

EUROPEAN RACE BULLETIN

INSTITUTE OF
RACE
RELATIONS

Racism, elections and the economic down-tum

By Liz Fekete

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Editorial

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June saw elections in Europe for 736 MEPs in twenty-seven countries. But while all eyes were focused on the extreme-Right and anti-immigration parties, the real threat posed by their gains has not been given the attention it deserves. At a time of global recession and economic down-turn, processes through which foreigners and vulnerable minorities are scapegoated and stigmatised for society's ills have been strengthened. Within the summaries and case-studies presented in this report is alarming evidence that anti-foreigner sentiment, homophobia and intolerance are being incorporated into the agendas of mainstream political parties.

While there were notable successes for the extreme-Right, the picture was not uniform. The share of the vote for the Vlaams Belang in Belgium and the Front National in France, for instance, declined substantially. But the Islamophobic Freedom Party in the Netherlands under the leadership of Geert Wilders, made dramatic gains, coming in second in the European parliament elections with 15 per cent of the vote. Equally alarming was the breakthrough for the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) and for the True Finns; the doubling of the Danish People's Party's share of the vote; and lesser, though significant, gains for the Austrian Freedom Party, the Slovak National Party, Greater Romania Party, the Popular Orthodox Rally in Greece and the British National Party in the UK.

But whatever the extreme-Right's additions and subtractions, whichever country it takes root in, it spreads a toxic poison through a rhetoric which blames the global recession on familiar enemies – Muslims, Roma, Gays, Jews – thereby encouraging the growth of fascism. There has been a neo-nazi resurgence in the Netherlands, Spain, Austria and Germany. The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) now has 176 seats on regional and city councils, and is even gaining ground in western Germany. And where the neo-nazis flourish, racial violence follows. In this report, are details of four racist murders – in Germany, Malta and Hungary - and since going to press a 45-year-old Roma woman has been shot dead and her daughter seriously injured in Kisléta, eastern Hungary in an incident which the police are treating as racially motivated. In addition to this, Romanian Roma who migrated to Belfast have been forced out of northern Ireland, and there has been a growth in arson attacks and other violence against refugee reception centres in Finland and Sweden.

What is so immediately apparent from all these examples is the pressing need for unity between all vulnerable groups in society, defined by the extreme-Right as the 'enemy within'. For what the growth of intolerance and neo-nazi violence should do is clarify the nature of the real enemy we face. Disunity between groups representing the Roma, Jews, Muslims, refugees is no longer an option. And in this respect, the actions of Stephen Kramer, Secretary General of the German Jewish Council, were exemplary. Amidst a deafening official silence against the horrendous murder of Marwa al-Sherbini in a German courtroom, he was the first non-Muslim to describe the attack as motivated by Islamophobia, something that the German government had, initially, resolutely failed to do.

Liz Fekete

Country summaries

This summary of the background to the June European parliamentary elections, as well as other recent state, regional and local elections, covers the period from April 2009 to the end of July 2009. While it is drawn from a wide variety of sources, a particular debt is owed to *Searchlight*, and its European editor, Graeme Atkinson.

AUSTRIA

Support for extreme-right Freedom Party grows

Two extreme-right parties, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), contested the June European parliamentary elections, with the FPÖ scoring 12.7 per cent of the vote, translating into two seats (up one, and a massive increase on the 6.3 per cent it won in 2004). This was the first European venture for the BZÖ, which was only formed in 2005. Its 4.6 per cent share of the vote was not sufficient to secure it any European representation. The FPÖ, which utilised the slogan 'The West in Christian hands' during its campaign, was condemned for exploiting Christian symbols, as well as singling out Turkey and Israel for attack.

The mainstream parties and particularly the conservative People's Party (ÖVP), which subsequently emerged as the biggest winners in the European parliamentary elections, struggling to adopt strategies on how best to deal with growing support for the extreme right, were accused of capitulating to its agenda. As Sonya Ferker, from the ZARA anti-racism organisation, concluded 'There is a serious problem with political debate on immigration. It is entrenching polarisation and producing an "us and them" view on immigration.'

Freedom Party campaign highlights Christian values

The FPÖ which put forward fifteen candidates, headed by MEP Andreas Mölzer, its previous sole representative at the European parliament, was accused of manipulating Christian symbols and openly pandering to anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The FPÖ was also roundly criticised by other political parties for adopting the slogan 'The West in Christian Hands'. (In previous elections, the party used the slogan 'Homeland instead of Islam'.) There was more criticism, this time directed against FPÖ leader, Heinz-Christian Strache (who is preparing for confirmation into the Roman Catholic church) when he waved a Crucifix at his supporters during a rally against a Muslim centre. The FPÖ campaigned on the economic downturn, the EU's Lisbon treaty and opposition to the accession of Turkey into the EU. The FPÖ's state-funded youth organisation, the Freedom Youth Ring, issued stickers showing a cigarette packet bearing the warning, 'Mixed sort - immigration can cause death'. One FPÖ comic-strip called 'HC Man' portrayed Strache as a muscular hero fighting against evil aliens from another planet. Socialist Party of Austria politician Hannes Swoboda said that the comic claimed evil invaders pollute the blood and ruin the society, adding that 'The Nazis did the same in *Der Stürmer* newspaper'. The President of the Islamic Community in Austria, Anas Schafkeh, said statements such as 'Occident in the hands of Christians' took him back to the horrors of the Holocaust, which,

he pointed out, started with verbal attacks on Jews.

