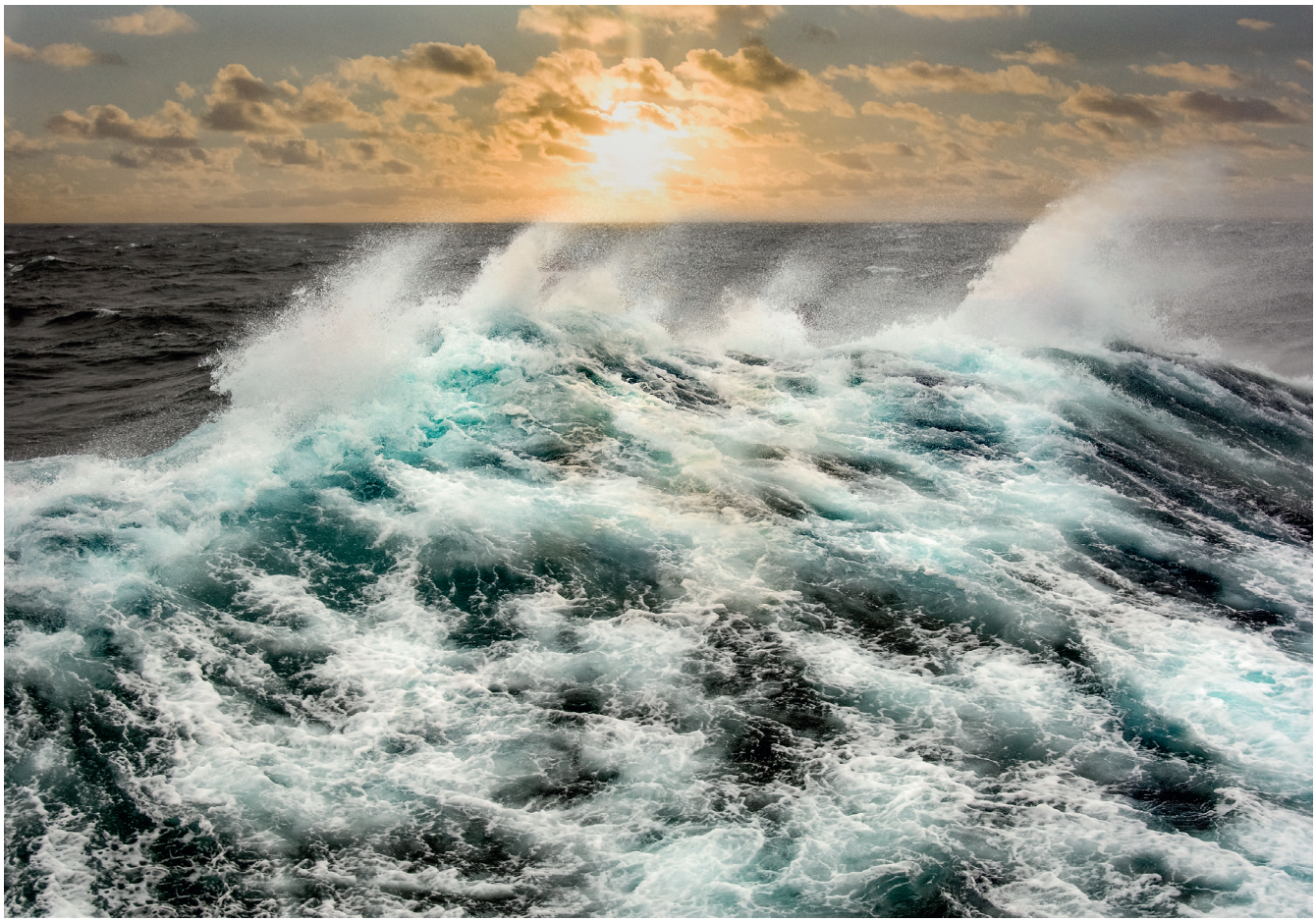
General Intelligence and
Security Service
*Ministry of the Interior and
Kingdom Relations*

Right-wing extremism in the Netherlands

A phenomenon in flux



The AIVD regularly publishes reports that analyse developments in the world against the framework of our current intelligence investigations. With these publications the AIVD wishes to contribute to the public debate on specific topics. AIVD publications describe general trends which may vary in individual cases.

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What is extremism?

The AIVD investigates various forms of extremism, such as left-wing and right-wing extremism.

Extremism is:
The active pursuit of/or support for profound changes in society which could pose a threat to (the continuity of) the democratic legal order, possibly by the use of undemocratic methods that might impair the functioning of the democratic legal order.

Such undemocratic methods can be violent or non-violent. Examples of the latter include systematic hate speech, spreading fear, dissemination of disinformation, demonisation and intimidation.

In its most acute form, extremism can lead to terrorism.

The AIVD refers specifically to right-wing extremism if the above definition applies in combination with one or more of the following core ideas:

- xenophobia;
- hatred of foreign influences or cultures;
- ultranationalism.

