

VLAAMS BELANG (FLEMISH INTEREST)

IMPACT: Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest, VB) is a far-right political party in the Flemish region of Belgium which promotes Flemish nationalism and was founded in 1978. The party has promoted fears of immigrant invasions, a Muslim takeover of Europe, and the Islamization of Flemish society. Filip Dewinter, one of the leading members of VB, has used the party's platform to advance anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim conspiracy theories. VB gained its first electoral successes in the late 1980s. Today, the party is represented in regional, national and European parliaments, and has transnational and international ties with other anti-Muslim and far-right movements and parties.

- Belgium is divided into three regions, Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels, where Dutch, French, and German are respectively spoken. Based in the Flemish region of Belgium, Vlaams Belang (VB) is a far-right political party that **advocates the preservation of Flemish culture, strict immigration laws, and an independent Flemish state.** Unlike all other Belgian parties, Vlaams Belang has no common list with Francophone counterparts on a national level.
- VB is the de facto successor of Vlaams Blok, established in 1978, which was **dissolved after a trial in 2004 where it was condemned for racism.** Prior to its disbandment, the Belgian Parliament had signed an agreement in November 1992 that established a cordon sanitaire around the Blok, following its publication of a “program of 70 points” aiming to combat immigration, which **included the forced repatriation of all immigrants up to the third generation, educational apartheid, and the division of social security.** Then Vlaams Blok Party Leader and member of the European Parliament (MEP) Frank Vanhecke immediately reacted with the establishment of a new party. Since 2014, VB has been under the leadership of Tom Jozef Irène Van Grieken. In 2019, VB won 23 seats in the Flemish parliament and 15 seats for a total of 18 in the Belgian national parliament.
- **VB holds transnational and international connections to other anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim organizations.** According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a senior official of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) met with leaders of VB in 2007. FAIR is designated as a hate group by SPLC, and its leaders “have ties to white supremacist groups and eugenicists and have made many racist statements.”
- In December 2010, VB member Felipe Dewinter traveled to Israel along with other far-right politicians such as Heinz-Christian Strache, the chairman of the Freedom Party of Austria, Kent Ekeroth of the far-right Sweden Democrats, and Rene Stadtkewitz from the German Freedom Party. According to Der Spiegel, “the group met with Jewish settlers in the West Bank, visited the city of Ashkelon in the Gaza Strip, discussed ‘strategies against Islamic terror’ and visited the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.” There, the whole delegation signed the Jerusalem Declaration, which says, “Now that the totalitarian systems of the 20th century have been overcome, [...] mankind currently sees itself exposed to a new, worldwide totalitarian threat: fundamentalist Islam.” The trip was organized by a leading international anti-Muslim figure, Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff.
- In 2011, VB organized a conference in which members of the Tea Party participated. During the so-called “March for Freedom,” which was organized in Germany in May 2011 to protest against the construction of mosques, VB marched alongside members of German PRO parties, the Austrian FPÖ, the German Republikaner, the French Bloc Identitaire, Italian activists and the transnational initiative ‘Cities against Islamization’ in support of freedom of speech together with Tea Party Representatives and the US-based Youth for Western Civilization (YWC).
- YWC was a far-right campus youth movement founded in 2006 by Kevin Deanna with a stated mission “to organize, educate, and train activists dedicated to the revival of Western Civilization.” The organization advocated against “radical multiculturalism, political correctness, racial preferences, mass immigration, and socialism.” It established chapters and faced controversies

VLAAMS BELANG (FLEMISH INTEREST)

at [about 15](#) universities across the U.S., including [American University](#), [Vanderbilt University](#), [Towson University](#), and [Liberty University](#). Since [2012](#), the organization has been inactive.