There were also fears in the gay community over the FPÖ's campaign. The Vienna branch of the FPÖ called for a law forbidding dissemination of 'exhortative information about homosexuality among minors' in an effort to 'protect our children from sexual exploitation' and warned against 'self-glorifying depictions of homosexuality in children's books'. A new campaign against homophobia launched by the Christian gay support group Courage revealed that gays and lesbians have a suicide rate seven times higher than the Austrian average (young people aged 15 to 17 were particularly vulnerable) and the Greens believe that the FPÖ is contributing to the high suicide rate by fomenting anxiety and hatred.

President condemns FPÖ campaign advert as anti-Semitic

On 18 May, the Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann intervened after the FPÖ was accused of anti-Semitism for placing an ad in the tabloid *Kronen Zeitung* that stated 'FPÖ veto for Turkey and Israel in the EU'. Chancellor Faymann told the *Daily Standard* online edition that as Israel [unlike Turkey] is not an EU accession candidate, the 'only reason to mention Israel here is to stir up anti-Semitic prejudices'. That is shameful. We have no time for such taunting, I strongly condemn it.' Chancellor Faymann also described Strache as a 'hate monger, a disgrace'.

FPÖ president of Austrian parliament attacks Jewish organisation

Members of the FPÖ, particularly MP Martin Graf, who is currently president of the Austrian parliament, have increasingly been at loggerheads with leaders of Austria's official Jewish body, the Jewish Community in Austria (IKG), particularly its leader Ariel Muzicant who had compared the FPÖ's general secretary Herbert Kickl to the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. The FPÖ's *Neue Freie Zeitung* (online edition) subsequently quoted Graf describing Muzicant as the 'godfather of anti-fascist left-wing terrorism', accusing him of 'creating a climate of brutality' by having links to the 'violent mob on the street'. The Green party cited the comments in parliament, stating that Graf had 'blatantly shamed' the dignity of parliament and the Republic of Austria. As the dispute escalated, there were calls for Graf to stand down from his official post as third president of the Austrian parliament. (Graf was elected as the parliament's third president in October 2008 after the FPÖ came third in the general election.) But the ÖVP refused to support any initiative to change the constitution so that a parliamentary president could be deprived of power.

There were also concerns that FPÖ MEP, Andreas Mölzer, had publicly argued that it had been mostly Jews who had caused the worldwide economic and financial crisis.

Archbishop of Vienna warns against political use of Christian symbols

In late May, Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn and a number of other Roman Catholic prelates criticised the use by politicians of Christian symbols during campaigning. As criticism mounted of Strache's use of the Crucifix at a rally against the extension of the Turkish-Islamic ATIB centre in Vienna, Schönborn pointed out that the cross was a 'symbol of reconciliation'. Strache refused to apologise, accusing other parties and the Catholic Church of being 'cowardly' and 'faint-hearted'.

The FPÖ was hoping to make a breakthrough in Vienna, but in the event only secured fifth place in the capital with 15.32 per cent of the vote.

Extreme-right campaign against the Vienna Islamic cultural centre

The 'Citizens' Initiative/Goodbye Mosque' is supported by the FPÖ and headed by Hannelore Schuster, the mother-in-law of an ÖVP minister who was convicted in 2002 for offences that arose out of her management of a charity for the homeless. It opposes the extension of the Turkish-Islamic community centre on the grounds of 'noise pollution', with Schuster adding that it would create a 'parallel society', and a widening gap between Muslim and Catholic residents. Asked whether she had any problems with being backed by the FPÖ, Schuster said 'I accept their backing with open arms because other parties are cowards'.

It was in May, at a protest march in Vienna's city centre against the mosque, that Strache brandished the cross during his speech in which he said someone 'needs to protect our Austria from these radical left-wingers who do not take people's problems seriously'. During the demonstration six people were injured when left-wing counter-demonstrators clashed with special police forces.

Alliance for Austria's Future

The Alliance for Austria's Future (BZÖ), which elected Josef Bucher as its new leader in April 2009, fielded as its lead candidate the former FPÖ MP and Catholic fundamentalist Ewald Stadler. The BZÖ hoped to capitalise on parliamentary unease over comments made by Strache and Graf by portraying itself as the more 'mature' of the far-right groupings. 'The FPÖ is not any longer the party of Jörg Haider. Fools have taken over', said Ewald Stadler.

In the run up to the European elections, the BZÖ sought to make political capital out of a fatal shooting incident at a Sikh temple in Vienna, with Stadler arguing that 'problem gurus and hate preachers' should not be allowed into the country and that Austria 'cannot become the parade ground for all the insane'. Stadler used the occasion to launch a ten-point programme for more safety in Austria which included a call for the reintroduction of border checks with its eastern neighbours and the formation of a special commission to deal with 'immigrant crime'. He called for the revocation of Austrian citizenship from naturalised citizens who commit crimes.

Campaigners concerned about deepening regional tensions

The BZÖ's stronghold is Carinthia, a rural region on the Italian-Slovenian border nicknamed 'Haiderland' on account of it being the heartland of the late extreme-right politician, Jörg Haider. (Fifty per cent of the population here support the BZÖ). Here, as the *Independent* (3.6.09) reported, the extreme right is exploiting historical tensions between Austria and Slovenia through the stigmatisation of the Slovenian language and culture in Carinthia. Slovenian was effectively banished from the region after 1945 following bitter clashes with the former-Yugoslavia during the two world wars. Carinthia was once a Slovenian-speaking region, but after the Second World War Slovenians were deported and/or forced to speak German. According to Jure Zerjav, the mayor of Kranjska Gora, a neighbouring Slovenian town, 'I simply do not understand the politicians'. 'They are always trying to dig up old problems and trying to talk up how dangerous the Slovenian minority is. The current economic crisis is only making things worse.'

Extreme right influences mainstream

The FPÖ's popularity affected the mainstream. Conservatives and Social Democrats spoke out against the EU asylum directive, opposed the lifting of labour market restrictions on the eight ex-Communist countries that joined the EU in 2004 and called for an extension of army patrols in eastern border areas.