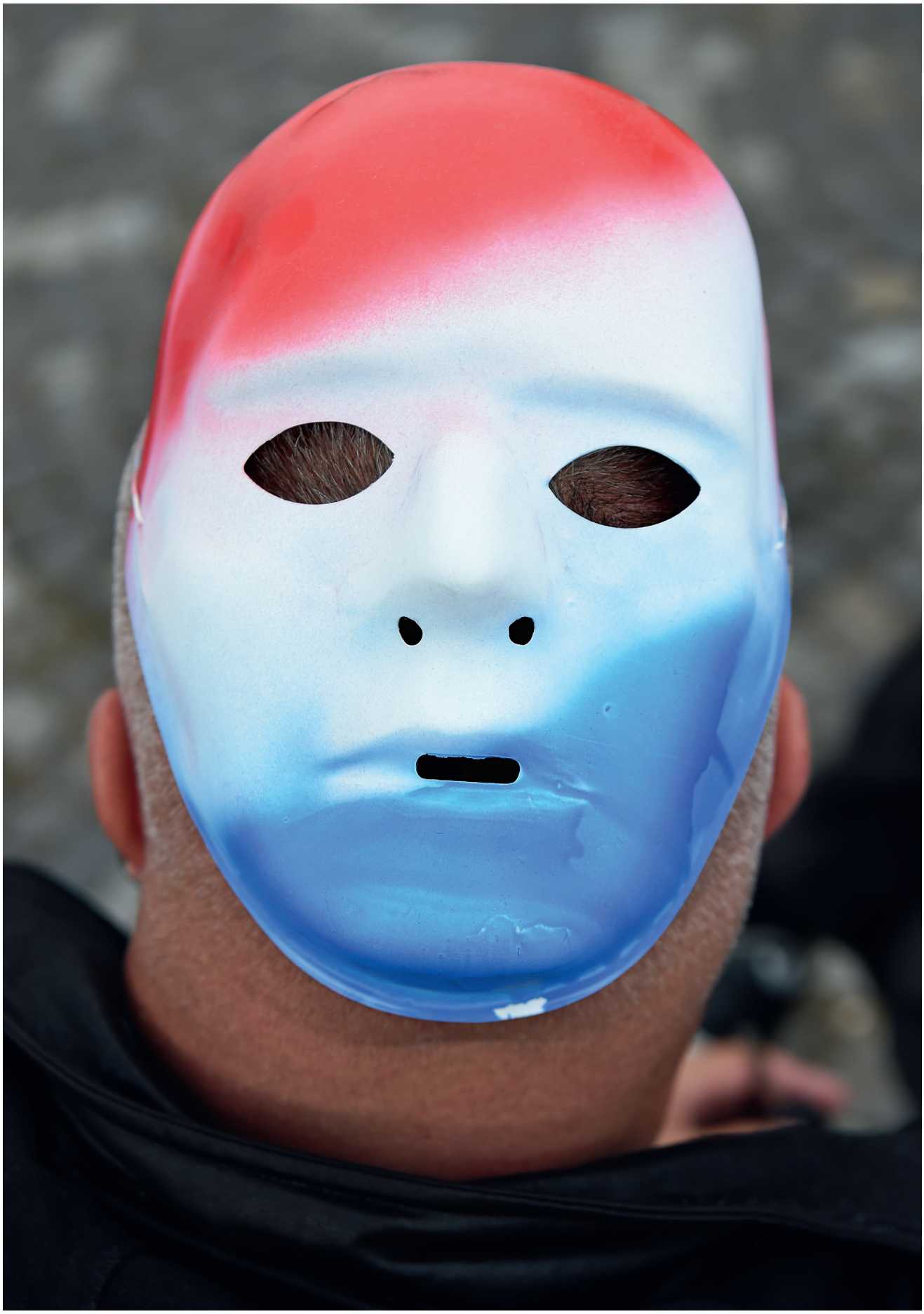
The AIVD does not investigate activism, because this does not pursue undemocratic goals or use undemocratic methods. Likewise, also (ultra) right-wing or (ultra) left-wing parties or organisations that operate within the confines of our democratic legal order are of course excluded from this definition of extremism.

Introduction

In addition to supplying relevant agencies and organisations with confidential reports and analyses, the AIVD regularly publishes reports about its areas of interest for the general public. This new publication reviews recent developments around right-wing extremism in the Netherlands and the current situation. This report is part of an intermittent series on left-wing and right-wing extremism (with publications in 2009, 2010, and 2013) and the first publication dedicated to right-wing extremism since 2010's "Right-wing extremism and the extreme right in the Netherlands".

After a period of decline, the AIVD has observed a slight revival in right-wing extremism in the Netherlands since 2014/2015. This revival is accompanied by ideological and organisational changes. There are also new developments in the activities of right-wing extremists. Underlying these trends are a decline in the neo-Nazi skinhead movement, the rise of ISIS, large-scale migration into Europe, the emergence of the alt-right movement in the US, and the ease with which digital communication facilitates mutual contact.

In this publication, the AIVD discusses both the ideological and organisational changes affecting right-wing extremism and how its activities have developed. The publication also addresses the threat posed by this form of extremism in the Netherlands.



Ideology

For some decades, right-wing extremism in the Netherlands was dominated by neo-Nazi, fascist and anti-Semitic ideas. This has changed in recent years. Today, neo-Nazism is a marginal movement and other forms of right-wing extremism have taken its place.

