

Sample translation from

*Our People First*

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## Foreword

The flag of the United States is waving on the dome of the Capitol. On the steps of the giant building in Washington, DC, a tribune has been built, filled with invited guests. At its top, the members of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir are standing, singing “America the Beautiful.” It is the 20th of January 2017, and real-estate businessman Donald Trump will soon be sworn in as the new president of the United States. It is a special moment in western history. For the first time, not only a businessman will become head of state of the most powerful country on earth, but the Americans have also elected a so-called rightwing populist. On the 9th of November 2016, he has been elected president with votes from the lower class and the lower middle class. This has caused a mental earthquake. Established politics, in particular, was shocked by Trump’s victory, of a man who had announced to do everything differently. European nationalists such as Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, however, are pleased by the American’s victory and feel supported in their mission.

After the Mormon choir has sung, Trump is sworn in as the 45th president of the United States. From a distance of about 250 meters I am observing everything. Next to me a middle-aged married couple from Kentucky is sitting. We got into a conversation—because of the tight security we had to be here early in the morning and are sitting here for a few hours already. One of the two has added me on Facebook. It is drizzling. Behind me other invited guests are sitting, and behind them, on the National Mall, about 150,000 Trumpians are standing and chanting U-S-A!, U-S-A! Their deafening noise causes an ominous feeling for me. As if a crazy herd of buffaloes comes running up to me. My colleague and photographer Alexander Schippers is standing right in the center of that crowd. We lost connection via our cell phones.

“We are transferring the power from Washington, DC, and are returning it to you, the people,” I hear Trump say during his inauguration speech. Later, that speech will get the sobriquet “American Carnage.” “The forgotten men and women of our country will no longer be forgotten. Everybody is now listening to you. You came here with dozens of millions to become part of a historical movement, one that the world has never seen before.” Trump summarizes the problems of the American heartland. Mothers and children, captured in poverty in the inner cities and rusting factories, according to him spreading like gravestones across the country. “This American carnage stops right here, right now.” As of now the American worker will always have priority. “As of today, it is America first.” Again, the U-S-A! U-S-A! of the mass is sounding. Trumps says that as of now the world has to take care

of it itself because the United States will care more about itself. Large companies that have left the country must come back, and jobs must return to those states with a hard time economically. Radical Islam will be “banned from the earth,” and love of our country has priority. “Together we will make America strong again. We will make America wealthy again, we will make America proud again, we will make America safe again. And yes, together we will make America great again. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless America.”

Once the ceremony is over, my colleague Schippers finds his way back from the crowd. The Trumpians did not treat him nicely, he says, because he was from “the media.” But still, he succeeded in taking some telling photographs. The next day we are at the home of friends of ours, a couple. We are watching television. In the German city of Coblenz a meeting of rightwing-nationalist parties in Europe is going on. On the podium, host Frauke Petry of the “Alternative for Germany” is standing with the Dutch PVV leader Geert Wilders, the president of the French Front National, Marine Le Pen, and the chairman of the Italian Lega, Matteo Salvini. Also present: the head of the Flemish Vlaams Belang, Geert Wilders, and the previous UKIP leader Janice Atkinson from the UK. Behind them, fans are waving national flags, and in the hall “Merkel must go! Merkel must go!” is sounding. I tell my American colleague that my new book will be about these people and their movement. “I want to find out how these parties have developed, who the key figures are, and what their relationships are with one another,” I say. “Aren’t you at the wrong location, then?” he asks. “Maybe,” I say. Together we are watching the waving and cheering politicians.

Back in the Netherlands, I continue with my research and try to interview as many rightwing-nationalist politicians. Surprisingly, this works quite well. After all, of the leaders in Coblenz I do not speak only with Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini. But I can talk with other rightwing-nationalists, such as Jean-Marie Le Pen, Filip Dewinter, Umberto Bossi, Nigel Farage and Alexander Gauland. With them I have long conversations. Geert Wilders, Norbert Hofer and Heinz-Christian Strache are more difficult to approach, but in the end I can talk with them at least shortly. Also, I conduct interviews with politicians from the lower ranks of the rightwing-nationalist European system. They often give me new insights and provide me with more detailed information.