The Social Democrats were the biggest losers in the European elections. Shortly before the election, Social Democratic Chancellor Werner Faymann criticised his own party, stating during a TV appearance, that provisional branches should have openly rejected cooperation with the FPÖ. Thus, while he pledged that there would be no SPÖ-FPÖ coalition at a federal level, he said he could not force provincial party branches to take the same line.

In the run-up to the elections, the ÖVP was accused of reflecting extreme-right concerns in its campaigns. One of the ÖVP's billboards, which was supposed to be aimed at encouraging people to vote, showed a defensive wall opposite a hedge with the question 'How open should our borders be?' Ernst Strasser, who headed the ÖVP list, also campaigned for Turkey's EU accession negotiations to be put on ice for 'five, ten or fifteen years'. Immediately after the election, ÖVP interior minister Maria Fekter promised to crack down on criminal asylum applicants through the introduction of new measures which would help make Austria 'one of the safest countries in the world'. Under the proposed measures, asylum applicants, charged with crimes, would be subjected to fast-track expulsion. Fekter also promised an increase in preventive detention, with a new detention centre created, probably at Leoben, Styria.

Fear of crime a factor in extreme-right support

Support for the far right also seems to be linked to fear of crime, with issues of crime prioritised in media debates in the run up to the election. IMAS, which conducted an opinion poll, found that the vast majority of Austrians (77 per cent) felt that crime was soaring. Sixty-three per cent of those questioned agreed with the claim that the development had something to do with

immigration. IMAS said that it was notable that those who agreed with the statement voted for Austria's extreme-right parties. (*Searchlight* May, June, July 2009, *Sunday Herald* 19.4.09, *Guardian* 17.4.09, *Daily Mail* 12.5.07, *European Jewish Press* 13.5.09, EU Business 18.5.09, Reuters 20.5.09, *Austrian Times* 15, 26, 29.5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 16, 17, 18.6.09, *Independent* 3.6.09, Inter Press Service 1.7.09.)

Far-right in March regional elections

The late Jörg Haider's BZÖ took 44.9 per cent of the vote in Carinthia in the March regional elections. Its new leader is Gerhard Dörfler, who has continued Haider's policy in Carinthia of isolating 'suspected criminal' asylum seekers in remote 'special institutions' in order to protect the local population.

In Salzburg, the FPÖ scored particularly well with 13 per cent of the vote (up 4.3 per cent). (*Searchlight* April 2009)

Dramatic rise in racist violence linked to neo-Nazi scene

While politicians exploit fear of crime, official figures suggest a dramatic rise in racist violence, with Amnesty International (AI) also drawing attention to institutionalised racism within the police and judiciary. Austrian interior ministry statistics suggest that between 2006 and 2008 reported racist and anti-Semitic crimes rose from 419 to 831. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency reports a 79.5 per cent rise in racist crimes from 2006 to 2007 and an 87 per cent rise in anti-Semitic crimes. A poll conducted by the *Austrian Times* published on 10 June 2009, just after the European elections, found that eight in ten readers were 'not surprised' by the soaring number of crimes connected with far-right ideology, as a 'xenophobic mindset has always had a place in the Austrian mentality'.

How neo-Nazis feed off FPÖ

There are also concerns that the far-right scene is becoming stronger, and has been emboldened by the FPÖ campaign for the revocation of the *Verbotsgesetz*, the law of 1947 that bans promotion of neo-Nazi ideology. There have been clashes at the University of Vienna between the nationalist students association, the *Burschenschaften*, and anti-fascist students. Left concerts, meetings and demonstrations have been targeted, Muslim graves desecrated and Holocaust memorials attacked.

In May, elderly Italian and French survivors of the Ebensee concentration camp near Salzburg were attacked by masked neo-Nazis and shot at with air guns during a remembrance event. FPÖ leader Strache described it as the 'foolish acts of boyish stupidity', adding that the boys should be strictly reprimanded but not kept in 'custody for weeks'. Days after this incident, it was revealed that a group of Viennese students had been sent home early from a trip to Auschwitz, Poland, after teachers failed to silence some who continually claimed 'All Jews should simply be gassed' – in front of a survivor of the camp who guided the group through the venue.

According to Heribert Schiedel of the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DOW), the official picture is that parliamentary parties like the FPÖ, and the

banned neo-Nazi groups like Blood & Honour, are separate; but in reality they are linked via the *Burschenschaften*, right-wing brotherhoods founded in German universities. (Senior members of the FPÖ, such as Strache and Martin Graf, currently deputy leader of the Austrian parliament, are members of the *Burschenschaften*.) Schiedel is concerned that the success of the Austrian right in parliament means that Austria is becoming a focal point for neo-Nazis around the world. 'There is a new European right and its core is right here in Austria.' (*Searchlight* May, June, July 2009, *Sunday Herald* 19.4.09, *Guardian* 17.4.09, *Daily Mail* 12.5.07, *European Jewish Press* 13.5.09, EU Business 18.5.09, Reuters 20.5.09, *Austrian Times* 29.5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12 16, 17, 18.6.09, *Independent* 3.6.09, Inter Press Service 1.7.09.)

BELGIUM

Significant decline of extreme right

There was a significant decline in votes for the three extreme-right parties which contested the European parliamentary elections for twenty-two Belgian MEPs. The three parties were the Vlaams Belang (VB), Wallonia First (WD) and the Front National (FN).

VB campaign

In contrast to its 2004 vote, when the VB gained 23.2 per cent of the vote (three MEPs), the VB's vote in the 2009 elections dipped to 9.97 per cent, with the loss of one MEP (total two). The list of the VB was headed by Frank Vanhecke, despite the fact that the European Parliament was attempting to strip him of his parliamentary immunity in order that he could be prosecuted for racism. It ran on the slogan 'This is OUR country' and promised to lead Flanders to autonomy.

