

Dutch coalition government survives after minister quits over Amsterdam violence

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Amsterdam, November 17 (RHC)-- Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof's right-wing coalition government has survived despite the resignation of a minister over alleged racist comments by cabinet colleagues related to clashes in Amsterdam between Israeli football fans and Palestinian supporters.

Junior Finance Minister Nora Achahbar unexpectedly quit the cabinet on Friday to protest against claims by some politicians, including far-right leader Geert Wilders, that Dutch youth of Moroccan descent attacked the Israeli fans during last week's match between Dutch side Ajax and Maccabi Tel Aviv.

"The polarising interactions of the past weeks made such an impact on me that I am no longer able to effectively carry out my duties as deputy minister," the Morocco-born Achahbar said in her resignation letter to parliament.

Schoof's coalition is led by Wilders's Party for Freedom (PVV), which won the most seats in general elections a year ago. The government was installed in July after months of tense negotiations.

Achahbar's resignation triggered an emergency meeting in which other cabinet members of her centrist New Social Contract (NSC) party also threatened to quit.

If they had, the coalition would have lost its majority in parliament. The NSC is a junior partner in the four-party governing coalition.

"We have reached the conclusion that we want to remain, as a cabinet for all people in the Netherlands," Schoof said at a news conference late on Friday in The Hague.

Addressing what he called "the incidents in Amsterdam last week", Schoof said, "There is a lot of upheaval in the country. It was an emotional week, a heavy week and a lot has been said and a lot happened." But he added: "There has never been any racism in my government or in the coalition parties."

Earlier, Schoof had attributed the violence to people "with a migration background", who he said did not share "Dutch core values."

Wilders, who is not a cabinet member, has repeatedly said Dutch youth of Moroccan descent were the main attackers of the Israeli fans, although police have not specified the backgrounds of suspects. Dutch authorities have also said the Israeli fans instigated the violence by setting fire to a Palestinian flag before the match, chanting anti-Arab slurs and vandalising a taxi as well as private homes displaying Palestinian flags.

Achahbar, a former judge and public prosecutor, felt comments by several political figures were hurtful and possibly racist, De Volkskrant daily reported. On Monday, during a cabinet meeting to discuss the unrest, "things reportedly got heated, and in Achahbar's opinion racist statements were made," the NOS public broadcaster said.

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