Anti-Islamic ideology to the fore

In the past few years, hostility towards Islam has become the primary ideological driving force for groups and individuals within the right-wing extremist movement. This development began to crystallise from 2014 onwards, as a result of two events:

- the proclamation of the caliphate by ISIS and the subsequent series of jihadist terrorist attacks in Western Europe;
- the influx of refugees into Europe and the Netherlands from 2015 onwards.

Established right-wing extremist groups in the Netherlands, such as the Dutch People's Union (Nederlandse Volks-Unie, NVU), seized upon the rise of ISIS and the refugee crisis to raise their own profiles and so reach a broader public. Their tactics included organising anti-ISIS rallies and demonstrations outside asylum centres. At the same time, a variety of new initiatives also emerged. Examples of these include Demonstrators against Local Authorities (Demonstranten tegen Gemeenten, DTG) and United We Stand Holland (UWS). The AIVD also observed an increase in online extremist statements against Muslims and asylum seekers.

Once the influx of migrants started stagnating in 2016, many of the above initiatives faded away. Nonetheless, their anti-Islamic ideology persisted. Rhetorically, this movement makes little distinction between Muslims and migrants. From its perspective, apparently, migrants are Muslims.

Many of those attracted to this anti-Islamic rhetoric have no previous history of right-wing extremism. Few endorse its traditional themes, such as anti-Semitism and Hitler worship, and those who do sometimes choose to conceal that for opportunistic reasons.

Anti-Islamic thinking is often combined with clear ideas about national identity. For instance, preserving "Black Pete" (Zwarte Piet, St Nicholas' blackface companion during the Sinterklaas festivities in December) has also become an annually recurring theme. Current events are exploited, too. One recent trend, for example, has been to take advantage of indignation at supposed Turkish interference in the Netherlands by organising activities directed against Diyanet mosques. In addition, strong anti-government sentiment has emerged in the past few years. The Dutch authorities and the European Union (EU) are seen as villains that facilitate the rise of Islam in the Netherlands through their policies.

Alt-right

Another ideological strand emerged in 2016 when, inspired by the alt-right movement in the United States[1], the Erkenbrand Study Association (Studiegenootschap Erkenbrand) was established. Erkenbrand calls itself alt-right and seeks to disseminate and normalise right-wing extremist ideas by casting them in a more "intellectual" mould. It organises lectures and conferences, for example, and publishes opinion pieces on its website. Participants in its meetings are expected to display a certain level of intellect.

Race is central to the Erkenbrand ideology. It explicitly opposes racial mixing and strives for the creation of a white ethnostate. It also especially targets men. According to Erkenbrand, white men need to start realising that their position is in danger. The group's ultimate goal is to achieve enough critical mass in favour of these ideas to instigate the transition to an ethnostate. In this pure white ethnostate there is no place for other races. Jews are also excluded from the white ethnostate in Erkenbrand's world view.

Like supporters of the anti-Islamic ideology, Erkenbrand and its sympathisers have a great aversion to the government. In this alt-right world view, however, other institutions are also responsible for what is called the "white genocide" or "Umvolkung" (the promotion of policies that in the long run could lead to the extinction of the white race). Schools, the traditional mass media and the film industry all promote the diversity they despise.

[1]) Alt-right, which stands for "alternative right", is a collective name that has been used for some years now to describe a new generation of white nationalists in the United States. The alt-right movement is not a coherent whole, but made up of separate groups (such as think tanks) and prominent individuals (such as vloggers) representing a number of different ideological currents. Their common denominator is the idea that the survival of the white man is threatened by other races. This alt-right generation makes effective use of the internet and social media and attaches great importance to masculinity, intellect and an impeccable appearance.

The Erkenbrand ideology: examples

The following texts are taken from opinion pieces or podcasts published by the Erkenbrand Study Association.

Erkenbrand website, 30/09/2016 – Miscegenation as a weapon

"Western women belong to Western men, as simple as that. The mantra 'boss in your own belly' (a slogan of the Dutch abortion rights movement) is nonsense and leads only to low fertility. Do you as a Western man think that you cannot appropriate a woman or do you not want to impregnate her? Then just remember that there are endless hordes of third-world men ready to do it for you."

White men who feel no anger when they see an interracial couple are, by definition, weak white men."