FN

The FN in Wallonia, which was headed by J P Borbouse secured just 1.32 per cent of the vote, a significant decline from its 2004 vote of 7.5 per cent. The last time it had an MEP was in 1999. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Parliament_election,_2009_%28Belgium%29>)

Wallonia First

Wallonia First, a new political party made up mainly of former FN activists, secured just 0.56 per cent of the vote.

ECRI highlights racism in public discourse

The Council of Europe's Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), in its latest report on Belgium, called for a more robust institutional response to political parties that resort to racist and xenophobic propaganda and warned that the nationalist propaganda of the VB was fostering a climate of tension between the different regions and communities of Belgium. It believes that the 'cordon sanitaire' introduced by the main Belgian parties, under which they refuse to negotiate with the extreme right-wing parties, has played an important role in their electoral decline since regional

elections in 2004. (*Flanders Times* 17.6.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, ECRI report on Belgium CRI (2009)18)

Regional elections see losses for extreme right

Regional elections were held in Belgium on 7 June 2009, on the same day as the European elections, to choose representatives for the regional councils of Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and the German-speaking Community of Belgium. The regional elections were contested by the VB, the WD and the FN, but also by the recently formed Dedecker List (LDD), some members of which used to belong to the VB.

Flemish regional parliament results

■ **VB:** The VB scored 15.28 per cent of the vote in the Flemish elections (down 8.86 per cent), with heavy losses in its traditional stronghold of Antwerp, where it now has twenty-one seats (down ten from the last regional elections held in 2004). While it is still the second largest party in Flanders, its losses were attributed to greater competition from more respectable Flemish nationalist parties, such as the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) and LLD.

■ **List Dedecker:** The List Dedecker, contesting the elections for the first time, also benefited from VB losses. It scored 7.62 per cent of the vote, and now has eight seats in the Flemish regional parliament.

The List Dedecker was formed by Senator Jean-Marie Dedecker in 2007 and uses as its slogan, the 'common sense party'. Two VB MPs defected to the Dedecker List in April 2007. One of these, Jurgen Verstrepen, used to head the VB list in Antwerp. It has the backing of Marten Fortuyn, brother of Pim Fortuyn, who campaigned for the party in the run-up to the 2007 general election.

Walloon regional parliament results

The FN share of the vote also declined substantially. It lost all its four seats in the Walloon Parliament, and scored just 2.86 per cent of the vote (down 5.26 per cent).

Brussels regional parliament

Likewise in the Brussels regional parliament, the National Front lost all four of its representatives, with 1.91 per cent of the vote (down 3.5 per cent). The VB experienced a massive decline, losing more than 60 per cent of its 2004 vote and half its elected representatives. While it still has three representatives in the Brussels regional parliament, it previously had six representatives. While the List Dedecker scored 3.78 per cent of the vote, this was not enough to secure representation in the regional parliament. (*Flanders Times* 17.6.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgian_regional_elections,_2009>)

BULGARIA

Far-right party enters European parliament with anti-Turkish campaign

The far right and ultra-nationalist, Ataka (Attack), scored 11.96 per cent of the vote in the European par-

liamentary elections, and now has two MEPs at Brussels.

Anti-Turkish campaign resurrects historical grievances

Ataka's main slogan was 'No to Turkey in the EU', with campaign literature carrying an image of the EU stars of Europe, in the centre of which lay a Trojan horse sporting the Islamic crescent.

Ataka started its European campaign on 17 May in the southern Bulgarian town of Batak, symbolically important as the site of the 1876 Bulgarian uprising against the Ottoman empire. In March 2009, thousands of Ataka supporters, carrying placards stating 'No to Turkey in the EU', staged an anti-Turkish demonstration in Sofia; they were also protesting against the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), which represents Bulgaria's ethnic-Turkish minorities (10 per cent of the population). Already, in February, Ataka had targeted the Turkish Embassy for a protest linked to its demands that Turkey apologise for crimes committed against Bulgarians during the Ottoman period. Ataka leader Volen Siderov declared 'We have claims ... against Turkey over this genocide that it has perpetrated on us.'

Ataka divided

Immediately after the European elections and prior to the general election (see below), the party was riven by a dispute over the management of the general election ballots, with several disgruntled candidates leaving the party after allegations surfaced that long-time candidates had been excluded in favour of businessmen, who paid for their inclusion. (*Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Agence France Presse* 3.3.09, *Noinvite* 28.6.09, *Sofia News Agency* 24.6.09. Additional information from Ataka website <www.ataka.bg>)

General election sees more anti-Turkish and anti-Roma rhetoric

The Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB), led by former bodyguard and Sofia mayor Boyko Borissov, emerged as the largest party in the July general election, and will now form a coalition government. The election also saw Ataka secure less votes than the Turkish minority party, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) leading to its accusing Turkey of interfering with the Bulgarian election process.

Roma, Turks and retirees referred to as 'bad human material'

In February 2009, in the run-up to both the European and general elections, Boyko Borissov, speaking in Chicago, told an audience of Bulgarians that immigrants from outside Bulgaria were threatening the country's future. 'What is the basis of our population at the moment – one million Roma, 700,000 Turks, 2.5 million retirees.' He then went on to describe these three groups as 'bad human material'.

Far-right results

Ataka won around 9.37 per cent of the vote (approximately twenty-one seats) while the MRF secured 14 per cent of the vote and approximately thirty-five seats out of the 240 seats in the Bulgarian parliament. Another extreme-right party contested the elections, and has likewise attacked Bulgaria's Turkish minority. The Order, Lawfulness, Justice Party (ORJ) won 4.13 per cent of the

vote which translates into around nine seats. It is anticipated that Borissov will invite the ORJ to be a junior coalition partner in the next government.

