

# EUROPEAN RACE BULLETIN

INSTITUTE OF  
**RACE**  
RELATIONS

## ■ MOBILISING AGAINST 'FOREIGN CRIMINALS': THE NEW ELECTORAL POLITICS

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# Editorial

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Populist politicians – mostly, although not entirely, from centre and extreme-Right parties – are seeking to win elections by mobilising voters against foreign criminals, ‘immigrant’ youth and the Roma. But this resort to xenophobia via crime comes at a high social cost, as the summaries provided in this *Bulletin* make clear.

Politicians who make use of divisive and reckless populism to gain votes, put post-war European democratic standards and values at risk. This was most dramatically shown in Italy, in November 2007, when, shameful, deportation policies, based on the collective punishment of all Romanian immigrants (read Roma), were introduced by a centre-left government. This followed the arrest of a Roma for the sexual assault and murder of Giovanna Reggiani, the 47-year-old wife of a navy captain whose body was found in a ditch near her home in Rome. But, in Switzerland, too, thanks to populist proposals advanced by the extremist Swiss People’s Party (SVP), the notion of ‘collective punishment’ is on the agenda. The SVP believes that the entire family of a criminal under the age of 18 should be deported as soon as sentence has been passed. If such a law were passed, say civil libertarians, it would be the first such law in Europe since the Nazi practice of *Sippenhaft* – or kin liability – whereby relatives of criminals were held responsible for their crimes and punished equally.

Politicians’ calls for swift action and authoritarian measures (including deportations) to deal with ‘foreign crime’ has been accompanied by the production of electoral campaign materials incorporating racist images of dark and threatening aliens. The interplay between sensationalised media reporting on crime and the statements of populist politicians is another alarming trend covered in this *Bulletin*. In one week, German TV channels broadcast images from a video capturing a brutal attack by two teenagers on an elderly man on the Munich metro. The Hesse CDU then sought to make this attack the dominant issue in the regional election and, in this, was directly supported by the mass-circulation *Bild* newspaper which featured frequent stories about ‘foreign’ repeat offenders with long criminal records.

In France, political manipulation of the media over issues of crime and punishment has been linked to the ruling L’Union pour un Mouvement Populaire’s (UMP) ‘Plan Banlieues’. French President and UMP leader Nicolas Sarkozy has been accused of cynically manipulating the police and the media for political gain in the run-up to the March 2008 municipal elections (for city mayors and municipal councillors in France’s 100 departments). A few weeks before the elections, thousands of riot police in armoured vans invaded housing estates in the Paris suburbs in order to round-up the ‘ringleaders’ of the November 2007 disturbances that started in Villiers-le-Bel after the death of two teenagers in disputed circumstances involving the police. The media were tipped off about the raids in advance and accompanied the police on this military-style enterprise. As images from the police raids were broadcast repeatedly on television, opposition parties asked whether the rendering of justice had been degraded into a theatrical ‘security spectacle’.

But examination of electoral issues also reveals something far more encouraging, that the resort to tactical populism has spurred a new resistance. In Rome, it was the Jewish community, utilising the slogan ‘one man guilty, not a whole people’, who mobilised via the EveryOne Group to oppose the climate of anti-Roma hatred. In Switzerland, racist images deployed by the Swiss People’s Party in its election campaign (a poster, in cartoon form, depicted three white sheep standing on a Swiss flag, with one of the sheep kicking out a black sheep with a flick of its back legs) gave rise to the broad-front politics of the Black Sheep Committee. Meanwhile, in France, young people of immigrant descent living in the neglected and run-down *banlieues* are defending themselves from demonisation and criminalisation. Truth and Justice was formed to defend those arrested, counter police misinformation and ensure that the perspectives of the youth of Villiers-le-Bel inform the media debate.

*Liz Fekete,*  
*Editor*

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# A survey of local and national elections: September 2007–March 2008

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## AUSTRIA

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### ***Integration and deportations emerge as Lower Austria elections issue***

In the run-up to the Lower Austria state elections in March 2008, the leader of the BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria) Peter Westenthaler said that foreigners who refused to integrate themselves into Austrian society should be deported. There was uncertainty as to whether another extreme-Right party, the FPÖ (Freedom Party), would contest the elections, as it is based in Carinthia. Even so the FPÖ joined in with the escalating deportation rhetoric, calling for the expulsion of long-term unemployed immigrants from different cultures as well as what were described as 'anti-integration' and criminal immigrants. It added that the numbers contained in these two categories had crossed 'the threshold of the unacceptable' and that 16 per cent of Austrian residents from a foreign background had created 'parallel societies'. (*Weiner Zeitung* 28.1.08)

### ***Green Party criticises government integration plan***

At around the same time, in late January, the government finally published its much-awaited integration report which was immediately criticised by the Green Party and migrants' organisations for lacking teeth and for, yet again, failing to formally acknowledge that Austria was a country of immigration. The report represented a missed opportunity - too much of it was focused on the duties of migrants (ie to learn the language and to acknowledge fundamental values), with no acknowledgement of the duties of the state to grant migrants protected rights, for instance, or address access to the labour market. 'Austria still lacks an integration strategy between the federal government, the Lander and the communities', concluded Green party integration spokesperson Alev Korun. (Press releases, Green Party 22.23.1.08).

### ***Islamophobia frames Graz local elections***

In January 2008, the FPÖ scored 11 per cent of the vote (up 3 percent) gaining two seats (total six) in local elections in Graz (Steiermark province). The BZÖ won a total of six seats. The election was dominated by the Islamophobic tone introduced by FPÖ candidate Susanne Winter. In a widely publicised election speech she launched a broadside against Islam (see Bulletin no. 62). At the beginning of February, it emerged that vandals had desecrated around sixty gravestones of Muslims buried in the central cemetery.

Graz is an important rail and industrial centre (total population 290,000) which was once a neo-Nazi stronghold (*Weiner Zeitung* 28.1.08, *International Herald Tribune* 5.2.08, *Searchlight* March 2008)

## BELGIUM

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### ***VB's stance on immigration frames government policy***

It took four months of talks between Belgium's four warring parties in the so-called 'orange-blue' alliance of conservatives and liberals before an interim national coalition government could be formed. The unifying issue that brought the sides together was that of asylum and immigration and the promise of harsh measures. According to critics, this reflects the extent to which the Vlaams Belang (VB) is setting the national agenda. VB leader Felip Dewinter called for the repatriation of immigrants who did not make greater efforts to integrate. (*International Herald Tribune* 9.10.07)

### ***Interim government rules against moratorium on expulsions***

The minister of interior for the interim government, Patrick Dewael (Open VLD) ruled against a moratorium on expulsions, adding that an existing amnesty adopted by the out-going Liberal Socialist coalition would remain in force. (*Migration News Sheet* February 2008)

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## DENMARK

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### ***DFP general election campaign targets Muslims***

The November 2007 general election resulted in a Liberal-Conservative coalition. Led by Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Venstre party), the coalition's slender one-seat majority means that it still has to rely on the Danish People's Party (DFP) for support. The DFP cemented its position as Denmark's third largest party with 13.8 per cent of the vote and twenty-five seats in parliament (up one). However, the newly created New Alliance Party, headed by Syrian-born Naser Khader, which had vowed to end the government's dependence on the far Right and press for more humane asylum policies, gained five seats.

### ***DFP campaign highlights freedom of expression***

The DFP campaign highlighted issues of Muslims and integration and freedom of expression in the context of the Danish cartoons' affair. DFP leader Pia Kjaersgaard prioritised Danish values, including gender equality, solidarity and freedom of expression, which 'we want to push forward'. Danish-Muslim Red-Green Alliance parliamentary candidate and town councillor for Odense, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, hit back at the DFP after it put out an ad showing a hand-drawn picture of the Prophet Mohammed under the slogan 'Freedom of expression is Danish, censorship is not', followed by the words 'We defend Danish values'. Ms Abdol-Hamid issued a poster showing a hand-drawn picture of the DFP leader Pia Kjaersgaard under the slogan 'Freedom of expression is Danish, stupidity is not'.

It is over two years since *Jyllands-Posten* printed twelve caricatures of the Prophet and there was little

reaction to the DFP's cartoon. But a spokesman for the Palestinian Al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade told the *Jyllands Posten* that the DFP was 'playing with the blood of the Danish people'. It said it might add the party's name to its list of enemies. (*Guardian Unlimited* 26.10.07, *Der Spiegel* 6.11.07, *Searchlight* December 2007, *Agence France Presse* 14.11.07, UNHCR Baltic & Nordic Headlines, October 2007)

### **Muslim MP in headscarf controversy will not take up parliamentary seat**

On 27 February, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid (Red-Green Alliance) announced that she would not take up her parliamentary seat later in the year and would take a one-year break from her party on account of the controversy over her headscarf.

Ms Abdol-Hamid had faced parliamentary opposition on account of her headscarf. As parliamentarians objected to the presence of a veil-wearing member, there had even been talk of introducing a dress code. A five-member presidium of the Danish parliament had been formed to draw up rules for appropriate clothing. This had naturally made Asmaa Abdol-Hamid the subject of intense media speculation. Announcing her decision, she said that while she was disappointed in the positions taken by her own political party she had no intention of leaving it. 'While there's all this hubbub out there over Muslims, with one over-the-top suggestion after the other, the Red-Green Alliance has been disturbingly silent', she said. (*Migration News Sheet* March 2008).

### **DFP warns Fogh about asylum policy**

In February, the DFP warned the government that if it wanted its continued cooperation then it must consult fully with the DFP on asylum policy. However, the New Alliance has said that it would force the government to call a general election if concessions on asylum policy are not made. The Social Democrats, the Social Liberals and New Alliance have been putting pressure on the government to ameliorate the harsher aspects of asylum policy. In particular, they are challenging the long periods asylum seekers spend in closed reception centres and are calling for asylum seekers to be granted the right to work in areas where there are labour shortages. (*Politiken* 3.7.08, *Berlinhgske Tidende* 7.2.08)

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## **FRANCE**

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### **Issues in the French municipal elections**

On March 9 and 16, there were municipal elections for all city mayors and municipal councillors in France's 100 departments (an estimated 36,700 cities, towns and villages). L'Union pour la Mouvement France (UMP) suffered significant losses in the final round, but Sarkozy held on to the far-Right vote which he had won over from Jean-Marie Le Pen in the May 2007 general election. The elections also drew attention to the lack of minority ethnic representation in French politics and attempts by grassroots' organisations to reverse this trend. In metropolitan France, only one of the parliament's 577 deputies is from a minority ethnic community; not one holds a seat in the French Senate.

