

Geert Wilders' trial to proceed on hate charges over "fewer Moroccans" comments in 2014 campaign



Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV)

Source: *SkyNews*

SkyNews reported that Geert Wilders will stand trial on criminal charges of violating the Dutch hate speech laws, "Geert Wilders hate speech charges upheld in court." His counsel had filed a motion with the Hague court to dismiss the charges. The case against Wilders arose from petitions filed with the Hague prosecutors by Dutch Muslims and leftist allies that his 2014 local campaign remarks of "fewer Moroccans" constituted prosecutable violations of hate speech laws in the Netherlands. Wilders' counsel has also questioned possible bias in the three judge tribunal. Wilders had been acquitted of similar charges in a trial in the Amsterdam District Court in 2011. The trial comes at a time where Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) has risen near the top of Dutch political polls close behind the ruling coalition of PM Mark Rutte's VVD party in the Hague Parliament. Wilders' counsel has also questioned the validity of the submitted petitioners that the Hague prosecutors have based their charges.

Sky News reported:

A court has upheld hate speech charges against Dutch far-right MP Geert Wilders over comments he made about

Moroccans.

The leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV) sparked outrage when he asked supporters at a rally in 2014 whether they wanted “fewer or more Moroccans in your city and in the Netherlands?”

After the crowd shouted back “fewer” Mr Wilders said: “We’re going to organise that”.

The MP appealed to have the charges thrown out, but his objections were dismissed by The Hague District Court.

The comments triggered more than 6,400 complaints and criticism from within Mr Wilders’ party.

Five organisations and 56 people have registered as victims of the remarks, judges said.

Mr Wilders’ lawyers slammed the trial as a “political case” ahead of parliamentary elections in March.

They argued that the MP had merely “put forward his party’s political programme” and claimed the case could have “far reaching political consequences for democracy”.

At an earlier hearing, Geert-Jan Knoops, defending Mr Wilders, told judges that freedom of expression is “the last freedom Mr Wilders has left”.

But the court said that although politicians are entitled to freedom of expression they should “avoid public statements that feed intolerance. Judge Hendrik Steenhuis said: “Where the border lies between the two will be debated in this trial.”

He added that prosecuting Mr Wilders will “not affect his political freedoms or that of this Freedom Party”.

After the hearing, Mr Wilders claimed he was being

prosecuted “for voicing the opinion of millions”.

He added: “The Netherlands is like Turkey. Displeasing political opinions are being silenced in court.”

The MP was