Anti-Turkish themes again dominate

Ataka and ORJ campaigned aggressively against Turkish entry into the EU and staged protests at Bulgaria's borders with Turkey, attempting to attack buses carrying Bulgarian-Turks to the country in order to cast their votes. During the election campaign, Ataka leader Volen Siderov called for the abolition of news broadcast in Turkish on the state broadcasting channel. ORJ leader Yane Yanev blamed Turkey for 'election tourism' and said that the Turkish secret services were to blame for their party's poor showing. (*Today's Zaman* 7.7.09, BBC News Online 6.7.09, *Telegraph* 6.2, 5.7.09)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Rise in anti-Roma and racist violence as far right contests European elections

There were no successes and notable failures for the three far-right parties - the Workers Party (DS), the National Party (NS) and the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSC) - that contested the June European parliamentary elections. Despite making no inroads with the electorate, neo-Nazis in the Czech Republic are having an alarming impact on the level of anti-Roma racist violence. There have been more and more neo-Nazi mobilisations, particularly in north Bohemian towns. But there has also been concerted opposition to the far right. On 3 May 2009, the first-ever nationwide protest of Roma organisations, coordinated by the initiative Dost ('Enough is Enough'), against growing extremism and racial violence took place in thirteen towns and cities. An NS campaign broadcast aired on state television in mid-May called for 'a final solution to the Gypsy question' and described the Roma as parasites.

The Workers' Party

In last year's regional election, 28,000 people voted for the DS, which has close links with the National Democratic Party of Germany and has sought to target Roma neighbourhoods for mobilisations. An attempt by the government to ban the DS was rejected by the Supreme Administrative Court in March 2009. (At the same time, the government also sought to ban the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia.) Overt expressions of sympathy with fascism, as well as the display of Nazi symbols, are banned in the Czech Republic. But Workers' Party leader Patrik Vondrák was referring to the Roma when he spoke of 'unadjusted minorities'.

Targeting Litvinov

The DS appointed Vladan Renak, a foreign language teacher at a grammar school in nearby Most, as its shadow mayor in Litvinov, an area where the Roma community feels constantly threatened. In March 2009, after several DS mobilisations, supported by local residents, against a Roma housing estate in the northern town of Litvinov, resulted in angry clashes with the police, the

Czech government attempted, and failed, to ban the Workers' Party. The public television and radio also refused to broadcast its campaign advert.

Media role criticised

The media, reported Radio Prague (19.5.09) came under increasing criticism for errors in judgement in reporting the far right, particularly after Czech TV broadcast blatantly racist pre-election commercials for two far-right parties before pulling them amid an angry backlash. A National Party advert broadcast on 21 May called for a 'final solution to the Gypsy issue' and images of Roma overlaid the slogan 'Stop Favouring Gypsies'. Political scientist Jan Charvát accused the media of fuelling extremism by giving too much attention to the extreme right. He cited the example of the National Party, which probably has less than thirty members but is often featured prominently in the media. The editor of *Mladá fronta Dnes*, the country's top broadsheet, was also accused of sensationalism and providing unchecked advertising space for the promotion of racism after publishing a prominent interview with a leading neo-Nazi. This kind of coverage 'lacks information, lacks critique and also is an example of the superficiality of some of the newspapers', commented Klara Kalibová of Tolerance and Civic Society.

Racist violence

According to Anna Durin, of the ISN Security Watch, a more effective response by law enforcement officers is necessary to stop the racist violence against Roma. There have been many serious arson attacks in Moravia and in late spring racially motivated violent attacks and demonstrations targeting Roma neighbourhoods increased significantly. Incidents included:

■ **18 April:** Unidentified arsonists turned off water access to a Roma house in Vitkov, a small town in the country's northeast, and burned it down, leaving a two-year-old girl gravely injured. (ISN 15.6.09)

■ **20 April:** On the same day as 300 neo-Nazis marched in the town of Usti nad Labem, to mark the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, molotov cocktails were thrown into the home of a Romany family in Vitkov, north Moravia. Three people were injured, including a 2-year-old girl who was critically ill after receiving serious burns. President Vaclav Klaus and outgoing Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek condemned the attack. (<<http://romove.radio.cz/en/>> 20.4.09)

■ **3 May:** Far-right activists associated with the Workers' Party, National Resistance and Autonomous Nationalists attacked a demonstration in support of the Roma in Chomutov. (ISN 15.6.09)

New programme to combat far-right extremism

In May, the outgoing interior minister Ivan Langer, announcing a new programme to combat far-right extremism, stated that 'the year 2008 was a turning point on the extremist scene', with groups 'attempting to enter politics and to become a political player'. And the interim prime minister Jan Fischer announced that he would not abolish the position for the minister of human rights and minorities in the caretaker government, as he originally planned to do. The new measures to counter the extreme right emphasise prevention through education. City and town officials will receive

guidelines on how to react to controversial far-right events, while 'flying courts' may be set up to enable judges to try the perpetrators of hate crime on the spot, if prevention proves ineffective.

Steep increase in Islamophobia

Previously, in September 2008, the government dismissed Muslim concerns about a steep increase in Islamophobia, as well as anti-Muslim and anti-Arab sentiment generally. The Libertas Independent Agency produced a report on the subject which was dismissed by the Czech commissioner for human rights, Jan Litomisky, who said that while Islamophobia was not 'a serious problem', in his view 'they sometimes provoke these moods themselves by issuing, for instance, anti-Semitic statements'. (CTK 25.4.09, Radio Prague 4,5, 29.5.09, *Aktualne Cz* 14.5.09, *Guardian* 28.5.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Prague Daily Monitor* 26, 2, 2.6.09, Czech News Agency 8.9.08, *Migration News Sheet* June 2009, ISN International Relations and Security Network 15.6.09.)