- VB has been represented in the European Parliament elections [since 1989](#). In June 2015, it joined the anti-Muslim political group ‘[Europe of Nations and Freedom](#),’ currently known as ‘[Identity and Democracy](#),’ which was headed by the [French Front National](#) and [Italy’s Lega](#). In 2019, VB [became](#) the second strongest force in the European Parliament elections in Belgium with 11.68% of the vote, and currently [holds](#) three seats in the European Parliament.
- **VB has used its platform to propagate anti-immigrant sentiment and fears of a Muslim takeover of Europe.** The party has an especially anti-Muslim program, including condemning Muslim [burial](#) practices, supporting the Belgian [burqa ban](#), denouncing offerings of [halal food](#), and mobilizing against [Muslim educational systems](#).
- [Filip Dewinter](#) is one of the guiding members of VB, and has been with the Vlaams Blok in [leading positions since 1985](#). In a December 2005 interview with The Jewish Week, Dewinter answered a [question](#) asking if “Jews should vote for a party that espouses xenophobia,” by saying, “Xenophobia is not the word I would use ... if it absolutely must be a 'phobia,' let it be 'Islamophobia.’” Dewinter has **spread fears that society will be “dominated by the rules and laws of Islam” and warned that “the Islamisation of Europe” is “one of the core problems of our society today.”**
- Dewinter has also proposed that terrorism is intrinsically linked to Islam, [stating](#), “You can only take away the problem if you solve the infiltration of radical Islam into Islamic society in Europe – and both are linked.” In a September 2015 article titled “[Open Borders and Islam Are the Problem](#),” the party claimed that Dewinter “was the only one who dared to name the core of the problem: on the one hand, the open (inner) borders [...] and, on the other hand, Islam.” In his new book and documentary titled “Immigration Invasion: The New Colonization,” **Dewinter claimed that “the influx of aliens is accelerating Europe at a rapid pace” and blamed lax immigration policy for bringing “more crime, more poverty and more Islamization.”**
- Many leading members of VB confess similar stances that Islam is intrinsically violent. In November 2015, Hans Keldermans, a leading member of VB in the small city of Mechelen, [stated](#): “Most Muslims profess their faith in an honest manner without being an extremist ... Islam itself, however, is indeed the engine behind specific extremism and terrorism [and] denial of the danger that lies in the doctrine itself is fooling oneself.” Filip Deforche, a VB councilmember, is quoted having [said](#): “Islam is a danger for the country, [and] for all Europe, so we have to fight that.”
- VB warns of what it calls the “Islamization” of Belgian and European societies in order to oppose the accommodation of Muslim life. The party has frequently mobilized against the regional projects of Muslims. In March 2012, VB [denounced](#) a multi-religious cemetery that accommodates Muslims. In its statement the party also condemned “separate swimming lessons for men and women, only female doctors for Muslims, [and] headscarves in the civil service and schools.” It concluded that **“Islam will adapt only under pressure” and “the semi-soft mentality of the traditional parties has the opposite effect.”**
- In February 2013, VB published an article on its website titled “[Islamist Fastfood](#),” where it condemned Quick, a hamburger chain, for switching to halal products at some of its French branches. VB argued that by offering halal products, **“Quick contributes to further) Islamization” and “indigenous French are also supposed to eat what the Islamic cooking pot offers.”**
- In May 2018, VB [opposed](#) Islamic education in schools, arguing that “Muslim education in our schools is also problematic for the Muslim children themselves” and “Islamic teachers create a culture of fear through their indoctrination.” **The party expressed its outrage over financing**

VLAAMS BELANG (FLEMISH INTEREST)

education in a religion “diametrically opposed” to European values. VB further [argues](#) for the abolition of religious education in official education, which includes “Community, municipal and provincial education.”

- In May 2012, VB [published](#) an article on the Burqa Ban which [criticized](#) liberal politicians from [Groen](#), the Belgian Green Party, for not supporting the ban. In the piece, **the party argued that voluntary burqa wearers “dislike freedom in our society” and “are actually abusing democratic freedoms by putting them against democracy.”** The party also [claimed](#) that “the degree of Islamization can be deduced directly from the extent to which Muslims (should) cover their bodies ... [and] the more Islam, the more textiles, the worse the plight of Muslim women.”
- In November 2012, **VB published an article on its website titled “Beginning of the End,” where it [warned](#) of a Muslim political takeover of Belgium.** The party argued that “the mass invasion of foreigners has [had] consequences for the election results” and increasing infiltration into the traditional parties has led them to populate parliaments and municipal and provincial councils. A photo in the piece shows the two words “Brussel: Eurabia,” drawing on a conspiracy theory from [Bat Ye’or](#), who [argued](#) that Muslims are infiltrating and taking over Europe.
- The party has expressed support for anti-Muslim author, activist, and former Dutch politician [Ayaan Hirsi Ali](#)’s argument that [Islamophobia](#) does not exist. In February 2012, VB came out in [defense](#) of Ali’s article “[The Global War on Christians in the Muslim World](#),” stating, “As naive souls mobilize against the specter of ‘Islamophobia’ in Europe, Hirsi Ali calls on the Free West to no longer passively oversee the ethnic cleansing of Christians in the Islamic world.” The Center for American Progress (CAP) [identifies](#) Hirsi Ali as a leading activist in the “Islamophobia Network.”
- **VB is the founder of [Islam Watch](#), a now-inactive website created in 2015 to “combat Islamic domination of Flanders.”** The website was launched in [response](#) to the 2016 Brussels attacks. Along with a now-suspended [Twitter account](#), the goal of the initiative was to mobilize citizens to report “every sign and fact” of Islamisation in Flanders, from the establishment of a new mosque, the activities of Islamic organizations, the opening of a new halal butcher shop or even the addition of veiled women working in public institutions such as local schools.”
- According to Dewinter, such an initiative was needed [because](#) citizens “can’t report to the government because the traditional political parties are multi-cultural and politically correct.” Using the website’s information, “any reported signs and symptoms of ‘Islamisation’ [would] be recorded, mapped, and entered into an “Islamisation index,” and this would “allow for an appropriate response to any recorded aspect of Islamisation.” In relation to tracking degrees of “Islamisation,” **VB MP Sam van Rooy [said](#), “The more Muslims we have in this country, the more Islamisation we will have, and the more Sharia we will have.”** The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) [ruled](#) the website “illegal under Belgian and EU rules against discrimination and incitement to hatred.”