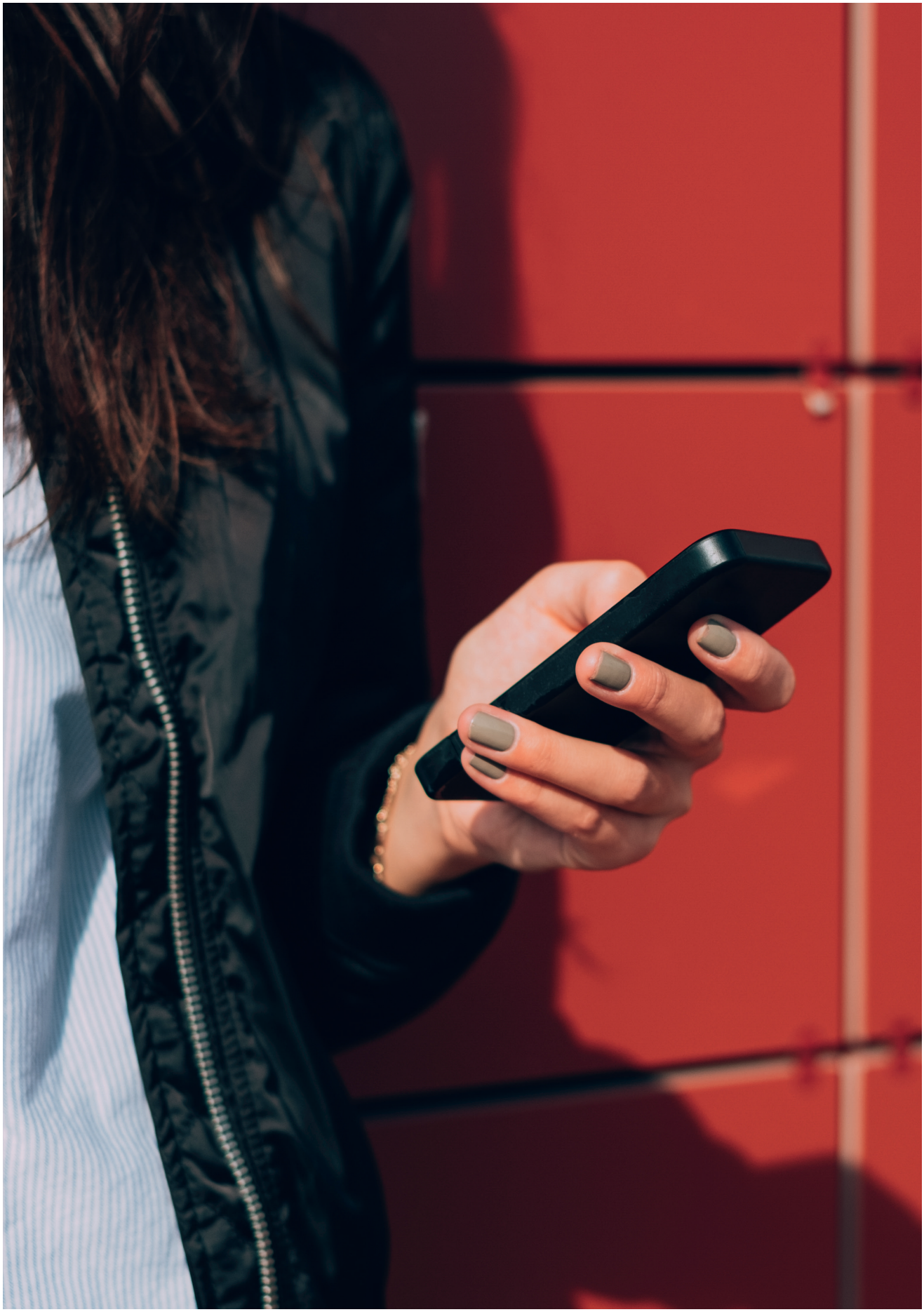
Erkenbrand website, 03/01/2018 – The diversity agenda

Anti-Western, anti-male, anti-white sentiment is what really lurks behind 'diversity'. It is being used as an ideological tool to change the demographic composition of workplaces, of sports and social clubs, of schools and of politics. Instead of striving for quality, the aim is to lower the percentage of white men."

Erkenbrand YouTube channel, 27/03/2018 – podcast Sam Speaks 1

"In general, non-whites are consistently smaller, regardless of diet, do not fare well in the creative professions and science or the arts without government support – look at the new initiatives for urban arts – and fail enormously in academic aspiration... But what if we mix whites with negroids?
Then everyone has what they want, surely?! But that's not how it works. If I can be rather blunt for a moment, you won't get a scientist who can run very fast. No, you'll get a dumber white person and a less fast African, all in one."

To summarise, anti-Islamic ideas have dominated right-wing extremism in the Netherlands for several years now. Alt-right thinking imported from the United States has also gained a foothold.



Organisation

Five years ago, there was a fairly straightforward right-wing extremist landscape in the Netherlands: a number of relatively small groups, often with one clear leader and a well-defined ideology, a reasonably stable membership and few recruits. Rivalry between them was strong and co-operation non-existent.

The current situation is a lot less clear. Today, right-wing extremism is characterised by a lot of online and offline activity outside of established organisations, and the relationships between the various groups and individuals are very fluid.

The impact of social media and chat apps

Right-wing extremists have increasingly been using social media and chat apps in recent years. This has had a major impact on the movement's organisation and behaviour.

- Social media such as Facebook and VKontakte (VK) (a platform similar to Facebook, see text box) make it easier to find like-minded people, so that newcomers to the movement can link up with kindred spirits more quickly. New initiatives and groups are also easily created, although these sometimes disappear just as quickly – especially if they fail to make the transition from virtual to physical contact.

- Social media allows extremist individuals to make their voices heard. The AIVD has observed an increase in right-wing extremist statements online. And the "filter bubble" dynamics of social media ensure that users confirm and reinforce each other's views. For example, events involving Muslims or Islam are systematically placed in a right-wing extremist light to reinforce the feeling of "us" (the white Dutch) versus "them" (the Muslims). Often, such reports engender hate posts. It is not uncommon for these to make threats or to wish death upon Muslims.

- Chat apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram have made traditional organisational structures less important. An app group is all it takes to arrange meetings, exchange information or prepare activities and actions.

From Facebook to VK?