DENMARK

Danish People's Party's vote soars in European elections

The anti-immigration and Islamophobic Danish People's Party (DFP) more than doubled its vote in the European parliament elections, securing 15.3 per cent of the vote and taking two seats (an increase of one).

Controversial election candidates

The DFP previously had one representative in the European parliament, Mogens Camre, a notorious Islamophobe who once described Muslims as a 'fifth column' that 'shouldn't be here'. Its list was headed by Morten Messerschmidt, who had previously resigned from the party after revelations that he had given the Hitler salute and sang the outlawed first verse of the German national anthem in Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens. Another candidate, Kenneth Kristensen, has a conviction for racism. Election candidate Jette Plesner Dali used to belong to the Women for Freedom organisation, set up to campaign against the hijab.

Local councillor highlights 'Muslim criminality'

In February, Nicolai Sennels, a DFP councillor in Østerbro who worked as a psychologist at a young offenders institution in Sønderbro, Copenhagen, published *Among Criminal Muslims*, a book purportedly based on conversations with 200 youth incarcerated at Sønderbro. In it Sennels argued that young Muslims lack respect for society for cultural reasons. Newspapers reported the book's publications under headlines such as 'Islam makes youth into criminals'. Sennels denied that being a DFP councillor affected his impartiality. 'We are many from the industry who vote for the Danish People's Party, but it has no influence on us working professionally in the area.'

Gun crime in Copenhagen concerns politicians

In March, Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen

announced that the government would introduce measures to accelerate the expulsion of members of gangs without Danish citizenship after a turf war between drug gangs in Copenhagen left two people dead. Police had repeatedly focussed on the growth of immigrant gangs in the capital and gun violence was said to be increasing. 'This conflict has an ethnic side to it', said Klaus Bondam, a deputy mayor in Copenhagen. 'That threatens to polarise Copenhagen and alienate a large group of citizens.' (Islam Online 18.2.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Euronews* 7.6.0, *Bloomberg News* 6.3.09)

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Major realignment of the Right in European parliament

Elections were held from 4-7 June for 736 MEPs in twenty-seven countries. The last elections were held in 2004. Voter turnout fell in each of the seven elections since 1979. Prior to the elections, there were fifty-seven MEPs to the right of the mainstream centre-right parties. Now, according to the briefing of the European election results provided by *Searchlight*, the far right has thirty-eight seats in the European parliament. The full list is:

- Party for Freedom (Netherlands) 4
- Danish People's Party (Denmark) 2
- True Finns (Finland) 1
- Northern League (Italy) 9
- Jobbik (Hungary) 3
- British National Party (United Kingdom) 2
- Freedom Party (Austria) 2
- Greek Popular Orthodox Rally (Greece) 2
- Slovak National Party (Slovakia) 1
- Greater Romania Party (Romania) 3
- Ataka (Bulgaria) 2
- Front National (France) 3
- Movement for France (France) 1
- Vlaams Belang (Belgium) 2
- Latvian National Independence Movement (Latvia) 1

Anti-immigration, Eurosceptic alliance formed

A new political grouping, comprising thirty MEPs from Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant parties in seven countries, provisionally titled 'A Europe of Free Peoples' was formed to take the place of the now defunct Union for a Europe of the Nations. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Northern League are the key components of the new grouping, which also takes in the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), the Dutch Protestant Political Reform Party (SGP), the Danish People's Party, True Finns, Libertas France and Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionists. More parties may well join from other countries.

According to Graeme Atkinson, European editor of *Searchlight*, 'This basically is the far-right "lite" forming a group, a community of interest, with UKIP's help – right wingers more of a populist than fascist character. While not welcome, this is probably partly deliberate, in order the keep the like of the genuinely fascist far right from forming an officially recognised group.' (*EU Observer* 30.6.09)

New Social Conservative grouping incorporates extremists

A new 55-strong social conservative grouping, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR), has been formed in the European parliament, comprising the UK Conservative Party, the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Belgium Lijst Dedecker, the Finnish Centre Party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), the Latvian National Independence Movement (TB/LNNK), and the Dutch Christian Union.

The Conservative party in the UK was forced to defend itself from criticisms of aligning itself with the homophobic PiS. The Tories say that it is wrong for the party to campaign on a Eurosceptic ticket in Britain only to sit in the highly-federalist EPP-ED group in Strasbourg. (*Guardian* 23.6.09, *EU Observer* 27.3.09)

FINLAND

Breakthrough for True Finns as immigration theme debated

The anti-foreigner True Finns party, having joined forces with the Christian Democrats, made huge gains in the European elections, leaping from 0.5 per cent to 10 per cent of the vote. In the run-up to the elections, all political parties save the True Finns signed a declaration pledging zero tolerance of racism and promising not to promote an anti-immigrant message in campaigning. But the National Coalition Party broke the pre-election party political consensus and asylum and immigration themes emerged as election issues with the government announcing that it would investigate whether Finland has certain 'pull factors' that distinguish it from other Scandinavian countries.

National Coalition Party divided over anti-immigrant vocabulary

In May, the National Coalition Party – which is part of the coalition government – stated that the country's current immigration policy did not correspond to the wishes of the Finnish people. It argued for the harmonisation of asylum policies with other Nordic countries (so that Finland does not seem an attractive option), the introduction of age-testing for young asylum seekers and the withdrawal of cash benefits from asylum seekers in reception centres. The Party believed that all this was necessary to cut down on the number of unfounded asylum applications. But Astrid Thors, minister of migration, pointed out that the number of asylum seekers in Finland was significantly lower than that in Sweden and Norway.