The more rightwing-nationalists accept my request and the more my research keeps me busy, the more I have to explain to colleagues and friends why I find these people so interesting. Some blame me for talking to demons and for concluding a contract with the devil—the like of Mephisto in

“Faust” by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. I do not regard these politicians as Mephistos, however, but as sources providing me with more insight into the development of their movement. That I definitely do not place myself into the rightwing-nationalist corner and find some of the ideas of these politicians disgusting is not important for my goal. I want to know what it is that is moving rightwing-nationalist politicians and how they have been fighting their ways into the political system. To accomplish this, I approach them as open-minded as possible—to make them tell their story—but without avoiding critical questions.

This book will tell their story from within and as truly as possible. Also, it is my aim to reveal the mechanisms of this political movement. I interview politicians of the established parties as well: ex-prime ministers and ministers such as the Belgian Yves Leterme, the Dane Per Stig Moeller and the Dutchmen Maxime Verhagen and Jozias van Aartsen. These interviews serve a contrasting perspective. Next to my interviews I have used books as sources as well as articles and audiovisual documents. I hope this combination of sources helps to comprehend the world and the history of rightwing nationalism.

This book is written with an open-minded attitude and without judging the politicians and parties it describes. Who expects to read a book labeling the rightwing-nationalist movement “racist” or “extreme right” will be disappointed. Critics and opponents of this movement often call it “populism” or “rightwing populism.” Deliberately, I do not use these terms because they are container terms. What is a populist? A populist tries to solve complex problems with simple answers, one often hears. “If the Euro fails, Europe fails,” said German chancellor Angela Merkel when the Euro was in jeopardy. “Nationalism is war,” said president Mitterand of France when he spoke about the—according to him—greatest threat to the project of European unification. These are populist statements, but used by politicians of traditional parties. Populism does not only appear on the right but also on the left and the center of the political spectrum. Politicians such as French president Emmanuel Macron and the liberal European leader Guy Verhofstadt are also known for populist statements—albeit for their own electorates.

Instead of the container term “populism” I will use the term “rightwing nationalism” in this book—because both politicians and parties of this movement are indeed often rightwing and nationalist. Not only do they have typically rightwing solutions for problems—such as more severe penalties or lower taxes. Sometimes they also favor leftist solutions such as increasing pensions and protecting the domestic labor market. So, the term “nationalists” could suffice, but because most parties are selling themselves

as “rightwing,” I consciously chose “rightwing nationalism.” Expressly, I do not talk about “extremely rightwing.” This term is reserved for neo-nazi, racist or identitarian splinter parties and groups. They act mostly outside of parliaments and attract only very small electorates. In short, this book is about political parties that act in a populist manner with rightwing-nationalist politics.

There is also the often-used term “racists.” From my research it seems that most of the parties and politicians of the rightwing-nationalist movement are not racist. Certainly, the ideology of rightwing-nationalist parties is often based on an ethnic nationalism derived from an existing community that has to be protected. But many Western-European rightwing-nationalist politicians realize that non-western immigrants are now part of society. This is why these people have to assimilate sooner or later, these politicians say—because homogeneous societies “work better.” In this assimilation process race or color are not important, however. Instead it is about speaking the language, living the customs of society and the demonstrating loyalty for the receiving nation.

However, Europe has quite a number of rightwing-nationalist parties with a racist, anti-semitic, fascist or “dark brown” history, such as the French Front National or the Austrian FPÖ. But in 2019 only relatively small groups within these parties are active on these grounds. But it still happens that rightwing-nationalist parties attract followers of extremely rightwing parties or groups, such as hooligans or neo-nazis—fact that many rightwing-nationalist parties are struggling with. They would prefer to be civil parties and participate in political administrations, but because of their contacts or even associations with the extreme right they are not accepted. This book describes the interactions between rightwing-nationalist parties and extremely rightwing groups. The same applies to relationships with the past and the parties’ own history—sometimes connected to fascism. Nothing will be left out. Sometimes loaded rightwing-nationalist terms will be used, such as “mass immigration” or “Umvolkung,” but in parentheses and if functional for this story.

The focus of this book is on Western Europe where in the 1970s rightwing-nationalist parties were rising by agitating against large groups of non-western migrants. The nine countries that I have investigated are The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark and Great Britain. In these countries, rightwing-nationalist politicians and parties have contributed significantly to the development of the rightwing-nationalist movement. The nationalist politicians in Central- and East-European countries such Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Hungary will be mentioned in this book only when they are functional

for our story as a whole. The same applies to countries such as Spain, Sweden, Finland and Greece.