Facebook has active policies to recognise and remove hate speech from the platform. The AIVD has observed that, in response, some outspoken right-wing extremists from the Netherlands are transferring their social-media activities to VK where they feel free to express themselves without inhibitions.
VK is the Russian equivalent of Facebook, and so especially popular among Russian-speaking users. It is not known how many Dutch people have a VK profile.

Characteristics of right-wing extremism

One consequence of the organisational changes within right-wing extremism is that part of the movement can no longer be categorised into groups. Ad-hoc coalitions and fluid contacts give this strand of the movement a certain cohesion, but it does not have a name. As a result, right-wing extremism has become more unpredictable than it once was.

Another section of the movement still organises into groups, but here too there is increasing overlap in terms of sympathisers and ad-hoc collaborations. Groups of this kind include Identitarian Resistance (Identitair Verzet) and Right in Resistance (Rechts in Verzet), as well the NVU and the Erkenbrand Study Association mentioned earlier. In all these cases, the core membership is small. No more than a few dozen individuals make an active contribution to each. Of course, the numbers they reach are greater. People may for example be involved in the background, as online sympathisers, by attending meetings, or as donors.

There have also been developments in the area of gender relationships. Traditionally a male stronghold, right-wing extremism has seen more and more women becoming involved in recent years, although they are still in the minority. The exception to this rule is Erkenbrand, whose active members and sympathisers are almost exclusively men. This is very probably due to the group's open opposition to women's rights.

AIVD investigations also reveal that Dutch right-wing extremists are not hindered by municipal or provincial borders. Activities take place wherever current events dictate. Meetings are organised at locations all the participants can reach easily. Between gatherings, people maintain contact by telephone and online. The picture presented in this report therefore applies to the whole country.

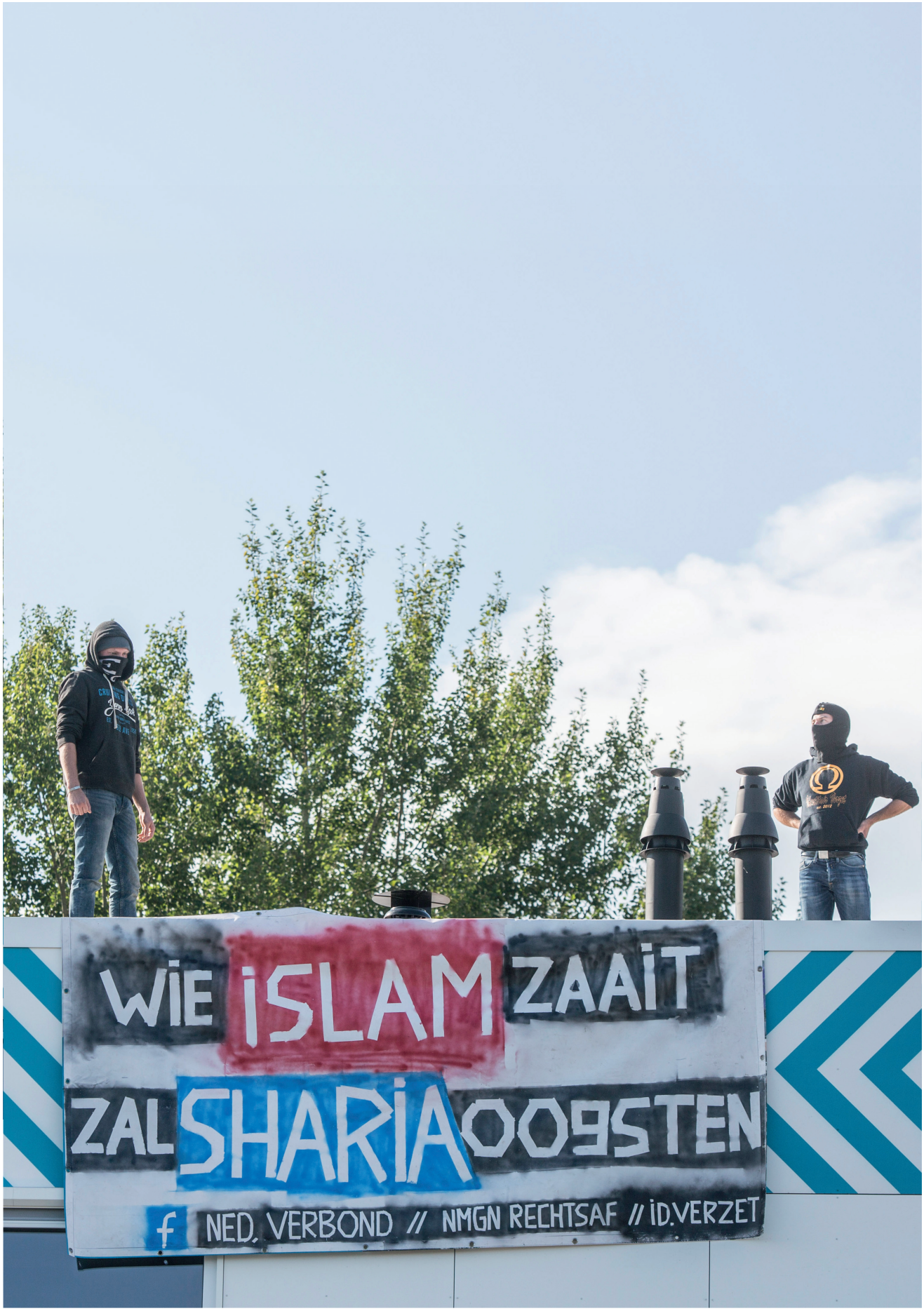
International contacts

Generally speaking, right-wing extremism is a national matter more or less by definition. Its nature and intensity can therefore vary greatly from country to country. Nevertheless, attempts are sometimes made to establish international contacts.