### **Sarkozy accused of 'security spectacle' to 'influence opinion'**

The Socialist Party and the Democratic Movement (MoDem) accused Sarkozy of attempting to 'influence opinion' in the run-up to the municipal elections by launching an excessive 'security spectacle' after pictures of armoured police trucks and riot police raiding housing estates in a Paris suburb were broadcast by television reporters tipped off in advance. On 18 February, more than 1,000 French riot police and special forces raided two apartment blocks in Villiers-le-Bel and the surrounding area north of Paris; they were looking for those suspected of masterminding 'violent riots', during which shots were fired, last November after two teenagers died in a car crash with a police car. Ségolène Royal (Socialist Party ex-presidential candidate) criticised the presence of the media on the scene. 'When video cameras are around massive police raids in time of municipal elections, it is a way of influencing public opinion, of wanting to scare' she said. 'I hope the French people will reject the manipulation through their vote'. François Bayrou, leader of MoDem, said that while it was appropriate that the incidents that occurred last November were properly investigated, 'the press was invited, and this is where the problem is. I have always regarded justice as free from performance. Justice is more about arrests than PR communication.' Public prosecutor Marie-Thérèse de Givry insisted that 'neither her department nor the police services... had wanted media coverage of the raids... on the contrary, we were dreading that the presence of the press would divert the objectives of the raid'. (*Guardian* 18.2.08, *nouvelobs.com* 20.2.08)

### **Sarkozy accused of wooing far Right**

The UMP was particularly concerned that it would lose Marseille to the Socialists, but managed to retain it after appealing directly to far-Right voters who largely abstained in the first round. The UMP was also accused of appealing to far-Right voters in Toulon, another Front National bastion, a few miles from Marseille. Sarkozy visited the town and delivered a speech on national identity and the merits of immigration quotas. Government spokesman Laurent Wauquiez said the President should be congratulated for having weakened the FN by addressing the concerns of its electorates. (*Telegraph* 13.3.08).

### **Surge in minority candidates**

Only a handful of minority candidates were fielded for mayoral positions. Nevertheless, Hasan Farsao, leader of the Union of Muslim Associations in Seine-Saint-Denis was excited by a new development in French electoral politics – Muslim-led party slates. Seine-Saint Denis, also known as L'neuf trois, in southeast Paris, is home to the largest Muslim population in France and in 2005 witnessed some of the worst riots ever. All the party slates prominently featured Muslim candidates.

The inter-racial list of the newly formed Independent Bobigny for All, was headed by Youssef Alzawi. The party campaigned for a new deal for young people and for funding to be channelled into educational and youth programmes.

In Paris' 13th arrondissement, home to Chinatown, where 20 per cent of residents are of Asian origin, Felix



Wu, a young restaurant manager, put himself forward as an independent candidate after lamenting the fact that the district did not have a single candidate of Asian descent. Forming a new party, he brought together thirty-seven candidates for the slate, around 20 per cent of whom are Asian. He has been accused of 'communitarianism' by his opponents. Wu said that prejudices against Asians are growing. Recently, the local mayor enacted a law blocking new Chinese wholesale clothing stores from opening. Wu believes that he has no chance of electoral success, but that his candidacy has already changed things. Suddenly, Asians are appearing on the Socialist Party and the Union for a Popular Movement party lists. There are two Asian quarters in Paris, the second one being Belleville. (*Islam Online* 28.1.08. *Agence France Presse* 28.2.08, *Los Angeles Times* 9.3.08)

#### *SOS Racisme disassociates from its president*

SOS Racisme issued a communiqué disassociating itself from the candidacy of its own president, Oumar Ba, who was standing for the UMP in the municipality of Compiègne under the list of Philippe Marini who supported an electoral alliance with the FN in order to retain UMP control of the Regional Council of Picardie. (*Le Parisien* 29.1.08)

#### *Acceptance or rejection of mosques key municipal election issue*

According to *Islam Online*, political candidates from both the ruling Union of Popular Movement (UMP) and the Socialist Party were anxious to support the construction of mosques. The online campaign of UMP candidate Françoise de Panafieue for the Paris municipality – the country's largest – featured a photo of Muslims praying on the streets alongside the caption 'France must be ashamed that citizens practise their rituals on the margins'. The head of the Trappes municipality, also a candidate for the UMP, also promised to back the city's mosque.

The extreme Right, however, built its election campaign on opposition to mosques and other Islamophobic messages. In Bordeaux, FN candidates Jacques Colombier called a press conference to oppose the UMP's support for the construction of a mosque with 2,000 spaces, an Islamic centre consisting of a library, a bookshop, an auditorium and school. According to Colombier, the plan would involve 'religious teaching against the French and the UMP talks about a politics of integration'. 'The aim of the mosque is to favour the Islamisation of our country ... We will oppose the project by all democratic means'. (*Français d'Abord* 2.2.08)

One of the main banners of Thomas Joly's campaign read 'No Mosque in Beauvais'. (*Guardian* 11, 17.3.08)

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## GERMANY

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### ***Hesse: major defeat for CDU's 'foreign crime' electoral strategy***

In the January 2008 regional elections, the Hesse CDU suffered its worst election result in forty years after making foreign crime the central election issue. Although it still remained the party with the most votes,

it lost its overall majority and was unable to remain in power in Hesse, even with the support of its coalition partner, the FDP. It was a bitter blow to Angela Merkel who, despite her personal popularity, faced criticism for backing a xenophobic campaign. Rumbblings of dissent across the Conservative party, led seventeen high-ranking CDU politicians to sign a letter in *Die Zeit* criticising the decision to make foreign crime a central issue and stating that 'integration is too fundamental for the future of our country to be downgraded into an electoral argument'.

#### *Social Democrats and CDU divide on crime*

With four regional elections in 2008 in CDU-controlled states and the federal election to be held by September 2009, all eyes were set on the Hesse and Lower Saxony regional elections as well as the February elections in Hamburg. The Social Democrats attempted to focus the Hesse regional election on the question of the minimum wage. But the leader of the Christian Democrats in Hesse (and incumbent state premier), Roland Koch sought to make crime perpetrated by foreigners the central issue, declaring that young foreigners were too quick to use violence. Hesse Social Democrat leader, Andrea Ypsilanti said, 'He's leading a dirty campaign again ... That's his style'.

As election campaigning progressed, a clear divide emerged between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats (CDU), with the Social Democrats stating firmly that existing law and order measures were enough to deal with criminal acts, whether committed by German youth or foreigners. As Merkel was drawn into the row, it threatened to engulf the governing 'grand coalition' with the relationship between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats deteriorating significantly.

#### *Munich sub-way attack gives rise to national crime debate*

Before Christmas, a 17-year-old Greek national and a 20-year-old Turkish national brutally attacked a pensioner when he asked them to obey a law prohibiting smoking on the Munich subway. The attack was caught on camera and TV stations broadcast the video for more than a week. It soon turned into a national debate on how to deal with youth violence, focusing particularly on crimes by non-German offenders. The CDU called for a whole host of tougher punishments for young offenders, including a 'warning shot' period of detention of several weeks, the establishment of US-style private correctional boot camps and the deportation of foreign youth sentenced for one year or more. In a 10-page policy statement, the CDU also stressed that 'we expect foreign families to be prepared to learn the German language' as a way of ensuring immigrant children are not marginalised.

#### *Koch launches six point plan*

At the beginning of January, Koch launched a six-point plan to fight crime. 'Zero tolerance of violence should be an integral part of our integration policy' he said, adding that Germany had, up till then, shown a 'strange sociological understanding' at violent members of ethnic minority groups. 'People who live in Germany should behave in a decent manner and refrain from violence', Koch said. 'Those who can't live according to our rules,

are in the wrong place.' 'In the name of multi-cultural tolerance, we've been blinded to accept social behaviour that can lead to dangerous aggression. We've got to put an end to the grand delusion.'

The pre-Christmas and New Year period, commented *Deutsche Welle's* Volker Wagener, is traditionally slow for news. Hesse premier Roland Koch, facing a tough bid for to be reselected for a third term in office, chose his moment well. 'Koch has been in the headlines for days. Everyone has heard Roland Koch's opinion. His timing is perfidious.'

#### *Focus on German values and integration*

The *Bild Zeitung* lent strong editorial support to Koch's campaign. It published his six-point list of values, together with his instruction 'German must be the language in everyday life and it must be clear that the slaughtering [of animals] in the kitchen or unusual ideas about waste disposal run counter to our principles.' Bernd Schlüter, a spokesman for the Protestant Church, said in an interview for the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that 'This is an indecent catalogue of rules for campaign purposes which can do a lot of damage to our society.'

#### *Koch accused of xenophobic campaign that feeds the far Right*

Immigrant groups, the Jewish community and the Social Democrats attacked Koch as a populist xenophobe. The Migrant Welfare Forum (a sub-group of the Equal Welfare Alliance), which represents 100 small immigrant organisations across the country, wrote an open letter in which it condemned 'tactical populism' and warned that the debate on youth criminality was stirring up prejudices and dividing society. Twenty-one prominent German Turks, including writers, entertainers and politicians also wrote to *Die Zeit* accusing the CDU of fanning racist resentments. Stephan Kramer, a board member of the Central Council of Jews in Germany said that Koch's stance in the campaign could hardly be distinguished from that of the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD). Former Social Democrat Chancellor Gerhard Schröder accused the CDU of race-baiting and bias. 'Young German right-wing radicals commit an average of three violent crimes per day – most of them against people of another skin colour. You do not hear anything about that from Mr Koch or Ms Merkel', he told the *Bild*.