The National Coalition Party's stance soon led to controversy and the party was forced to distance itself from European election candidate, Kai Pöntinen, who placed an ad in the media that stated 'no more benefit-scrounge [sic] immigrants'. Both the leader and party secretary of the National Coalition Party said that they did not approve of the vocabulary used in Kai Pöntinen's advertisement.

Rise of the True Finns

It is believed that one reason for the True Finns' dramatic rise was the increasing focus in the media on crime, particularly rape, statistics on which are often racialised. Clashes between Finnish gangs and ethnic minority gangs are reported in ways that promote scare scenarios about the dangers of the 'Swedish situation' coming to Finland. In late 2008, prominent True Finn member Jussi Halla-aho used his blog to describe asylum seekers as 'African gang rapists' and 'parasites'. He was subsequently charged with hate crimes. (*YLE* 12.1, 16.4, 15.5, 30.6, 1.7.09, *Aamulehti* 15.5.09, as cited in UNHCR Baltic & Nordic Headlines, *SR Ekot* 7.6.09, *Euronews* 7.6.09, *EU Observer* 30.6.09, *Helsingen Sanomat* 24.2.09)

Summer sees refugee centres attacked

There were a number of attacks on refugee reception centres over the summer and the minority ombudsman said that the number of online hate groups targeting refugees was also on the increase. On Facebook, a group with over 15,000 members, called for the expulsion of refugees, particularly Somalis.

■ *15 June, Suomusjärvi, south-west Finland:* Powerful explosive device set off at the Red Cross reception centre. No one injured but residents, mostly from Afghanistan and Somalia, offered counselling. (*Helsingen Sanomat* 15.6.09)

■ *30 June, Kemi, northern Finland:* Two men armed with knives assaulted an asylum seeker at a reception centre. A second male asylum seeker was assaulted and thrown into the lake at Takajärvi in Kemi. (*YLE* 30.6.09)

FRANCE

Sarkozy gains from FN losses in European elections

In a European election result which saw gains for president Sarkozy's ruling centre-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Front National (FN) won only 6.3 per cent of the vote, and now has three out of France's 72 seats in the European parliament. Sarkozy's tough talk on crime, and promise to oppose Turkish entry into the EU, seems to have undermined the FN.

Previously, in 2004, the FN secured 9.8 per cent of the vote, and had a total of seven MEPs. The Party of France (PF) led by Carl Lang, and the Movement for France, led by Philippe de Villiers, also contested the elections, as did the controversial Anti-Zionist list that was accused of anti-Semitism.

Front National

In contrast to previous years, the FN, which is facing bankruptcy and dwindling membership, ran a low key campaign focusing on the same issues: law and order, opposition to immigration and 'supranational Europe' which it described as a forerunner to 'world government'. The party had a different level of success in different regions, with the Le Pen family securing representation in South East France and North West France. The third MEP elected was in the East constituency. On 23 June, its new MEP, Professor Bruno Gollnisch of Lyons university, was cleared of disputing crimes against humanity by the Lyons appeal court.

Regional variations: In the North West constituency, where over 60 per cent of the electorate abstained, the FN's national list, headed by Steeve Briois and Marine Le Pen, achieved 10.18 per cent of votes (with 13.4 per cent in Aisne, over 12 per cent in Pas de Calais and Oise, 11.99 per cent in Somme and over 10 per cent in Eure). Le Pen's team also polled 28 per cent in the town of Hénin-Beaumont, Pas de Calais (see below).

In the South East constituency (Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Rhone-Alpes, Corsica) where ten parties put up candidates, the FN polled 8.49 per cent (down from over 12 per cent in 2004) and took one seat (Le Pen), losing one from 2004. In the Vaucluse department the FN polled 12.11 per cent, and in the Provence towns of Cavaillon and Carpentras it scored 17 per cent and 15 per cent respectively, despite a large-scale mobilisation of the UMP. In Cavaillon it came in second, leading La Provence to refer to a 're-awakening' of the party. In Alpes Maritimes it came in third, in front of the Socialists with 11.21 per cent. However the abstention rate was over 60 per cent, rising to almost 70 per cent in Corsica.

In the East constituency, the FN polled 7.57 per cent and took one seat (Bruno Gollnisch). Its highest polls were in the department of Haute Marne, where it polled 9.33 per cent, coming in fourth, and Aube with 9.13 per cent (fifth) and in another six departments it polled over 8 per cent. Its worst score was in the West constituency, where it polled 3.06 per cent, coming ninth out of the ten parties.

Election violence: On 10 May, in Vidauban, southern France, five FN activists, including a 68-year-old woman, travelling home from an election meeting, got off the bus and assaulted a black cook who happened to be passing by. During the attack they shouted slogans such as 'France for the French People', 'Le Pen for President' and 'Death to blacks or Arabs'. The assailants received a suspended prison sentence for the attack and the FN subsequently announced their expulsion from the party. The incident was reported in the June 2009 edition of *Migration News Sheet*.

Party of France

Several FN members, notably Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel, left to form a new party, the Party of France. The PF, which failed to make any inroads, won support of other far-right fringe parties, such as the New Popular Right and the remnants of the National Republican Movement (MNR), under the leadership of Annick Martin.

Movement for France

The Movement for France, which ran under the Libertas banner, polled 4.8 per cent of the vote, dropping from three seats to one.

