. Wilders was afraid he'd be upstaged by Hiemstra's comments – by now a hot item on Twitter and in various papers - and that opposition leaders might get wind of the fact that the parliamentary piece of theatre was a rehearsed script.

"Just retract your comments and everything will be all right," said de Graaf to Hiemstra. "But I wouldn't." And when de Graaf ordered Hiemstra not to appear on local Frisian TV, Hiemstra said: "I'll be the one to decide that, not The Hague."

The PVV declined to give their response.

Leftwing paper

When Hiemstra and his wife were attacked in their home in September by masked men - which the politician claims was a political attack – he agreed to an interview with *NRC Handelsblad*. When he stated in their article he had no intention of putting Islamisation on his political agenda, Agema called him up.

"What have you done to me this time, a leftwing paper?' 'No', I said, 'it's a quality paper.' Then, she started on about Islamisation. 'From now on, everything Geert says, you stand behind him. From now on, you'll put Islamisation on the Friesland agenda.' 'No, I won't, I'm not a soldier,' I said."

The Frisian Route

"Frisians don't get worked up about things. They're straightforward," said Hiemstra, who announced he was leaving the PVV on 24 October.

Now he's flying under a new flag, *De Friese Koers* ('The Frisian Route'). Drawing on a maritime metaphor, Hiemstra charts new ideas for the region. He wants Friesland to be "the Florida of the Netherlands" in the healthcare sector, which, in turn would necessitate a university in the province.

He considers himself "a serious competitor" for the [Frisian Nationalist Party](#). Annigje Toering of the FNP says her party doesn't regard Hiemstra as a competitor, if he's championing the same Frisian issues. It's too soon to say whether he's committed to the Frisians and "experience shows one-man bands tend to disappear after their term in office," she says.

Hiemstra's new course is neither rightwing nor leftwing - simply Frisian pragmatism: "People here are fed up with headscarves and the idle talk of The Hague. I do it my way."

Read further: <http://www.rnw.nl/english/bulletin/dutch-burqa-ban-legislation-row-heating>

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VVD party leader, on national news.

His teacher let him set up mock elections at his primary school. He played Wiegel.

Hiemstra studied law, but didn't finish his degree, then ended up doing economics. He works as a college lecturer in the province and has represented the VVD - the largest party in the current coalition government – on local councils.

Leftwing hobby or mathematics

In its 2010 party manifesto, the PVV – which props up the minority government in parliament – outlined plans to put an end to "leftwing hobbies", including subsidised culture.

With his entrepreneurial principles and down-to-earth Frisian nature, Hiemstra saw another side to culture in his province.

He joined forces with the Labour Party in rallying for a 400,000-euro subsidy for the annual Oerol music and theatre festival on the Wadden island of Terschelling.



More articles and videos on Geert Wilders, focusing on his ideological background and his political influence both here in the Netherlands and abroad.

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DISCUSSION

Anonymous [reply](#)
9 February 2012 - 12:54am / Netherlands
Wilders' campaign seems so futile. Divisiveness is not the order of the day, if we're talking about progress; if we're talking about dealing with now. He can't rewrite history. The only thing to do is to prevent him from being elected again; hopefully continued information and reports made public will influence this.

Stuart leenstra [reply](#)
8 February 2012 - 6:46am / new zealand
We left the Netherlands in 1956. We have never regretted it and are very happy to be in this beautiful country.
On the other hand New Zealand was a little paradise 50 years ago, but even here the rot has set in, mainly under the Labour government, who believes to gain votes is to buy them with false promises. I recommend the book about democracy by the American author Charles A Kupchan. One wonders what Democracy has in store for us now. The only way to live happy is to ignore all politician's advise, work hard spent less than you earn and keep away from the financial conman. Live in NZ is still very good , good health system as I have found out. Yesterday turned 83, live on a "lifestyle" property, enjoy the mild climate. However unemployment is rather on the high side and the State pensions are insufficient for the avery Kiwi, who likes to live on his credit card. And there is the Maori problem, they think they own the country, the sea, the rivers, the foreshore (beaches) the fish, the clouds, the rain, the trees, the birds. Do I need to go on? But you can ignore all that, as we do. Welcome to New Zealand.

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GBR [reply](#)
6 February 2012 - 5:55pm
@ sofaman
Dear Sir, as I understood you live in USA. I must disappoint you because there is no thing such a free press. Already long time. Google John Swinton, 1880 toast to the independent press. He was the preeminent New York journalist at that time. And there is no thing such a free nation. Look around you. Think about it. Research. Inform yourself. And ignore ignorance. "None are more hopelessly enslaved as those that falsely believe that they are free" - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Hays [reply](#)
6 February 2012 - 9:57am / Netherlands
Altogether it's clear from this well written article that Jelle Hiemstra seems somewhat naïve about what to expect from the PVV. Maybe it is just a hobby...

sofaman [reply](#)
5 February 2012 - 7:22pm
Can anyone explain to me how a publication that is funded by public money, is allowed to attack and persecute just one political party? How in the world is that democracy? RNW should be ashamed of unwittingly working towards its own form of fascism. Free nations depend on a free press, not one that parrots just one political point of view.
We have a channel in the US like this. Fox News. By charging every article with a heavily political bias, they fail the fundamental ideal of journalism.
It may seem to be counter-intuitive, but RNW should be brave enough to publish this response, and defend its bias.