'The CDU in Hesse has always been a law and order party and is known for its ultra-conservative wing', said Gero Neugebauer, a political scientist at Berlin's Free University. Analysts drew parallels with Koch's 1999 election campaign in which he ousted the ruling Hesse centre-left administration by launching a successful signature campaign against the federal government's attempt to introduce dual citizenship in order to integrate long-term foreign residents. Peter Lösche, a retired professor of political science at the University of Göttingen told *Deutsche Welle*, 'The CDU is a highly pragmatic party that doesn't shy away from using the anti-foreigner card to reinforce prejudices and appeal to right-wing elements in the population.'

'Koch's current campaign is an obvious attempt to mobilise this hard core of its supporters who the CDU fears it might lose to far-right parties', commented Gero Neugebauer. Analysts believe that Koch is appealing to

the older generation of conservative voters. CDU membership has fallen from 638,000 in 1999 to 541,289 at the end of September 2007. Around 60 per cent of the members are older than 50, compared with 14 per cent in the age group 16 to 39. 'Whipping up fears about security after a brutal attack on the Munich subway is a sure tactic of getting the attention of older voters', concluded Gero Neugebauer.

#### *Chancellor's crime statistics questioned*

Chancellor Angela Merkel, after initially attempting to steer clear of the debate, defended Koch in an interview in *Bild am Sonntag*. Merkel's claim that 43 per cent of all violent crimes in Germany are committed by people under 21, almost half of whom are from immigrant backgrounds, was subsequently disputed. Official figures suggest that overall crime committed by foreigners in Germany was falling and crime statistics for 2006 compiled by the BKA federal police force reveal that crime committed by non-Germans stood at 22 per cent in 2006, down from 33.6 per cent in 1993. No federal data for crimes by foreign youth exists. Nevertheless, *Bild* plastered the headline 'Young foreigners more violent than young Germans', citing a nationwide survey of students by a Hanover-based criminologist. The *Bild* also featured news stories about 'foreign' repeat offenders with long criminal records on an almost daily basis.

On January 15, as criticisms of the CDU's perceived xenophobia intensified, Chancellor Merkel, speaking at a press conference, stressed that she was concerned about all forms of youth crimes, be they committed by German neo-Nazis or by immigrants, adding that 'the vast majority of people living here, be they from a German or an immigrant background, want to live in safety'.

Another perspective on youth crime has been provided by critics who say that the problem lies in disproportionately disadvantaged backgrounds and that poor German youths are as likely to commit crimes as poor Turks or Russians. Statistics show that juvenile crime rates fell in 2007 from the year before, leading criminologists to conclude that the debate had been more rhetorical than statistical.

#### *CSU poster campaign attacked for racial overtones*

A campaign poster in Bavaria showed a still from a surveillance video of an attack, in which the one attacker in the frame is a black silhouette. The victim's image is cut out, making him a pure white shape. Where he slumps on the ground is written the words 'So that you are not the next'.

#### *Neo-Nazi NPD backs CDU campaign*

In response to Stephan Kramer's warning that the campaign played into the hands of the extreme Right, Koch told ARD TV that 'I am not going to keep quiet about crime just because the NPD would use the issue'.

On 8 January, NPD leader, Udo Voigt said that 'When established politicians adopt the NPD's arguments, it will lead to more citizens placing their trust in the policies of the NPD and as a result vote for the NPD'. Peter Marx, general secretary of the NPD said that 'Germany must remain the land of the Germans, so that our children don't suffer the same fate as the [American] Indians and now live on reservations.'

*Der Spiegel* points out the hypocrisy of the NPD's

campaign, given the criminal record of Hesse NPD candidate, Marcell Wöll.

#### *NPD election broadcast scrapped*

At the beginning of January, a court upheld a decision by Hessen Broadcasting (Hessischer Rundfunk) not to air an NPD campaign broadcast because it constituted incitement. The NPD, like other electoral parties, has a right to airtime on public radio stations prior to elections. Its broadcast, which was scheduled to go out on January 4, called for the deportation of non-Germans with 'foreign cultures'. Helmut Reitze, the broadcaster's director general, said that 'The cause of freedom of expression and the parties' freedom to campaign cannot lead to public broadcasters being forced to spread campaign messages that contain racist or inhuman ideology.'

#### *More on German anti-crime youth measures*

Koch's campaign badly misfired when it emerged that Hesse is one of the worst states in Germany for dealing with young criminals because of the lack of detention facilities. In mid-January, it emerged that youth welfare officers in Hesse sent an unidentified 16-year-old boy to a remote Siberian village for an 'intensive educational experience' under the supervision of a Russian-speaking German assistant after he had behaved violently in school and at home, attacking his mother. The youth will remain in the remote village of Sedelnikovo, several hours drive from the city of Omsk, in the western Siberian interior, where he will fend for himself by chopping firewood to make his own fires, digging his own toilet and pumping water from a well. Hundreds of other youth have been sent on similar programmes to countries as diverse as Greece and Kyrgyzstan. But the decision to send the youth to Siberia was seen as a step too far, particularly as equally bleak, but not as cold regions, are to be found in Germany. It has been described as a cost-cutting measure (it would cost three times as much in Germany) and more akin to a reality TV show than a social welfare programme.

#### *Analysis of CDU defeat in Hesse*

The media attributed the CDU's losses almost entirely to the anti-foreigner campaign launched by Koch. *Frankfurter Rundschau* noted that Koch was punished because the 'calls for swift justice from the state with the slowest judicial system in the country' were 'implausible'. *Thüringer Allgemeine Zeitung* commented that 'the majority of people in Hesse recognised that sloganeering is not the right approach to the multi-layered subject of juvenile delinquency'.

Although the CDU, with 36.8 per cent of the vote (down twelve per cent) finished neck and neck with the Social Democrats, gains for the SDP and the Left Party meant that the CDU, together with its planned coalition partner Free Democrats (FDP), no longer had a large enough majority to rule. Many traditional CDU voters switched to the Social Democrats, with Osmonde Brehme, a 64-year-old schoolteacher and former CDU stalwart, telling the *Independent* 'I just can't stand Koch any more, I find his campaign against foreigners disgusting'. (*Deutsche Welle* 28.12, 2,3, 5,7, 8, 28.1.08, *Reuters* 3.1.08, *Associated Press* 10.1.08, *International Herald Tribune* 14.1.08, *Agence France Presse* 8, 27.1.08, *German Press Agency* 8.1.08, *Guardian* 18.1.08, *Der*

*Spiegel* 4.1.08, *Independent* 25.1.08, *Spiegel Online* 24.1, 1.2.08, *Financial Times* 31.1.08, *Migration News Sheet* February 2008)

#### ***Low key election in Lower Saxony and Hamburg avoid crime polarisation***

The CDU retained control of Lower Saxony, despite a drop in just over six per cent of the vote. The media contrasted the low-key, non-confrontational campaign of Christian Wüff with that of Koch and suggested that Merkel must adopt his approach in the March regional elections in Hamburg.

The NPD had too few members and officials capable of conducting the election campaign. It had to hire neo-Nazis, on a part-time basis and for handsome financial reward, to put up posters and distribute flyers. (*Spiegel Online* 24.1.08, *Deutsche Welle* 28.1.08)

CDU Hamburg mayor and premier, Ole von Beust, topped the list of signatories to the *Die Zeit* letter which indirectly criticised the Hesse election campaign. (*Financial Times* 31.1.08)

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## GREECE

#### ***New extreme-Right party enters parliament***

For almost the first time since the collapse of military rule thirty three years ago, a nationalist, anti-Semitic party has entered the Greek parliament. In the September 2007 general election, ten members of the Popular Orthodox Alarm (Laos), led by Georgios Karatzaferis, a former body-builder, were elected to the Greek parliament with an unprecedented 3.5 per cent of the vote. It is now the fifth largest party in parliament.

Laos has entered parliament, despite its nationalist, anti-Semitic and racist record. Founded in September 2000, it has not been able, until now, to achieve the 3 per cent of the vote needed to enter the 300-seat parliament.

#### *History and Ottoman rule*

In the run-up to the election, Laos called for the withdrawal of a book written for 12-year-olds because of its stated failure to equate the Ottoman Empire's four-century rule of Greece with 'slavery'. The book has now been withdrawn from schools and replaced by a previous edition which is markedly different in tone and more acceptable to ultra-nationalists.

#### *Background*

In the run-up to the general election, Laos promised to challenge the 'status quo' and stand up for the 20 per cent of the population that live below the poverty line. (*Guardian* 13, 17.9.07, *Turkish Daily News* 9.10.07)

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## ITALY

#### ***New alliances formed for April general election***

In January, after just twenty months in office, the centre-left governing coalition collapsed after the withdrawal of the Christian Democrats. Soon, alliances were



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either cemented or forged with a view to contesting the April elections amidst accusations that the new centre-Right alliance forged by Silvio Berlusconi was pandering to the far Right.

The centre-Left is represented by the Partito Democratica (an alliance of two centre-left parties and other reformers, formed in October 2007) led by Walter Veltroni, a onetime Communist and now mayor of Rome, the Democratici di Sinistra (descendants of the Communists) and Margherita (progressive Catholics). The centre-Right is represented by the hastily convened Partito Il Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedoms, PDL) – a merger of Forza Italia and the Alleanza Nazionale (AN). There are around eighteen different parties in the alliance including the Northern League and, most controversially, the Azione Socialie (led by Alessandra Mussolini), (*Nation* 3.3.08, *Searchlight* March 2008)

### ***People of Freedoms party drifts further to right***

Berlusconi has been accused of drifting even further to the far-Right by bringing into his electoral parliamentary list the lifelong fascist publisher Giuseppe Ciarrapico, the publisher of several newspapers in the Lazio region, who described Berlusconi as a 'dear old friend' and suggested that Berlusconi had personally invited him to stand in the election. (*DPA* 10.3.08)

In the week prior to the general election, Berlusconi said that he would introduce mental health checks for prosecutors.

### ***Focus on Northern League's election campaign***

*Padua: 'too many mosques'*

In the run-up to the April general election, Zakaria Najib, an Italian citizen of Moroccan-origin – the first Moroccan-born member of the Northern League – said there were too many mosques in Italy. Najib, who says he is no longer a practising Muslim, has asked the Northern League to field him as a candidate for a Senate seat.

