

Europe's far right is thrilled about Trump's victory

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Europe's far-right populist movement has been having a good year, seeing gains at the regional and national level in Austria, Italy and Germany, and leading a little effort known as Brexit in the U.K. And now Donald Trump, defying nearly a year of polling predictions and punditry, won the U.S. presidency Tuesday evening.

It's a worrying situation for Europe's leading politicians. "Populism is not only a problem happening in the U.S.," Germany's Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble warned in German newspaper Bild on Thursday. Schäuble urged European leaders to expand their perspectives and rethink current strategies in order to avoid a larger "Trump effect."

Trump's victory is the latest signal of populism's growing hold in the West, and comes a mere six months after the U.K. defied similar polling projections and voted to leave the EU. Viewed together, these two events cast a cloud over upcoming national elections throughout Europe, and most notably those set to take place in France, Netherlands, and Germany in 2017, where populist parties expect to feature in the mix.

But the first test in Europe will come next month. Austria's re-run presidential election is set for Dec. 4 and could see populist Norbert Hofer of Austria's Freedom Party, a right-wing party founded by former Nazi members more than 60 years ago, win the country's top, if mostly ornamental, position.

In the spring, the Netherlands may see anti-Islam and populist Geert Wilders's Freedom Party have a chance at forming a government. Same goes for France, where the National Front's Marine Le Pen will likely be a contender in the country's presidential election. And in Germany, though current projections favor Angela Merkel maintaining her chancellorship, a deeply unpopular refugee policy and a steady surge from the country's populist "anti-migrant" AfD, has European onlookers foreseeing a "messy" general election.

Rafal Pankowski, a sociology professor at Collegium Civitas in Warsaw, expects Tuesday's U.S. election result will further embolden these parties and will serve as a model for them in the 2017 elections.

"Far-right parties such as the FN in France will use the U.S. case as a reference point, and they will try to copy Trump's success with anti-elite sentiment mixed with xenophobia and a rejection of liberal democratic culture," he said.

Hearty congratulations for Trump

Trump's surprise victory elicited excited responses from the who's who of Europe's populist movement on Wednesday. Starting with the man who spearheaded the Brexit campaign, former UKIP leader Nigel Farage, who referred to Trump's victory alongside Brexit as "the year of two great political revolutions."

In France, Le Pen congratulated the president-elect and "the free American people!" on Twitter. Le Pen has long been vocal in her support of Trump, and she endorsed him last February, arguing then that his presidency would be good for France.

Geert Wilders joined in as well. The Dutch politician welcomed Trump's victory, hailing it as a "historic victory" and "revolution."

"Politics will never be the same... What happened in America can happen in Europe and the Netherlands as well," he added.

Viktor Orbán, Hungary's hardline nationalist leader and chief antagonist to EU politicians in Brussels, was unsurprisingly pleased to hear that Trump had been victorious. "Democracy is still alive," he wrote on Facebook.

In Germany, AfD leader Frauke Petry called Trump's victory a "fresh start." And the party's European parliament member Beatrix von Storch said the "success of Donald Trump is a signal that the citizens of the Western world want a clear political change."

A similar sentiment was exclaimed by the hardline Golden Dawn party in Greece, which gained popular support in the wake of crippling austerity policies implemented in 2010 in the wake of the global economic crisis.

"A great global change is starting, which will continue with nationalists prevailing in Austria, Marie Le Pen in France and Golden Dawn in Greece," the group said in a clear warning to the rest of Europe.

Some context

Mitchell Orenstein, professor of Russian and East European Studies at University of Pennsylvania and senior fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, is unsurprised by the European rush to congratulate the new U.S. president:

"The far right in one country gains from successes in another. Trump's win is a big win for far right populism. It shows that these views are dominant in one of the largest and most successful countries of the world, so it validates it in Europe as well."

Yet despite this wave of support from extremist parties in Europe, Dr. Aurélien Mondon, an expert in populism and the far right, told VICE News it's important to maintain perspective.

"Progressive movements must ensure that they do not respond to the reactionary right in a similar manner," Mondon said. "The response needed from the broad left will need to go beyond the simple reversal of recent electoral results or damage control, and instead offer something positive to the growing parts of the population who have become increasingly alienated and distrustful of mainstream politics, and who have only partly turned to the right-wing alternative."

Scott Radnitz, director of the Ellison Center for Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies at the University of Washington, agreed that Trump's win would boost far-right sentiment but said it was unlikely to provide any lasting momentum.

"It is unclear how much of his agenda Trump will actually try to implement," Radnitz said. "He is likely to find that many of his campaign lines cannot be realized in policy, precisely because too much of the U.S. economy depends on global integration, and because much of the U.S. public believes that diversity and even immigration are good things."

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