The story begins around 1980 when the migration of large groups of non-western people gave rise to social and integration problems. The book consists of 13 chapters. Each of them focuses on a common denominator. Each chapter tells the story of politicians and parties from two or more Western European countries to acquaint the reader with their communalities and differences—but without lumping all rightwing-nationalist parties together. Each party has its own DNA and history with unique leaders and specific events.

This book is structured chronologically. This is why the first chapter deals with countries where rightwing-nationalism was a taboo between the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1990s. The second chapter covers the same period but now for countries where rightwing-nationalist parties participated in politics. The third chapter jumps ahead in time and tells the reader about countries where rightwing-nationalists underwent an evolution after the attacks of 9/11, 2001—The Netherlands, France and Denmark. Every chapter consists of an introductory paragraph about the topics the chapter deals with. I chose a story-telling format for the presentation of my results of my round through Europe--the format of a biography of rightwing-nationalism in Europe.

Many regard rightwing nationalism still as a phenomenon that has been condemned, excluded or banned. I believe that in 2019 this attitude is not appropriate anymore--because reality has changed. We are now dealing with a political movement that is a part of Europe and must be challenged within the democratic system. Fortunately, this system is very strong in Western Europe. In a democratic society all voices and opinions have to be heard--even those of pariahs or presumed demons—to arrive at a good exchange of ideas, plans and visions. In the end, this makes a democracy only stronger.

## Abstracts of chapters

### 1: Cordon sanitaire

The societal resistance that the Dutch Centrum movement had to cope with is not unique in Europe. In other Western-European countries the message “Against the foreigners and for our own people” is a taboo. In Belgium, the Vlaams Blok is surrounded by a “cordon sanitaire.” In West Germany, the

DVU and Die Republikaner are observed by the national security service. In these countries rightwing-nationalist parties are no serious participants in the political system of the 1980s and 90s.

## 2: It happens around the Alps

Whereas it was difficult in the 1980s and 90s for rightwing-nationalists in The Netherlands, Belgium and Germany and whereas they were struggling to be accepted, this was much less the case in Austria and Italy. These countries have dealt differently with their consequences of the Second World War. A collective sense of guilt was missing as was the public condemnation of the country's role during the war. Instead, rightwing-nationalist parties such as the Italian Lega Nord and the Austrian FPÖ had become normal. Also, in Switzerland--that had been neutral and even profited from the war--a collective sense of guilt was missing. The Swiss People's Party could develop freely.

## 3: Evolution

A time of optimism and economic progress after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of communism in Central and Eastern Europe is rudely disturbed by the assaults of September 11, 2001, by Muslim terrorists. That terror was extremely impressive for European and increased the fear of a radical Islam. In some countries, part of the public turns openly against the multicultural society. Rightwing-nationalists in The Netherlands, Denmark and France try to profit from this sentiment and experience an unexpected evolution in the years after 9/11--an example for the movement as a whole.

## 4: The reaction from the right

The rise of rightwing-nationalist parties after the attacks of 9/11 is a signal for the established parties. Rightwing parties, in particular, understand that they had lost voters. Christian Democrats, conservatives and rightwing liberals realize that they--often together with Social Democrats--have been responsible for several decennia for a policy that underestimated the challenges of the immigration from non-Western countries. If these parties wanted to win their departed voters back, they would have to take the concerns of these voters seriously. In several Western-European countries, rightwing politicians develop their own response to immigration and integration during the 2000s. Voters return--but this is no guarantee for the future.

## 5: Respectable, finally

By taking over elements of the rightwing-nationalist parties' agenda, the established rightwing parties in The Netherlands, Belgium and France succeeded in keeping their competitors out of government—only the LPF in The Netherlands co-governs for a little less than year. How different is it in Italy, Austria and Switzerland where rightwing-nationalist parties participate in government for longer periods of time. This offers the chance for them to profile themselves as credible partners in government. The established parties have to grant room for government partners which do not always take the established mores into account. But still, for Lega Nord, FPÖ and SVP governing is a process of falling and standing up again.

## 6: “A crusade against Islam”

The presence of Muslims and of Islam in Western Europe becomes more and more the subject of an intense and dividing debate in the 2000s. Will Muslims adapt to modern western values? Where should Islam find its place in society? Could and should a “liberal” or “enlightened” Islam emerge? The idea of a “clash of cultures” is in the air during those years. After 2005, the presumed “clash” becomes visible in the Danish “cartoon crisis,” but can also be felt around the premiere of the Dutch “anti-Koran movie” Fitna and the Swiss referendum about the ban of minarets. Rightwing-nationalist parties definitely become “issue owners” of the topic Islam.