#### ***Who is Zakaria Najib?***

Zakaria Najib was a member of the Cadoneghe city council in the province of Padua between 1999 and 2003. He achieved notoriety at the beginning of 2008 when he gave an interview to a local newspaper in which he called on the president to take away his Italian citizenship because being a foreigner in Italy meant being 'given homes and work, while I only have taxes and difficulties in paying the bills at the end of each month'. His comments were, it seems, a sarcastic critique of left-wing parties whom he accused of helping immigrants particularly Muslim immigrants. He particularly bemoaned state subsidies for the building of mosques which were, according to him, a waste of taxpayers' money, adding that 'I don't like the imams that I have seen inside the mosques and I think these are places that have to be controlled'. Najib said that if elected his first task would be to deal with the excessive presence of mosques in the region of Veneto. (*Aki* 22.2.08)

### ***Cittadella: immigration and crime emphasised***

In the historic medieval town of Cittadella, in the flatlands west of Venice, which had previous become the first town in Italy to issue an ordinance spelling out the

rules for any foreigners applying for residence in the town (see bulletin no. 62), the Northern League's campaign prioritised issues of immigration and law and order. The Northern League offered all women a course in street self-defence, while conceding that there was barely any crime in Cittadella. Polls indicated that, in the multi-seat constituency in which mayor Bitonci is a candidate, the League will double its vote to between 15 and 18 per cent – enough to ensure that Bitonci enters the Rome parliament.

### ***Xenophobia unleashed***

In Treviso, the NL's election poster showed three white sheep kicking out a black one. A NL councillor told a session of the council: 'With immigrants, we should use the same system the SS used, punishing 10 of them for every slight against one of our citizens.'

At Ardo, the mayor posted a €500 bounty for anyone turning in an illegal immigrant. (*Guardian* 9.4.07)

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## **MALTA**

### ***Far-Right and anti-asylum candidates obliterated in March general election***

The far-Right Azzjoni Nazzjoni (AN), founded in June 2007, by the former nationalist MP Josie Muscat, failed to win parliamentary representation, despite a well-funded campaign scoring just 1,461 votes in the first-round. Prior to the election, it signed an agreement with the hunting lobby, promising that any elected MPs would back hunting during the Spring breeding season, which is prohibited by European law.

The maverick far-Right Imperium Europa leader Norman Lowell, campaigning against illegal immigration, scored just 84 votes (0.03 per cent of the vote) in the 11th and 12th districts after deciding to stand in the March 2008 general election. Lowell, a banker, compares himself to the post-war British anti-immigration MP Enoch Powell. 'In England they're now saying Powell was right', he said, adding that 'Soon here, they'll be saying Lowell was right.' Previously, in 2004, Lowell scored 1,603 votes in the European elections. He achieved notoriety in 2005 for an infamous speech in which he suggested that if need be, immigrants' boats should be sunk 14 miles out at sea. (*Times of Malta* 11.2.08, *Malta Today* 23.3.08 <[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman\\_Lowell](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Lowell)>)

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## **NORWAY**

### ***Progress Party polls well in local elections***

In the September 2007 local elections, the Progress Party polled its best local election results ever, but wound up with fewer mayors around the country as other political parties formed coalitions to keep them out. Its election campaign included a call for tighter voter eligibility rules in local elections. Per Willy Amundsen said that it was too easy to acquire voting rights in Norway and that they should be restricted to those who could pass written exams in Norwegian.



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### *Oslo: foreign beggars targeted*

The Conservatives and the Progress Party gained most in the September Oslo local elections. In the run-up, both Oslo city council leader Erling Lae (Conservative) and the Progress Party called for the introduction of regulations aimed at taking non-Norwegian beggars off the street. Both parties said that since begging was decriminalised in 2006, there had been an increase in foreign beggars. (*Sydney Morning Herald* 6.9.07, *Aftenposten* 24.9, 11.7.07)

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## **POLAND**

### **Racism and stigmatisation**

#### ***Will collapse of new government stop stigmatisation of vulnerable groups?***

The collapse of the rightwing coalition government headed by Jaroslaw Kaczynski and the Law and Justice Party led to a snap election in October 2007 which ousted it from power. The Law and Justice Party and its associates, the League of Polish Families (LPR) and Self-Defence had been widely associated with anti-Semitism and homophobia. The constant talk about 'enemies' had also been fuelled by the fundamentalist Catholic radio station Radio Marjya.

#### *Politicians scaremonger about Muslim demographic threat*

On 1 March 2007, Poland's (then) deputy prime minister, Roman Giertych (LPR), who also held the education portfolio, said in an interview that the rights of homosexuals and the practise of abortion had to be curtailed or Europe 'will be a continent settled by representatives of the Islamic world who care for the family'. Giertych, leader of the League of Polish Families, said that without 'religion, without the family, without people who protect those family values in Western Europe, we will be replaced by Muslims'. A spokesman said that Giertych's statement did not reflect the government's official views.

#### *Election result*

The turn-out for the general election was the highest since 1989. The general election saw the LPR secure just 1.3 per cent of the vote (previously 8 per cent) which meant it was no longer represented in the Polish parliament. Giertych has now announced his withdrawal from political life although his twin brother, Lech, remains as president until 2010. (*Migration News Sheet* April 2007, *Guardian* 18.10.07, *Searchlight* December 2007)

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## **SPAIN**

### ***Immigration and integration dominate March general election***

In March, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) won a convincing general election victory, but fell short

of an absolute majority, forcing it to seek alliances with regional parties in order to form a government. During a rancorous election campaign, the People's Party, which gained six seats, consistently highlighted the immigration issue. It also made several controversial proposals aimed at managing 'immigrant' populations.

#### *Integration contract – proposals and reactions*

The Popular Party announced that if it were elected it would introduce an 'integration contract' for immigrants under which they would pledge to 'learn the language and adhere to local customs'. When asked in a television interview to define the values and customs which immigrants would have to respect, Rajoy gave the examples of polygamy and genital mutilation which are, in fact, unlawful in Spain.

Defending the new 'integration contract', the PP shadow minister for economy and employment, Miguel Arias Cañete said that Spaniards had the right to expect immigrants to 'integrate' and, if they failed to do so, to 'go home voluntarily'. Speaking at a business breakfast organised by Foro Cinco Dias, Cañete blamed foreigners for the collapse in hospital and accident services and made disparaging remarks about immigrant workers who 'aren't properly qualified. The waiters aren't like they used to be'. Cañete spoke of the huge problems that Spain faces in bringing about the 'cultural assimilation' of new immigrants, adding that the new integration contract, with its 'good custom and practice guide' would help to prevent a 'conflict of cultures' by assisting immigrants to assimilate into the Spanish way of life.

*PP xenophobia condemned:* The proposals of Mariano Rajoy, leader of the PP, were almost universally condemned as 'discriminatory' and similar to proposals made by the 'extreme right'. PSOE leader, and president of the existing government, José Zapatero asked 'what is the contract' that Rajoy is proposing for immigrants, because 'all they have to do is observe the law, like any other citizen', adding that 'the rest is absolutely superfluous'. In an interview with the broadcaster Punto Radio, Zapatero observed that those who failed to obey the law could already be deported under the Foreign Nationals Act. Interior minister, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba said that Rajoy 'seeks to demonise immigration', calling on the PP to explain who would draw up the list of good custom and practice. Miguel Fonda Stefanescu, head of Fredom, an association of Romanian immigrants, asked 'Are they going to expect us to watch bullfighting and take siestas?'

*Academics urge voters to boycott PP:* In late February, 127 deans and professors of migration studies in nearly forty universities across Spain signed a statement urging voters to reject the PP's immigration proposals. It argued that the integration contract was xenophobic and that links made between immigration and delinquency 'represent a new aggression against people who have not received welcoming treatment and who have had to put up with inferior rights in many ways'.

#### *PP promises to restrict the Islamic veil*

Another election pledge contained in the PP party manifesto was the promise of a law restricting the wearing of the Islamic veil in schools. PP shadow spokesman for justice and security, Ignacio Astarloa, described the

Muslim headscarf as a mark of discrimination, adding that regulation would prevent discrimination against women and ensure that its use 'does not encourage inequality'. The deputy prime minister, Maria Teresa Fernández de la Vega, accused the PP of 'creating a problem where there isn't one'.

#### *PP demands no more immigration*

At a political rally in late February, held just a few days after the PP promised the new 'integration contract', Rajoy said that 'everyone should be stopped from entering the country' as 'There is not enough room for all of us'. This statement led to fresh allegations that the PP, with its blatant appeal to white, low-income voters, was positioning itself to the extreme-Right of European politics.

*Political parties squabble over expulsions record:* The debate over the 'integration contract' turned into a competition as to which party had the best record on dealing with illegal immigration. Zapatero said that he was surprised at the Popular Party proposal given that Rajoy was a member of the government which saw as many as 700,000 illegal immigrants in the country when it left office – more than any other administration. Asked by journalist Luis del Olmo whether he believed that in putting forward this proposal Rajoy was trying to follow France's example, Zapatero said that 'France wants to follow in Spain's footsteps, because we repatriate more people than any other country'. According to the prime minister, there has been a 50 per cent increase in the number of repatriations under the current government.

Minister of the interior, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, during a press conference at the Socialist Party HQ also stressed that the Socialists were '43 per cent more effective than the Populares in deporting the "sin papeles" to their countries of birth'. The rise was due to good relations with the immigrants' countries of origin and an increase in the number of border police.

#### *PP says no more regularisation*

The Popular Party announced that it would introduce a law to prohibit mass legalisation for illegal immigrants, with a spokesperson saying that 'Spain now led the world on illegal migration'.

#### *Division in PP over immigrant voting rights*

In February, during a visit to Berlin, PP leader Rajoy announced that he was against an extension of voting rights for non-EU nationals in local elections after a certain period of residence. *El País* commented that 'at the stroke of a pen, the PP leader overruled some prominent members of his own party, such as the Chair of Madrid's city council, Esperanza Aguirre and Madrid councillor Ana Botella, who had been defending voting rights for non-EU nationals for over two years'.