On the anti-Islamic side of the movement, the AIVD sees limited contacts between Dutch right-wing extremists and like-minded people in neighbouring countries. What links do exist frequently result in participation in each other's meetings, events and demonstrations, but do not go much further than that. In most cases, moreover, it is Dutch extremists who travel abroad. There is less traffic in the opposite direction.

Erkenbrand's alt-right ideology, on the other hand, has its origins abroad. It is logical, therefore, that greater effort is put into international exchange and co-operation within this part of the movement. At present, however, this does not go beyond ad-hoc contacts with small groups in other European countries. Whether or not closer forms of co-operation will emerge in the future remains to be seen.

To summarise, groups have become less important at the organisational level. A lot of right-wing extremist activity, online and offline, now takes place outside of established organisations. And what groups remain are relatively small. However, the number of people being reached is clearly greater. Both anti-Islamic and alt-right extremists have international contacts. So far, though, these have not resulted in any worrying developments.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Activities

The activities undertaken by right-wing extremists in the Netherlands vary widely, from the dissemination of their ideology to violence and terrorism. Engagement with left-wing extremists also plays an important role.

Below, various activities are discussed in order of increasing threat of violence. Left-right interaction is dealt with separately.

From disseminating ideas to violence

One of the most important activities for right-wing extremists in the Netherlands is spreading their ideology. This is done both online and offline.

- Online, extremists are spending more and more of their time producing websites, promotional videos and podcasts, and they are active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These activities focus on the recruitment of new sympathisers, calls to participate in activities and fundraising.
- Offline, the principal means of "spreading the word" are lectures, conferences and informal gatherings. For the Erkenbrand Study Association, in particular, such events are its main way of disseminating its ideology.

Whilst activities of this kind pose no threat of violence in themselves, we still categorise them as extremism when they involve systematic hate speech, demonising particular sections of the population, intimidation or creating an atmosphere of fear – as, for example, when the addresses of homes allocated to asylum seekers are published online in order to scare them off.

As well as spreading their ideas in this way, various right-wing extremist groups organise demonstrations with some regularity. On average, these attract a few dozen people.

A more radical form of campaigning is the so-called "occupation". This is a tactic used primarily by Identitarian Resistance. To generate attention and publicity, a small group of "identitarians" climbs a mosque or some other building associated with Islam, hangs out banners with anti-Islamic texts and stays there until removed by the police or the fire brigade. In 2017 Identitarian Resistance succeeded in gaining national media coverage for an action of this kind at a recently opened Muslim secondary school in Amsterdam. The occupation of a place of learning by people wearing balaclavas was particularly intimidating. In a few cases, such activities have also lead to confrontations or near-confrontations with opponents.

A step further up the scale of escalation is threats. In June 2017 the As-Soennah mosque in The Hague was sent a toy lorry in the post, with an accompanying letter suggesting that worshippers would be run down. The issuers of such threats are often difficult to trace. When a decapitated doll was left outside an Amsterdam mosque in January 2018, however, the culprit was found. He turned out to be the founder of the small group Right in Resistance.

Violence motivated by right-wing extremism is relatively rare in the Netherlands, certainly when compared with the situation in Germany. There, no fewer than 1600 violent incidents of a right-wing extremist nature occurred in 2016 alone. In the Netherlands, the number of such incidents is estimated to be no more than a few dozen per year. One widely reported example was the arson attack with Molotov cocktails on a mosque in Enschede in February 2016. The culprits, five men from the town, were the first to be convicted of right-wing terrorism in the Netherlands. In another example of right-wing extremist violence, a firework bomb was placed outside the home of a Somali family in December 2015.

Whilst acts of violence may be rare, its encouragement and glorification are not. Both online and offline, the language used by right-wing extremists has become increasingly aggressive and inflammatory in recent years. Moreover, there is a widespread fascination with firearms in these circles. Numerous extremists have attempted to obtain licences so that they can own weapons legally. In themselves, however, neither verbal violence nor an interest in firearms reflects a direct willingness to put words into action. In most cases, the fear of personal repercussions such as losing their job restrain people from taking the next step. Nonetheless, these developments are exposing more and more (vulnerable) people to violent extremist ideas and possible radicalisation.

Right versus left

The left-wing extremists of Anti-Fascist Action (Anti-Fascistische Actie, AFA) have a declared aim to thwart the actions of groups they classify as "right-wing". In their philosophy it is moreover permissible to use violence in this struggle. Sometimes, therefore, a massive police effort is required to prevent AFA from seeking confrontation with the "enemy" and creating violent situations.