## 7: A fight for power

In their struggle for power, rightwing-nationalist parties have to cope with an unexpected backlash between 2006 and 2012. Voters leave them because their politicians fight with one another and exaggerate their radical rhetoric, but also because traditional rightwing parties take some of the rightwing-nationalist standpoints over. The grow is no longer automatic, and vulnerability becomes visible. At the top of Vlaams Belang, a huge fight for power explodes in 2006 between hardliners and moderates. Also, in the Dutch PVV and the Front National in France, fights and turbulences increase.

## 8: Rumpus in Strasbourg

After the Contract of Maastricht, rightwing-nationalist parties fight more and more against European integration and against the idea of a supranational federal European state. Instead, they want a Europe of nation states working together bilaterally only. They do not appreciate an

increasingly closer European Union. This does not keep them from participating in the European elections, however. In the European parliament, rightwing nationalists strive for cooperation. But this seems difficult and sometimes even creates bizarre situations. Different groups of euro-sceptics emerge in the European parliament. Only after 2014 the rumpus settles somewhat.

## 9: Fear

Because of the economic crisis (2008-14), Western-European rightwing-nationalist parties experience an electoral free fall. Citizens vote for Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Liberals because they trust them more. In 2015, Europe is overwhelmed by the refugee crisis. Millions of migrants dare to cross the Mediterranean to walk north. Citizens begin to fear these new non-western migrants. This is water on the mills of the rightwing nationalists. Suddenly, parties such as the PVV and the FPÖ find their way back to the top. In Germany, where the impact of the refugee crisis is the heaviest, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) changes from an anti-Euro party into a rightwing-nationalist one.

## 10: Arrogance

Russian president Putin looks for political powers to help him divide the EU and finds them in the rightwing-nationalist parties. Some get Russian banking accounts or cooperate with his United Russia Party. With their affiliation with Russia rightwing-nationalists gather new political capital. At the same time, all eyes watch Great Britain where in 2016 a referendum takes place about Britain's membership of the EU. In the years before, the rightwing-nationalist UK Independence Party (UKIP) emerged. It is furiously against the EU and the British membership, but has also developed as a critic of the influx of migrants from overseas. During the referendum campaign, migration becomes the most important issue. UKIP wins the referendum and inspires other rightwing-nationalist parties.

## 11: A year of elections

The Brexit referendum and the American presidential election in 2016 encourage rightwing nationalists on the European continent. At the start of 2017, PVV leader Wilders and FN frontwoman Le Pen are convinced of a "patriotic spring." The elections in their countries, however, disappoint them because the Dutch and French voters do not behave as expected. Wilders even has to cope with a new competitor, the Forum for Democracy. In Germany, however, the AfD is the great winner of the Bundestag

elections. For the first time in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany a rightwing-nationalist party gets seats in the parliament. The party looks for support by the Austrian FPÖ which welcomes it with open arms. Slowly but surely, new political contours emerge in Europe.

## 12: We against the system

Everybody believing that the rightwing-nationalist trend is over after the losses of Wilders and Le Pen, at least in some countries, is wrong. In Austria, FPÖ is on the rise again. Both the Social Democrats and the Conservatives are interested in governing with the rightwing-nationalists. In the end, the FPÖ cooperates with the young conservative leader Sebastian Kurz. In neighboring Italy, the Lega Nord under Matteo Salvini experiences a resurrection. He changes the name of the party and chooses a national strategy. Together with the populist Five Star Movement he forms an “anti-system government” in 2018. In the meantime, the German AfD gets in trouble because of its rightwing-nationalist rhetoric.

## 13: Globalists versus nationalists

Leading up to the European elections of 2019, political developments in Europa follow one another rapidly. While the American rightwing-nationalist Steve Bannon tries in vain to unite his European soulmates, a new generation of rightwing-nationalist politicians breaks through. The growing inequality between citizens who profit from globalization and those who do not increases social tensions. In France and Belgium this leads to a rebellion of the lower class and the lower middle class. This movement of the “yellow vests” is welcomed by right-wing nationalists but is too diffuse to be led by them. Part of the social problems is caused by the previous policies around immigration. This is why The Danish Social Democrats accept a new agenda for immigration and integration with more rightwing and nationalist elements. According to the Danes, this is a “just and realistic” plan for government.