#### *Voluntary organisations call for higher standards in immigration debate*

The National Federation 'Red Acoge' (All our Welcome), comprising thirty-four organisations working for the integration of immigrants, have asked all political parties represented in the next parliament to sign an agreement to avoid statements linking immigration with crime, lack of public order or social conflict, as 'the link, beside being unproven, lends support to xenophobic

attitudes that do nothing to promote social harmony'. (*El Tiempo* 10.2, 2.3.08, *The Age* (Melbourne) 7.3.07, *Guardian* 10.3.07, *El País* 7, 14.2.08, *Expatica News* 8.2.08, *Associated Press* 28.2.08, *Migration News Sheet* March 2008)

#### ***PP deputy mayor of Cadiz criticised for xenophobic statements***

In the run-up to the general election, the Human Rights Association of Andalusia (APHDA) criticised the Senator and deputy mayor of Cadiz, José Blas Fernández Sánchez, for xenophobic comments made in an article written for the Cadiz Association of Social Science Professionals which he chairs. In it Fernández argued that whilst he supported immigration, the rise in unemployment amongst immigrants with low skill levels, and the resulting recourse to unemployment benefits, had 'got the Spanish economy on the ropes'. Immigrants, he argued, were eating up unemployment benefits, exploiting the new baby benefit and causing the health services' drugs bill to spiral out of control.

#### *Professional expertise or prejudiced views?*

Much of the controversy rests on the fact that Fernández used a professional body which he chairs to disseminate his views. The article was emailed to all 1,200 members, posted on the organisation's website and released to the media. APHDA made a comprehensive critique of Fernández's claims of professional expertise, stressing that as a social scientist he had displayed a complete lack of understanding of the social and legal reality surrounding immigration.

The 'baby-cheque' was introduced in November 2007, and provides a one-off benefit of at least €2,500 to any mother who has had a baby, or adopted a child from 1 July 2007. APHDA, points out, however, that the benefit is only offered to women who have lived in Spain legally for at least two years and it is ridiculous to blame the benefit for high birth-rates and demonise this group of women, when economists point out that increased birth-rates are vital to maintain the Spanish pensions system. Statistics comprehensively disprove the Senator's claims about the drugs bill for the immigrant population and it is extremist to argue that immigrants should work and pay National Insurance contributions without receiving the benefits that the labour and trade union movement has won for workers. (*Infoaphda* 27.2.08)

#### ***Catalan party accused of promoting xenophobia***

In Catalonia, in the run-up to the March 2008 general election, the Socialist Party regional assembly member, Mohammed Chaib accused the *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) of promoting a xenophobic video which insulted immigrants. The video attempts to influence the electorate by claiming that North African parents living in El Escorial, Madrid, were refusing to let their daughters take part in PE classes. CiU's campaign director, Joana Ortega defended the content of the video as 'initiating a serious debate'. (*El País.com* 29.12.07)

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## SWITZERLAND

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### *Swiss People's Party campaigns to deport foreign criminals and their families*

The Swiss People's Party (SVP) achieved its best-ever showing in the October 2007 general election. In the run-up, the SVP launched a campaign to raise the 100,000 signatures necessary to force a referendum to reintroduce into the penal code a measure to allow judges to deport foreigners who commit serious crimes once they have served their jail sentence. (It claimed to have raised 170,000 signatures in the first three months.) Even more dramatically, it announced its intention to lay before parliament a law allowing the entire family of a criminal under the age of 18 to be deported as soon as sentenced. If this were passed, it would be the first such law in Europe since the Nazi practice of *Sippenhaft* – or kin liability – whereby relatives of criminals were held responsible for their crimes and punished equally.

### *Poster campaign prompts international outrage*

A poster issued by the SVP, in cartoon form, was condemned by the UN. Distributed in a mass mailing to Swiss households, reproduced in newspapers and magazines and hung on billboards across the country, it showed three white sheep standing on a Swiss flag, with one of the sheep kicking out a black sheep with a flick of its back legs. The poster bore the slogan 'For More Security'. This is not the first time the SVP has used racist imagery. In 2004, the party successfully campaigned to block liberalisation of the citizenship laws using the image of dark hands reaching into a pot filled with Swiss passports. Another poster showed a picture of Osama bin Laden on a Swiss identity card with the caption 'Don't be fooled'.

Doudou Diène, the UN special rapporteur on racism and Jorge Bustamante, the UN rapporteur on the rights of migrants, described the campaign as totally unacceptable and demanded an explanation from the government. And Swiss president Micheline Calmy-Rey, a member of the centre-left Social Democrat Party said that the campaign 'stirs up hatred' and 'disgusts her'. The Zurich *Tages-Anzeiger* called for a broad public reaction against the campaign. Well known Geneva police officer, Yves Patrick Delachaux, who has a record of combating racism in the police said, 'These campaigns remind me of the worst times in Europe between 1930 and 1938. The same types of posters were used to encourage people to kick the Jews out. We have to be very careful with such propaganda.'

The SVP denied that its campaign was racist and tried to make fun of criticism. It said that the black sheep was a common phrase in German, French and English for an undesirable character who did not play by the rules. 'It is a very nice poster and we receive a lot of requests from children who want to cut out the pictures of the sheep', said SVP spokesperson, Roman Jaggi.

### *Campaign material concentrates on fear of crime and Muslims*

The SVP manifesto reads 'Foreigners are shamelessly abusing Swiss hospitality. This has to be stopped.' For

the election campaign, the SVP produced a three-part film, *Heaven or Hell*. In the first section, young men shoot heroin, steal handbags from women, kick and beat up schoolboys, wield knives and carry off young women. The second segment shows Muslims in Switzerland, women in headscarves and men sitting around idly. The third part shows 'heavenly' Switzerland: men in suits rushing to work, logos of Switzerland's multinational corporations, harvesting on farms, experiments in laboratories, scenes of lakes, mountain churches and goats. 'The choice is clear: my home, our security', it states. The film was later withdrawn from the party's website after the man who acted in it sued, arguing that he was unaware of its purpose. But at a political rally in Schwerzenbach (Zurich) the film was screened.

The SVP's current campaign also attempts to build on anger over a 2006 cause celebre which involved two Kosovo-Albanian boys who raped a five-year-old Swiss girl. For Daniele Jani, one of the founders of the Black Sheep Committee, which tried to halt a march of the SVP through Bern, the SVP is playing on a nostalgic belief that Switzerland can return to the 1950s where society was supposedly more homogenised and economically prosperous.

The election campaign was also set against the SVP support for a referendum seeking approval of a ban on minarets (see *Bulletin* no. 62). Other flyers used during the election campaign show a minaret and an old Islamic woman in a burqa with the caption 'Baaden oder Baghdad'. According to party official Matthias Muller, 'We have a strong foreign infiltration. We have a lot of immigrants with an Islamic background and we feel that this is going to change our society dramatically. And yes... we have problems with immigrants with an Islamic background. We have them at school. We have them in the streets. We have them also, unfortunately, when it comes to crime.'

### *Criticism of SVP agenda*

The SVP has the largest number of seats in the Swiss parliament. It had little hope that its proposed law to deport families of 'foreign criminals' would ever be passed. But critics said this was not the point –the proposal was a way of dominating the agenda in the run-up to the general election, and on that point the SVP succeeded. Spokesman Roman Jaggi told Swissinfo that the campaign was 'completely fair'. 'We have a big problem with violence and in particular youth violence, and foreign criminals are a big factor', he said. At a news conference in Bern a few days before the election, the People's Party thanked other Swiss political parties for their criticism of the initiative, which it said had led to an increase in support. SVP parliamentarian Toni Brunner criticised the foreign press which, he claimed, had been guilty of writing critical articles 'directed by the left and some of which were completely false'. The president of the SVP, Ueli Maurer refused to answer questions posed by a foreign journalist. 'I don't give interviews to foreign journalists. I want to win the elections in Switzerland', he said.

### *Concern over Blocher personality cult*

Former Swiss president, Adolf Ogi, the current UN envoy for sports and peace, criticised the personality cult being built around Blocher, the billionaire who bankrolls



the SVP, as 'completely un-Swiss'. He expressed concern about the growing polarisation of Swiss society over immigration in an interview with the Baden-weekly *Sonntag*. Ogi's criticisms were echoed by interior minister, Pascal Couchepin (Liberal Democratic Party) who said it reminded him of how Italian fascists had revered Mussolini. Blocher's style has shaken the cliquish world of Swiss politics, writes Peter Beaumont in *The Observer* (14.10.07). He has brought 'an abrasive and finger-jabbing style – denouncing his foes, including a senior female official investigating the functioning of his Ministry of Police and Justice, as "enemy number one"'.

Another concern raised was the amount of money spent on the SVP campaign. It is estimated to have spent in the region of 20 million SF or twenty times what the Social Democrats spent. A card inviting recipients to support the SVP's referendum campaign was mailed to all households. It could also be mailed back to the SVP at the SVP's expense. According to *Searchlight*, election campaign funding in Switzerland is far from transparent.

#### *UN – a catalogue of concerns*

In March 2007, Doudou Diène had submitted a report to the UN Human Rights Council in which he accused the Swiss authorities of lacking a 'coherent and resolute political strategy against racism and xenophobia'. In his 2006 report he noted that racism, xenophobia and discrimination were 'trivialised' in political debate in Switzerland and that there was strong evidence of institutionalised racism, citing the police. He had also warned that a 'racist and xenophobic dynamic' which used to be the province of the far Right was now becoming a regular part of the democratic system in Switzerland. The Swiss government rejected the conclusions of both reports. In response to the UN's concerns about the poster campaign, the government stated that although racism was unacceptable it was up to the courts to decide whether the posters violated anti-racism laws. The SVP strongly denouncing Diène's intervention, called on the government to give the UN Special Rapporteur 'a lesson on Swiss direct democracy and reality', accusing Diène of inciting government bodies in Switzerland to distance themselves from those who support the deportation proposal. In January 2006, SVP spokesman Roman Jäggi had stated that Diène was not entitled to voice criticisms because of his national origin. 'I can accept that a UN representative makes criticisms since we are members of the UN, but it is really the limit when these remarks come from a Senegalese', he said.