Although the initiative for such confrontations generally comes from AFA, right-wing extremists seem to have gained confidence in recent years. Some are no longer afraid of their ideological opponents and have started organising "anti-antifa" activities. These are not solely directed against AFA. The recent rise of anti-colonialist and anti-racist groups – who, for example, campaign for the abolition of Black Pete or the removal from the public domain of references to the Netherlands' colonial past – has also triggered a backlash. Right-wing extremists oppose these efforts because they see them as destroying Dutch history and traditions.

In practice, however, right-wing extremists have so far shown only limited willingness to use violence against "the left". In a few cases where this will did exist, such as during St Nicholas' ceremonial arrival in the Netherlands in 2016, clashes were prevented thanks to the security precautions taken by the authorities.

Left-right interaction: an example

One example of a left-right confrontation occurred in Amsterdam in the spring of 2018. 'We Are Here', a collective of asylum seekers who have been denied residency and have exhausted all legal remedies prior to deportation, had squatted around 20 buildings scheduled for demolition in the Watergraafsmeer district. Their actions received widespread national media coverage after reports of nuisance caused to local residents.

Using the slogan "Illegal is criminal – and squatting is too!", Identitarian Resistance took up a role in the situation. On a Saturday morning in April, a number of its members equipped with a banner and flags moved into a house on the same street as the We Are Here campaigners. Although Identitarian Resistance claimed that they had squatted the premises, this was not in fact the case: access had actually been gained through a property guardianship arrangement.

The same afternoon, AFA-members wearing balaclavas surrounded the building occupied by Identitarian Resistance and pelted it with stones and fireworks, smashing a number of windows.
They were also reported to have attempted to break down the front door. No arrests were made.
After the attack, Identitarian Resistance vacated the premises at police orders.

In an online post Amsterdam concluded that, "Once again it has been shown that the only language these fascists understand is stones and fireworks. This is a language that we can, must and will speak."

This example shows that right-wing extremists are not afraid to provoke, in this case non-violently, and that left-wing extremists do not shy away from responding with violence. The AIVD believes it likely that such situations will occur more frequently in the future.

To summarise, for the most part the activities of right-wing extremists in the Netherlands are non-violent. But verbal violence, in the form of aggressive and inflammatory language, is becoming more prominent in the right-wing extremist scene. Many also have a fascination with firearms. And when it comes to confrontations with the left, their confidence is growing. Nonetheless, left-wing extremists still seem more willing to use violence in these confrontations than their right-wing counterparts.

The threat to the democratic legal order

Slight revival and changes

Since 2014/2015, the AIVD has observed a slight revival of right-wing extremism in the Netherlands. This has been accompanied by an ideological shift, with anti-Islamic ideas coming to the fore and alt-right ideas being imported from the US. At the organisational level, groups have become less important. A lot of activity, online and offline, now takes place outside established organisations. It is also noticeable that right-wing extremists are showing an increased interest in seeking confrontation with their left-wing counterparts.

AIVD concerns

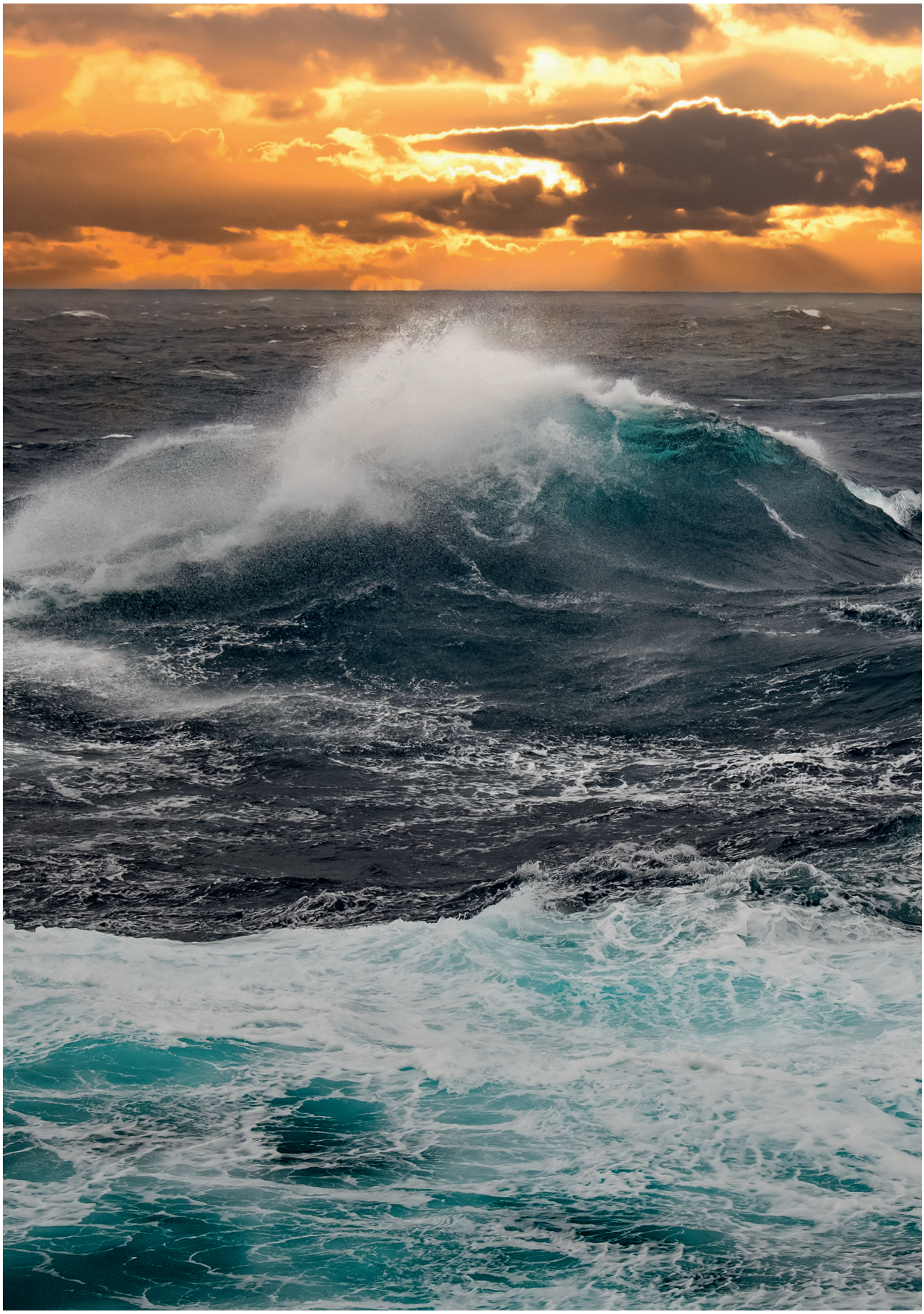
The AIVD investigates right-wing extremism in order to establish how and to what extent it threatens the democratic legal order in the Netherlands. In this respect, the service has concerns about two aspects of the current situation.