News Desk [reply](#)
5 February 2012 - 10:28pm



I contacted the PVV, but they declined to comment. There are always two sides, or, at least, another angle to one story and for me, a story is rarely black and white. I would be only too delighted to interview a PVV member; I don't have a bias for any Dutch political party. It really is a pity that the PVV distances itself from selected media. They are certainly welcome to contact me and I will give them a fair ear and a fair pen. (JN, author, RNW)

sofaman

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 7:22pm

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We have a channel in the US like this. Fox News. By charging every article with a heavily political bias, they fail the fundamental ideal of journalism.

It may seem to be counter-intuitive, but RNW should be brave enough to publish this response, and defend its bias.



Rob Kievit

[reply](#)

6 February 2012 - 10:30am

Dear Sofaman,

Thank you for your reaction. May I draw your attention to the fact that the article on former PVV politician Jelle Hiemstra is one in a multi-part series called [Acting Locally](#) in which a whole range of politicians will appear.

We are not persecuting one political party, as you claim. In the past we published articles highlighting the leadership problems of the Christian Democratic party and the Labour Party, for instance.

By the way, the PVV is not a party. It is an association with just one member, Geert Wilders. Nobody can become a member of the PVV. All candidates are hand-picked by Mr Wilders or his close associates. How in the world is that democracy?

Kind regards,

Rob Kievit, Senior Editor, RNW English

james neild

[reply](#)

10 February 2012 - 2:36pm / Thailand

Dear Mr. Kievit,

Your 'by the way' remarks about Mr. Wilders and the PVV smack of indulgence in the smear campaign the left-oriented Dutch media has evidently embarked upon some years ago. You just could not resist to write some adverse observations about him. Especially, the killer sentence "how in the world is that democracy?" further demonstrates your bias, and inability to remain objective.



Rob Kievit

[reply](#)

10 February 2012 - 2:46pm

Dear Mr Neild,

Thank you for your comment. The 'killer sentence' which you refer to is a literal quote from the initial comment posted by Mr Sofaman.

My remark about the internal structure of the PVV party is not a slur, it is a statement of fact. The PVV does not accept any members, it is a one-man organisation. When you check out the party website (<http://www.pvv.nl>) it turns out you can only become a volunteer for the party, or give a donation. There is no body of members who have a say in deciding the party line. There is just Mr. Wilders.

Pieter Witteveen

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 2:36pm / United States

As former chairman of the Republican Party here in my local county located in the USA I commend Mr Wilders and his party. Nederland is fortunate to have a man like Geert Wilders. I was born in Drenthe in 1942.. We moved to the USA in 1956. We left a great country behind.. What has been done to my Nederland is a disaster. May men like Geert Wilders and his politics multiply.

Yvette

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 1:19pm

It's clear from the article that there is not only a difference in political ideology between Hiemstra and Wilders but the cultural divide between Friesland and Holland was an added impetus to the break.

realist

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 12:47pm / South Africa

Geert does N O T attac people but a nazi-like ideology sold to us as a religion of peace. Besides, religion is N O T a race.

Daan

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 12:15pm / Netherlands

"People here are fed up with headscarves and the idle talk of The Hague. I do it my way."

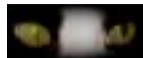
Mr. Hiemstra claims he does not want to address 'islamization', yet he wants to tackle headscarves? Does not compute.

Anonymous

5 February 2012 - 7:46am / lalaland

[reply](#)

It is now known... that men enter local politics solely as a result of being unhappily married.



knirb

[reply](#)

5 February 2012 - 2:31am

Hiemstra's claim, that he had only joined the PVV for peripheral issues, without supporting their main platform stance on Islamisation is beyond belief. So then, is the claim the he informed the PVV of this

Anonymous

5 February 2012 - 12:40am / canada

[reply](#)

geert wilders you are a joke

GBR

5 February 2012 - 12:15am

[reply](#)

This article just shows how much is PVV Freedom party a one man dictatorial show. The only thing what counts is what the blonde leader say. No dialog, no discussion, just say yes my leader, you are absolutely right. I do not agree with this concept cos I think everybody has right for his own opinion in an open and constructive discussion. Yet, considering some proposals issued by PVV Freedom party (Why I'm writing this: it has nothing to do with freedom) last week, this party reminds me more and more about something what's started almost 80 years ago in different part of Europe and we all know what were the consequences of it. I want to believe there are more people as Mr. Jelle Hiemstra

Emma

5 February 2012 - 12:13am

[reply](#)

Interesting article. Bizarre that his wife regarded the PVV as 'his hobby'. Geert Wilders always strikes me as someone who has turned his own obsessively dangerous hobby-provocation- into a political party.

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