#### *Political rhetoric linked to racist attack in Zurich*

Glenda Loebell-Ryan, a candidate for parliament and head of the Zurich branch of SOS Racism, has linked the deterioration in the political climate to a chain-saw attack on Antonio da Costa, an Angolan war refugee, which occurred five months ago. Da Costa, who had lived in Switzerland for eleven years, was attacked by masked assailants, each wielding a chainsaw, at the McDonald's restaurant where he worked as a janitor after hours. The masked assailants told him, 'We don't need Africans in our country. We're here to kill you.' One put the chainsaw to his head, saying 'We're going to cut you in half. Miraculously, Da Costa managed to escape, but

is still traumatised by the attack. He had to undergo six hours of surgery to stitch the cuts on his face, chest and arms and reattach his left thumb. Asked about the attack on Da Costa, SVP legislator and creator of the black sheep campaign, Ulrich Schlüer said, 'Sometimes a mistake can happen. I don't say all Swiss men and women are the most ideal human beings in the world.'

#### *New initiatives*

In response to the poster campaign, the Black Sheep Committee was formed. It organised a 10,000 strong demonstration in Berne to oppose an SVP rally (a section of demonstrators broke off from the rally and clashed violently with the police. Around 100 neo-Nazis had joined the SVP rally). A coalition of business, union and church leaders also spoke out against SVP extremism at a meeting in Basel, saying 'Those who discriminate against foreigners hurt the economy and threaten jobs in Switzerland'. 'In the past', said Daniele Jenni, a lawyer and the founder of the Black Sheep Committee who is running for parliament, 'people were reluctant to attack the party out of fear that it might only strengthen it. Now people are beginning to feel liberated, they no longer automatically accept the role of the rabbit doing nothing, just waiting for the snake to bite.'

A legal complaint by the Communist Party over the poster was rejected by the justice authorities in Zurich. Further complaints are pending in other cantons.

#### *General election results*

The SVP secured 29 per cent of the vote and an extra seven parliamentary seats in the lower house (total of 62 seats in 200-seat parliament) – the largest share of seats any party has won since Switzerland's proportional voting system was introduced in 1919. Traditionally, the SVP's success is in German-speaking cantons. However, this time it also did well in the French-speaking cantons. The SVP is now the most popular party in Vaud, a canton that has traditionally voted left. In Geneva, it obtained more than 20 per cent of the vote and is the third most popular party in Jura.

As the largest party in the Swiss parliament, its success was credited to the issue of immigration. An editorial in *Le Temps* by Jean-Jacques Roth summed up the mood that the election marks a distinctive change in Swiss politics. 'Never before has a party so distinctly seized leadership of the country... It is on questions linked to identity, to behaviour and values that the elections rested, rather than on the left-right axis.' (swissinfo 13.9, 15, 22, 28.10.07, *Guardian* 8.10.07, *Independent* 7.9.07, *Independent Digital* 22.10.07, *Scotsman* 1.9.07, *Associated Press* 19.10.07, *Associated Press* 22.10.07, *Migration News Sheet* October 2007, *Le Temps* 22.10.07, *Observer* 14.10.07, *Times Online* 10.10.07, *Washington Post* 9.10.07, *New York Times* 8.10.07, *Migration News Sheet* November 2007, *Searchlight* December 2007)

#### ***Swiss People's Party withdraws from Cabinet***

On 12 December, the Swiss People's Party withdrew from the ruling coalition after Christoph Blocher was ousted from his cabinet position as justice minister and replaced by a more moderate party rival, Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. (*BBC News* 13.12.07)



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### **General election sees far Right lose only parliamentary seat**

The far-Right Swiss Democrat Party saw its share of the vote drop below 1 per cent which resulted in its losing its only parliamentary seat. Hans Hirter, a political scientist at Bern University, pointed out that the 'rise of the People's Party to the top over the past fifteen years was bad news as it pulled the carpet under the feet of the Swiss Democrats and any other far-Right group.'

#### *State of play on the far Right*

The Swiss Democrats are still represented in several cantonal parliaments, as are the Lega dei Ticinesi, which still has one seat in the federal parliament as well as a seat in the regional Ticino government. The Federal Democratic Union, a fundamentalist Christian party also lost one of its two seats in the general election. (*Swissinfo* 29.10.07)

### **The SVP following the general election**

#### *Murder leads to renewed calls to deport foreign criminals*

At the beginning of February, the Swiss People's Party and the Lega dei Ticinesi called on the cantonal parliament in Locarno to revoke the Swiss nationality of two young men, originally from the Balkans, in order to expel them for beating a young carnival reveller to death. As opinion polls seemingly support the tough line on 'foreign criminals', Simone Prodoliet, director of the Federal Commission for Foreigners pointed out that most of these youngsters actually grew up in Switzerland. Incidents of crime were a reflection that first-generation immigrants had not been properly integrated and were now passing their problems onto their children. (*Swissinfo* 11.2.08)

#### *SVP targets Eritrean asylum seekers*

A court decision which upheld the right of 2,500 Eritrean army deserters to seek asylum, was described by Blocher as a 'problem'. He proposed an urgent federal resolution to remove desertion as a ground for obtaining refugee status in Switzerland. (*Searchlight* December 2007)

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## **UNITED KINGDOM**

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### **London mayoral elections marred by racism claims**

In the run-up to the London mayoral elections, the 1990 Trust and Operation Black Vote accused London's only mass circulation newspaper, the *Evening Standard* of launching politically and racially-motivated attacks on Black organisations funded by the current Labour mayor, Ken Livingstone.

According to the press release, the *Evening Standard* repeatedly made false accusations of corruption and impropriety against Ken Livingstone's race advisor, Lee Jasper and further unsubstantiated allegations against Black groups and individuals. It has further been suggested that the *Evening Standard's* campaign is politically-motivated, designed to erode support for the

Labour mayor in favour of the Conservative contender, Boris Johnson.

#### *Conservative candidate apologises for offensive remarks*

In January 2008, Conservative candidate Boris Johnson finally apologised for earlier remarks in which he called black people 'piccaninnies' and sneered at Africans' 'watermelon smiles'. He said that he was sorry if the words had caused offence. (1990 Trust & Operation Black Vote joint press release, 14.2.08, *Mirror* 23.1.08)

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# Italy: emergency laws, summary expulsions and a climate of hate

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The sexual assault and murder of Giovanna Reggiani, the 47-year-old wife of a navy captain whose body was found in a ditch near her home in Rome, led to the introduction of an emergency decree, aimed at Romanian nationals, that allowed for the summary expulsion of EU citizens. According to John Hooper, writing in the *Guardian*, the anti-foreigner outcry which gripped Italy following the murder in October 2007 was unparalleled in the country's history. In the days that followed the issuing of the decree, Gianfranco Fini, the head of Italy's 'post-fascist' Alleanza Nazionale (AN) made vitriolic and racist comments about the culture of Gypsies. But many voices were raised against the decree, with the Pope warning that Italy must not go down the road of racism and paranoia. The head of Italy's criminal lawyers' association, Oreste Dominioni, called on his members to protest against the emergency measure which he described as authoritarian. In the event, by the beginning of December 2007, expulsions numbered in the hundreds, not the 200,000 that Fini had demanded, or the 20,000 the government had promised. In December, a new decree was issued as the first, although ratified by parliament, could not be signed into law because of a technicality.

## *Romanians in Italy – the facts*

Estimates vary as to the number of Romanians in Italy. Caritas says 560,000, official figures 342,200. After visa restrictions were lifted in 2002, Romanians sought work in Italy, men in the building trade and women as carers for elderly Italians. The interior ministry claimed that while Romanians, Italy's largest immigrant community, comprised one per cent of the population, they were responsible for 5.6 per cent of all murders. However, statistics cited by Peter Popham in the *Independent* suggest that in ten months there have been nine cases where Romanians have been accused of murder, a number dwarfed by gang murder in Naples, for instance.

Nicolae Romulus Mailat, the 24-year-old Romanian Roma arrested for the attack on Mrs Reggiani lived in a shantytown, yards from Tor di Quinto station on a commuter line serving central Rome. Police raided the encampment after the attack and took in seventeen people for questioning. Others were told to leave within the next 24 hours. Argint Costica, president of the Association of Roma and Romanian Political Refugees in Italy, condemned the murder but pointed out that the destruction of the camp solved nothing. 'They'll just go elsewhere and built new shacks', he said.

## *Decree allowing for summary expulsion introduced*

Following an emergency session of cabinet, Italian President Giorgio Napolitano signed a decree which came into immediate effect allowing prefects – the local representatives of the interior ministry – to summarily expel citizens of other EU states if they were judged a threat to public security. No trial was necessary. The prologue to the new measure made it clear it was aimed at Romanians.

The law is in line with a European directive that allows member states to expel citizens of other EU countries if they are a threat to public health, public security, do not fulfil the residency criteria and have insufficient means (the Italian decree does not include the final provision).

Under guarantees within the decree, expulsion orders need the endorsement of a justice of the peace or, in the case of suspects in investigations or defendants in trials, the approval of a prosecutor or judge respectively. Antonio Manganelli, chief of Italian police said EU citizens would be treated 'with absolute respect for human dignity, without witch-hunts'.

## *Pressure for law proceeded murder*

Pressure for such a law had been building up for some time, not only from within the opposition parties but from within the ranks of the governing coalition. Rome's mayor, Walter Veltroni (a former Communist who is believed to be the centre-left's choice to succeed prime minister Romano Prodi) had previously flown to Bucharest to secure a repatriation deal with the Romanian president which was due to start in January 2008. Veltroni, leader of the centrist Democratic Party, subsequently headed demands for the emergency decree, telling a press conference that 'Before Romania's entry into the EU Rome was the safest of cities... We need to start over with repatriations.' Veltroni has also made exaggerated claims that three-quarters of all arrests in Rome in 2006 involved Romanians. His office quickly had to clarify his statements, saying that Romanians comprised half the foreigners arrested in the capital from January to May 2007.

Also previously in July, Flavio Tosi, newly elected Northern League (NL) mayor for Verona announced his intention to expel 'do nothing' Roma from the city. The mayoress of Pavia, Piera Capitelli (also Democratic Left, PDS) ordered the eviction of roughly 150 Romanian Roma from a squalid encampment at a former factory. She refused to provide alternative accommodation and there was speculation as to where the Roma had gone, whipped up by the NL and far-Right parties, and promises to track them down. T-shirts were produced bearing the slogan 'Rom animali'.