- The first is the threat of violence posed by right-wing extremists. Although this remains limited overall, their discourse is becoming increasingly aggressive and inflammatory. More than ever before, statements are being made which encourage and glorify violence – especially against Muslims and the government. There is also a widespread fascination with firearms. Neither development need necessarily result in a willingness to actually use violence. But these developments and the growing group of sometimes vulnerable people coming into contact with violent extremist ideas are worrying. They create a climate in which the risk that (rapidly radicalising) individuals or small groups will resort to violence to make a statement is greater than in the past.

- The second concern is the non-violent threat to the democratic legal order posed by systematic hate speech, demonisation, intimidation, creating an atmosphere of fear and so on. This comes for example from the so-called "intellectual" right-wing extremism inspired by the alt-right movement. Its ideology, based upon racial doctrine, is directly at odds with the principles upon which our democratic legal order is based. However, the Dutch alt-right is trying to make this very extreme thinking common currency in order to achieve a cultural transition to a society in which racism is normal, ultimately paving the way for a political system that guarantees only the fundamental rights of the white citizen. If such ideas were to take root in Dutch society at some point in the future, and thereby also filter through to the public administration, that would constitute a threat to our nation's democratic legal order.

Future developments

Because of the fluid and only partially organised nature of right-wing extremism in the Netherlands, it is very difficult to make statements about likely future developments. In the short term, however, the AIVD does not expect any great change to the threat as described in this report. In the medium to long term, the extent of social polarisation may play a role. If events occur which further exacerbate this, such as new jihadist attacks in Western Europe, they could also create a more fertile breeding ground for right-wing extremism. The AIVD therefore expects the extent of right-wing extremism and the threat it poses to evolve in line with social polarisation in the Netherlands.



Summary

After a period of decline the AIVD has observed a slight revival in right-wing extremism in the Netherlands since 2014/2015. This revival is accompanied by ideological and organisational changes. There are also new developments in the activities of right-wing extremists.

Ideology
For some decades, right-wing extremism in the Netherlands was dominated by neo-Nazi, fascist and anti-Semitic ideas. This has changed in recent years. Today, the scene is dominated by anti-Islamic ideology. Alt-right thinking imported from the United States has also gained a foothold.

Organisation
Groups have become less important. A lot of right-wing extremist activity, online and offline, now takes place outside of established organisations. And what groups remain are relatively small. However, the number of people being reached is clearly greater. Both anti-Islamic and alt-right extremists have international contacts. So far, though, these have not resulted in any worrying developments.

Activities
For the most part, the activities of right-wing extremists in the Netherlands are non-violent. But verbal violence, in the form of aggressive and inflammatory language, is becoming more prominent in the right-wing extremist scene. Moreover, right-wing extremists are increasingly confident in their confrontations with the left. Nonetheless, left-wing extremists still seem more willing to use violence in these confrontations than their right-wing counterparts.

AIVD concerns
The AIVD has concerns about two aspects of the new situation. The first is the threat of violence. This remains limited overall, but the language used by right-wing extremists – online and offline – has become more aggressive and inflammatory in recent years. Many also have a fascination with firearms. Although most right-wing extremists show no signs of resorting to violence, the AIVD believes that the risk that (rapidly radicalising) individuals or small groups will resort to violence is greater than in the past.

The second area of concern is the non-violent threat to the democratic legal order from, for example, the so-called "intellectual" right-wing extremism inspired by the alt-right movement. The aim of this Dutch alt-right is to make very extreme ideas based upon racial doctrine common currency, so that they eventually become accepted in both civil society and public administration.

General Intelligence and Security Service
aivd.nl

P.O. Box 20010
2500 EA Den Haag

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