## *Round-up of Romanians begin*

Soon after the decree was signed, a headline in *La Repubblica* read 'First 5000 expulsions to go ahead'. The prefect of Milan became the first in the country to apply for its implementation, demanding the expulsion of four Roma. The prefect of Rome, Carlo Mosca, said: 'I shall sign the first expulsion orders straightaway. A hard line is needed because, faced with animals, the only way to react is with maximum severity.' The raid at the Tor di Quinto was followed by raids across Rome and along the banks of the Tiber, and in other big cities shantytowns were demolished as Romanians were targeted for expulsion. Police stated that they were expecting to carry out several thousand expulsions. A makeshift camp near the

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centre of Rome was bulldozed and its inhabitants bussed away for identification.

### *Northern League announces vigilante patrols*

Very shortly after the decree was announced, a NL MP said the party would organise vigilante patrols in the next few days in predominantly immigrant areas of Turin and Piacenza (Emilia Romagna region). Officials of the Freedom Circles, a network of political clubs close to Berlusconi, also announced patrols. But founder Michela Vittoria Brambilla denied any knowledge of the scheme and said that she had not authorised it. The San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Centre reported on 6 November that patrols were operational in Genoa, Turin and Milan.

Two racist attacks were reported in the context of the climate surrounding the emergency decree:

\* 2 November: three Romanians were taken to hospital after being beaten and knifed in a raid by masked attackers on their encampment in a working-class Rome suburb.

\* 5 November: on the day of the publication of the emergency decree in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, a gang of about ten people, their faces covered by crash helmets and balaclavas, attacked four Roma in the Tor Bella Monaca area of Rome. One was left in a critical condition after the attack.

There was also controversy after the acclaimed Romanian actress Laura Vasiliu, who was in Turin to work on a film, reported an incident in which police came to her hotel room to investigate a child trafficking case; they left when they concluded she was not the person they were seeking.

### *Fini launches vitriolic attack*

Even before the Reggiana murder, AN leader Gianfranco Fini mobilised against the Roma. He had taken journalists up in a plane with the specific purpose of identifying Rome's squatter camps. Speaking three days after the arrest of Nicolae Romulus Mailat, Fini said Gypsies considered 'theft to be virtually legitimate and not immoral' and felt the same way about 'not working because it has to be the women who do so, often by prostituting themselves'. In an interview with the daily *Corriere della Sera*, he claimed Roma 'had no scruples about kidnapping children or having children [of their own] for the purposes of begging'. 'To talk of integration with a people with a "culture" of that sort is pointless', he said.

As expulsions of Romanians began, Fini demanded more. He told a reporter that all the Roma camps in Italy should be torn down and 100,000 to 200,000 people expelled.

There was criticism of Fini's behaviour from centre-left politicians with Anna Finocchiaro, the Senate leader of the main governing alliance saying he was 'exploiting the emotions aroused by a brutal killing'. Commentators speculated that Fini might be positioning himself to take the leadership of the right from Silvio Berlusconi, whose own reaction had been more moderate.

### *Plea from Romanian president ignored*

Fini's remarks were seen as a snub to Romania's president Traian Basescu who appealed to Romanian and

Italian politicians to 'refrain from making statements that could make the situation more tense'. The respective governments had reached an agreement to improve integration of Romanians in Italy, with Italy promising to send thirty policemen to Romania to manage the expulsions. In an open letter to Italy's daily newspaper *il Messaggero* Italian prime minister Romano Prodi defended the decree as 'necessary but also just', yet also warned against 'criminalising a nation because of the fault of one individual or a minority'.

### *EveryOne Group leads international action*

The EveryOne Group – in collaboration with the European Roma Rights Centre and other international organisations – lodged a complaint with the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) against the Italian government and local authorities which it accuses of carrying out persecutory measures against the Roma. It has also presented complete documentation of abuses to the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commission, the European Council and the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

The EveryOne Group was actively mobilising against the climate of hate, utilising the slogan 'one man guilty, not a whole people'. Writer and Holocaust scholar Roberto Malini reminded the public of the context of the neo-Nazi pogrom of Kristallnacht which occurred after the murder of the German diplomat Ernst Vom Rath by a Polish Jew.

Previously, in May 2007, Rome's Jewish community had written an open letter to mayor Walter Veltroni urging him not to expel travellers from Rome: 'As Jews, we say to you, do not chase the gypsies from the city'. The EveryOne Group states that institutional attacks on Roma encampments are hard to monitor due to constraints placed on humanitarian organisations and also press reporting. It points out that as local authorities leave thousands of people without shelter, and assistance of any kind, hunger, cold, infections and hardship increase. Furthermore, it is concerned that under guise of child protection, local authorities may be prepared to split Roma families by taking their children into care. They cite a suggestion by the Mayor of Livorno that any child caught begging on its own or in the company of its parents should be taken away from its family on the grounds that the parents had abandoned the minor.

### *Spanish local authority reacts*

According to the Andalusian Association for Human Rights (APHDA), the climate fostered by the emergency decree also led Spain's Cordoba Council to issue special instructions to social workers, allowing them to extend their work hours with the aim of keeping Romanians off the streets during the Christmas period. The council also distributed leaflets, encouraging residents to report those begging with children to an emergency hotline. Businesses in the city displayed anti-child abuse advertisements in shop windows. These featured a Romanian woman and her children (whose faces had been blanked out) with the words 'Thank you to this business for helping to protect children'. According to APHDA, such initiatives stigmatise and stereotype Romanians who are now widely associated with the mafia, begging and criminal activity.

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### *European parliament criticises decree and censors Fini*

On 15 November, the European Parliament passed a motion, despite opposition from the centre-Right EPP-ED group, stating that it 'rejects the principle of collective responsibility and emphatically reaffirms the need to combat every form of racism and xenophobia and all forms of discrimination and stigmatisation based on nationality and ethnic origin.' The resolution stated that EU directives may allow member states to expel citizens of other countries, but under limited and clearly defined conditions. It also criticised comments made to the Italian press by European Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs, Franco Frattini, as contrary to the spirit and the letter of EU free movement rules. Frattini had supported the deportations and advised the Italian government to pull down Roma camps to prevent the Roma from returning. Valeriu Nicolae, executive director of the European Roma Grassroots Organisation said that such statements were 'unacceptable', particularly as they came from someone charged with fighting for the civil liberties of European citizens.

### *Measuring the expulsions*

Initially, the announcement of the decree led to competition amongst politicians as to who would be prepared to deport the highest numbers. But the interior ministry put out a statement saying that mass expulsions would violate European norms and advised law enforcement officials that a 'targeted expulsion' policy should be followed. The statement said that the measures should be designed to have a deterrent effect, with 'numerous voluntary repatriations and less influx'. A government survey, conducted in November and December, found that one third of Romanian immigrants living in Italy 'definitely' want to return home within the next two years. (*Guardian* 2, 3, 5.11.07, *Independent* 4.11.07, San Francisco Bay Centre Independent Media Centre 6.11.07, *New York Times* 7.11.07, *Agence France Presse* 6.11, 28.12.07 *BBC News* 6.11.07, *EUobserver* 16.11.07, *The EuRActiv News* 16.11.07, *il manifesto* 23.5, 27.6, 24.7, 31.8, 7.9.07, *Independent Digital* 27.11.07, *Associated Press* 22.11.07, *APHDA Bulletin* 12.7.07, Statement of Everyone Group [www.everyonegroup.com](http://www.everyonegroup.com))

### **Media reporting of crime fuels anti-Roma racism**

Italy's emergency decree and summary expulsion of Romanians, needs to be set against rising concerns about media reporting of crime in Italy (see *Bulletin* no. 62). An article in the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* by Alfio Bernabei suggested that hysterical coverage of crime stories in April and May 2007 involving immigrants contributed to a number of racist incidents, including the burning of travellers' homes near Ascoli Piceno, in central Italy. 'In popular imagination inherited from Fascism, Travellers are equated with delinquency. They are continually the target of nazi and fascist groups that describe them as a public danger', he concludes.

### *Roma encampment torched*

In April in Ascoli Piceno, near the Adriatic coast, an angry mob torched a Roma camp after a drunken Roma youth killed four teenagers on a narrow road. *Searchlight* reports that the drunken driver's Rom identity was headlined in all the major quality newspapers. Within hours

of these headlines the dwellings of Travellers in the vicinity of the accident were set alight.

### *Far Right exploit death of Vanessa Russo*

In May, the regional president for the Lazio region Piero Marrazzo, was barracked by a crowd for being soft on immigration when he attended the funeral of Vanessa Russo, a girl from the suburb of Borgata Fidene murdered by a Romanian prostitute during a row. According to *Migration Newssheet*, shouts of 'immigrants assassins' erupted during the funeral mass and the party helped organise a demonstration in the district where the victim lived. The tragedy was the subject of a parliamentary debate on 30 April 2007. (*Searchlight* June 2007, *Migration News Sheet* June 2007)



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# From Villiers-le-Bel to the Plan Banlieues: a catalogue of events

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By Karen Toma

## November 2007 disturbances

- Villiers-le-Bel is a suburb eleven miles north of Paris. Unrest erupted on Sunday 25 November after two youths, Mouhsin Cehhouli (French-Moroccan) 15, and Larami Samoura (French-Senegalese) 16, died when their motorcycle crashed into a police car.
- The circumstances surrounding the deaths were immediately disputed. According to a spokesman for the police union, the youths, who were not wearing helmets and driving an unregistered vehicle, were 'victims of a traffic accident'. But voices in the community disputed this description of events and there was anger over allegations that the police fled the scene instead of helping the injured youths.
- On 29 November, the results of the preliminary investigation into the boys' deaths were released which corroborated the police version of the accident. It stated that the police car was driven at a normal speed and that the two youths were not wearing helmets.
- On 30 November, the director-general of the national police stated that the two youths were the victims of 'a tragic and ordinary traffic accident'.
- There were several nights of violence in Villiers-le-Bel during which gunshots were fired at the police and rocks and Molotov cocktails thrown. The local police station, school and library were set on fire.
- In the days that followed, the unrest spread to other cities in the south such as Toulouse. Initial media reports suggested that sixty police officers were injured on the 25 and 26 November, with a further eighty-two injured on the 27 November. The final tally during the entire unrest (as cited by the *Guardian* 19.2.08) was 130 officers injured, including at least ten hit by buckshot or pellets.
- President Sarkozy, who was in China when the disturbances erupted, called for calm and argued that it was up to the justice system to decide who was responsible for the death of the youths. On 28 November, Sarkozy met with police officers and fire-fighters injured during the 'riots' and spent forty-five minutes with the families of the victims at a meeting at the Elysée. An emergency meeting to was held on the same day to discuss security with Prime Minister Francois Fillon, Interior Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie, Justice Secretary Rachida Dati, and the State Minister for Urban Affairs Fadela Amara.
- On 22 January, Fadela Amara, the State Minister for Urban Affairs, unveiled the outline of a plan 'that fits with the France of today...a mixed race republic proud of its diversity' at Vaulx-en-Velin. It was initially said that \$1.43 billion would be invested on creating jobs and training for the suburban poor, renovating housing estates and regeneration of places as well as dealing with discrimination. A day earlier, President Sarkozy had visited a suburb, Sartrouville, west of Paris and promised the youth that they would not be 'let down' provided they 'make the effort to get up in the morning'.

## The view from Villiers-le-Bel

• On 26 November, the victims' families called for calm. Pupils and teachers at secondary schools as well as members of the bereaved families organised a silent march in the community. Siblings and friends of the victims explained that 'the police should not have run off, they should have called an ambulance'. A youth angrily said that 'they [the government] are going to launch a debate on motorcycles as a diversion [for real issues]. But do they make a fuss when a member of the cavalry in Neuilly [wealthy suburb of Paris] does not wear his helmet?' A councillor for the Ile-de-France region, Rachid Adda, said that the police had changed and become 'a racialised institution'. 'I have lived through Charonne [demonstration for the independence of Algeria that was violently repressed] on 17 of April 1961. But the police would still give assistance to people in need. Today I tell my children "when you see the police, just run away".'

A brother of one of the victims, Omar Sehhouli, said that 'what happened was not violence but rage'. Omar felt that the 'riots' were not irrational but expressed anger and despair: 'This is a failure to assist a person in danger...it is a hundred percent [police] blunder. They know it and that's why they did not stay at the scene. I know they will say that they left because they were afraid of clashes or of being assaulted...but until now we have had no apology from the police chief.'

• On 27 November, a meeting between social workers, parents, politicians, activists and youths took place in Villiers-le-Bel described by activist Rosalie Stephan as 'cathartic'. From the youths' side, the disturbances were blamed on 'police brutality, racial profiling and random identity checks and arrests'. Mohamed Douhane, a spokesman for the police union argued that he knew about 'racial profiling', as he was of Algerian descent himself, but that did not turn him into a delinquent. Alexandre Stephan (son of Rosalie) stated that there 'is a general disgust with all broken promises, the lack of equality between French citizens. [The rioters] wanted to burn down every building representing the police as they were a symbol of the state and Sarkozy.'

• Newspapers on 29 November included interviews with residents from Villiers-le-Bel, some of whom reported on the damaging impact of the riots on daily life. Nadege Tanier claimed that 'it is like a war zone' adding that she feels safer now that police are being deployed. Cise Tanjigora despaired at the burning down of the library, adding that 'there is no other library nearby' and that 'parents don't have much money to buy books'. Nora Hemmal said: 'I don't like the way the police are treating the kids sometimes, and I know they have got not many economic opportunities, but there is no excuse for the violence and the destruction.'

## The politicians' view

*Government:* Sarkozy rejected the view put forward by the Socialist Party leader François Hollande that the 'riots' were a symptom of a wider 'social crisis'. Speaking

to police officers at a meeting west of Paris on 29 November, he said that 'riots' go hand-in-hand with the 'thugocracy' or culture of violence on housing estates. 'I reject any form of other-worldly naïveté that wants to see a victim of society in anyone who breaks the law, a social problem in any riot.' Sarkozy said that he would not respond to the riots with more money, since 'when you try to explain the inexplicable, you end up finding excuses for the inexcusable'. However, he committed the government to 'respect and equal opportunities' and a plan to help those in the suburbs 'who want to get out, a job, a family, a home' but for those 'whose only idea is to poison the life of others' he promises severe penalties, adding that he would punish 'one by one' those responsible for police casualties.

**Socialist Party:** The Socialist Party condemned the violence, declaring its support for the police and firemen and all those affected by the damage while calling for an investigation into the circumstances that caused the death of the two youths. The leader of the Socialist party, François Hollande, in an interview on radio station France Inter on 26 November, claimed that it was a situation of 'social and political crisis' and blamed the government for failing to deal with the plight of the suburbs since the 'riots' in 2005.

**Front National:** In several press releases and declarations, the leader of the Front National, Jean-Marie Le Pen described the violence as the result of 'an uncontrolled foreign invasion' and the rise of the 'urban guerrilla'. The threat to national security would remain an issue as 'as long as we do not tackle the problem of immigration in France'.

### **Policing, arrest and punishment**

- On 30 November – the day on which a silent march took place in Villiers-le-Bel in memory of Larami Samoura – the police distributed leaflets stating that they would reward anybody that had information regarding the shooting of policemen during the riots. Leaflets handed out in December offered rewards of up to several thousand euros for information and said sources could remain anonymous.

- On 18 February 2008, more than 1,000 French riot police and special forces raided ten apartment blocks in Villiers-le-Bel and the surrounding areas, kicking open doors and arresting thirty-three people in a search for the suspected ringleaders of the 'riots'. The labour minister, Xavier Bertrand, said the arrests of people aged 17 to 31 showed 'there is no zone of lawlessness in our republic'.

The arrest of Larami Samoura's brother, Mamadou, during the raids was a source of renewed tension in Villiers-le-Bel. 'Mamadou was not in hiding' said his father. 'We asked them why they were arresting him, they did not answer.' The family claim that around thirty policemen came to their flat, that there was some jostling, which caused a young child to fall down. 'We are fed up now. They already killed my son', the father added. It seems that Mamadou Samoura is accused of the theft of a police vehicle which was subsequently set on fire. Public prosecutor Marie-Thérèse de Givry said, 'We will of course take into account the fact that he is Samoura Larami's brother'.

- On 20 February, the Regional Criminal Investigation Department (DRPJ) announced that anonymous testi-

monies had enabled the police to target several people suspected of shooting at the police during the riots and that they now awaited the results of DNA matching with genetic fingerprints found at the scene. Thirty-seven people remained in police custody.

- A new organisation, Vérité et Justice (Truth and Justice) was formed to defend those arrested, counter police mis-information and ensure that the perspectives of the youth of Villiers-le-Bel informs the media debate. A symbolic gathering was held in Villiers-le-Bel on 23 February in which young people held a press conference, denouncing the police raids and arrests as a 'media performance' and comparing the means deployed to investigate those who 'rioted' to those given over to the investigation of the deaths of Moushin and Larami. The president of Truth and Justice (named only as Bachir) said 'They sent more than a thousand police for the arrests. But the examining magistrate still has not come to ... the scene of the accident.' Another member of the organisation, who asked to remain anonymous, told *Le Monde* journalist Luc Bronner, 'We have decided to change our attitude towards the media. Today, we are ready to speak.'

Truth and Justice claimed that the real purpose of the raids was to trawl for information and pressurise those arrested to inform on their friends. They also pointed out that the police strategy to offer bribes for anonymous testimonies was leading to an abuse of process, appealing to those with financial difficulties or seeking to settle personal scores. Several people who had been in police custody during the raids testified to journalists on condition of anonymity. 'The police came to my house and destroyed the front door. They handcuffed me. Then for the four days of custody, they made me believe that I was going to jail. They told me someone had grassed me up', explained a nursing auxiliary, accused of attempted murder, who was later released without charge.

A similar story was told by 'Grizzly'. Also accused of attempted murder, he was held in police custody for thirty-eight hours and told that he had been identified as a ringleader by two witnesses. But the police 'did not even know what I was wearing that day', he said, adding that 'At 6am sharp, they broke the front door, and told all of us, even my father who is over 60, to lie on the floor'.

### **The Plan Banlieues**

Following the November 2007 disturbances in Villiers-le-Bel, the French government called an emergency security summit and announced that a plan to improve education, job prospects and transport links in the *banlieues* would be unveiled in January 2008. On February 2008, the French government's much-awaited 'Plan Banlieues' was announced. It includes the following proposals.

### **Administration of banlieues**

President Sarkozy promised an increase in the numbers of civil servants employed in the administration of the banlieues. Recruitment would not be by means of formal tests, but driven by incentives and bonuses. Sarkozy said he wanted people who were 'experienced' and 'motivated' to put themselves forward for the administration of the banlieues. *Liberation* described Sarkozy's propos-

als for the civil service as tantamount to the transposition of the the colonial system of administrating the French overseas territories onto modern-day conditions in the French suburbs.

**Employment:** Sarkozy promised to encourage 'more than a hundred thousand' young people into employment within three years. The government would encourage businesses to recruit youngsters from deprived estates and introduce a 'contract of autonomy' whereby youngsters would be able to gain skills necessary for integration via employment within weeks. No budget has been announced.

**Public transport:** €Five hundred million would be set aside to develop proper public transport systems to and from the banlieues. Critics pointed out that the budget was not enough, given that €two hundred million was needed just to open up the public transport system to the Paris suburbs of Clichy and Montfermeil.

**Education:** Most of the ideas for education schemes in the banlieues, such as the closure of dilapidated secondary schools and the introduction of 'second-chance schools' (for young people who had left with no qualifications) are not new. No budget was announced for education and it is suspected that Sarkozy is counting on the departments and the regions as well as the European Social Fund to finance any new projects.

**Security:** Sarkozy pledged to reintroduce the short-lived Groupes d'intervention régionaux (regional groups for intervention) to tackle crime, particularly drugs, gang violence and illegality. Two hundred territorial units will be deployed in the banlieues with an extra four thousand police.

(Information taken from "Plan banlieues: la pagaille des idées", [HTTP://WWW.LIBERATION.FR/ACTUALITE/POLITIQUES/309075.FR.PHP](http://WWW.LIBERATION.FR/ACTUALITE/POLITIQUES/309075.FR.PHP) (Saturday 9 February)

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