Attempts to ban Anti-Zionist list

The government considered and decided against banning a list of anti-Zionist candidates proposed by the French comedian Dieudonné M'Bala and including Alain Soral, a former member of the FN. During the press conference announcing the campaign, Anti-Zionist list candidate Yahia Gouasmi was alleged to have said 'Behind every divorce, there is a Zionist, I am telling you. Behind everything that divides human nature, there is a

Zionist. This is what I believe and this is what we are going to prove.' (*Searchlight* March, June, July 2009, *Guardian* 14.5.09, *EU Observer* 4.5.09, BBC News Online 5.5.09, *Economist* 11.6.09, *La Voix du Nord* 4.6.09, *LibeLille* 17.6.09, *Migration News Sheet*, June 2009.)

Cordon-sanitaire prevents FN win at Hénin-Beaumont

Following its victory on 28 June in the first round, the FN was only just prevented from taking control of the town council of Hénin-Beaumont after all the other mainstream parties formed a 'Republican Front' and rallied around leftwing candidate Daniel Duquenne, who scored just 20 per cent in the first round of the election against the FN's 39 per cent. In the second round of voting on 5 July, the Left regained control of the town by 52 per cent compared to the 48 per cent scored by the FN.

FN campaigns as anti-corruption party

The FN's traditional power-base is in the south of France and its dramatic breakthrough in Hénin-Beaumont, one of the poorest parts of France, in the first round was seen as a personal victory for Marine Le Pen who tried to capitalise on local disillusionment with traditional parties.

Hénin-Beaumont is a depressed former coalmining town of 26,000 people in Pas de Calais, northern France, which has been solidly left for seventy years, but where unemployment is now running at around 19 per cent, almost three times the national average. A local man, Steeve Brios, ran as the FN candidate.

The byelection came after a political corruption scandal had led to the jailing of the town's former Socialist mayor, following charges of embezzlement and nepotism that left the council Euros 12m in debt, resulting in big tax rises and the resignation of virtually all the mayor's colleagues, as well as a split in the local Socialist party. To make up the colossal sums lost, local taxes rose steeply and school grants were cut. The FN did not centralise its anti-immigration credentials in electioneering, or overtly feature the FN logo in campaign literature, but instead presented itself as the anti-corruption party, with posters calling for a halt to 'robbery by the European Union' and 'France for the French first'. Marine Le Pen claimed that she and her party were the natural inheritors of the tradition of working-class, leftwing politics in France.

Backlash

Minutes after the results were announced, the new mayor, Daniel Duquenne, was sprayed with tear-gas by unknown assailants who fled the scene. Duquenne was not injured. The FN candidate asked the administrative court to cancel the election results, saying that Duquenne won 'dishonestly' by lying about the FN's intentions should it gain power. (*Guardian* 30.6, 6.7.09, *Independent* 30.6.09, *Le Point* 23.6.09, *Libération* 27,30.6.09, *Observer* 5.7.09, *Associated Press* 6.7.09)

GERMANY

Far right does poorly in European elections

Three extreme-right parties contested the European elections – the Republikaner (REP), the German People's Union (DVU) and the La Ruche movement – but none gained any representation. Meanwhile, the centre-right Christian Democrats, which emerged as big winners in the election (though turn-out, at 43 per cent, was almost an all-time low), alongside its sister party in Bavaria, the Christian Social Union (CSU) and its ally the Free Democrats (FDP), made rejection of Turkey's entry into the EU a feature of its campaign which also focused on the global recession.

Both the REP and the DVU are ridden with internal problems and ran lack-lustre campaigns. The two parties opposed the entry of Turkey to the EU and declared that Europe needs to stay 'western'. The DVU entered into a 'Pact for Germany' with the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), whereby it agreed to share out some seats to avoid rivalry. (*Searchlight* May, June, July 2009, *Frankfurter Rundschau* 2.6.09, *Deutsche Welle* 8.6.09, *Economist* 11.6.09)

Far right gains in state elections

In September, regional and federal elections will take place in Germany, and all eyes are on the neo-Nazi NPD that in June contested local elections in several federal states. Surprisingly, the NPD's share of the vote remained steady, despite internal problems and financial scandals, including having to pay a fine of 2.2million euros, after senior members were found guilty of embezzlement. In fact, the NPD now has 176 seats on regional and city councils, and even managed to gain some ground in western Germany. As usual it was strongest in the eastern German states of Thüringen (21 seats), Saxony, where it trebled its seats (73) and Mecklenburg Vorpommern (55), but it also enjoyed some success in Saxony-Anhalt (19) Saarland and even the western city of Trier.

Elections for a new regional parliament will take place in Thüringen at the end of August.

NPD part of mainstream in some areas

Nationwide, the NPD accounts for 2.3 per cent of the popular vote. But in some towns it notched up between 10 and 20 per cent of the vote. In the Reinhardsdorf-Schoena constituency in Saxony, it scored 22 per cent of the vote. According to Stephan Kramer, the secretary-general of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, in some areas in the eastern states of Mecklenburg West-Pomerania, the NPD is now considered a mainstream party. Kramer's view was backed by researcher Olaf Sundermeyer who said that in certain areas 'You have festivals, or public holidays where the NPD gets itself involved with the local society', organising social activities for children, and activities in social centres. He said 'it was pretty astonishing to see that such social work is basically an accepted norm in some parts of Germany.'

What factors are helping the NPD?

Up until February 2008, a party had to win five per cent of the vote to qualify for seats on local councils, but

Germany's highest court deemed that this discriminated against smaller parties. Professor Steffen School from the University of Rostock believes that 'The NPD has now gathered a base of regular voters'. Researchers Olaf Sundermeyer and Christoph Ruf spent two years infiltrating the NPD for their book *Reisen in der National Befreite Zone*. They interviewed many ex-members who say that NPD members hoard weapons at their party regional headquarters in Jena and dream of rebuilding Hitler's Third Reich. The writers believe that the economy and unemployment are factors playing into the hands of the NPD which in some areas of eastern Germany are attempting to create 'national liberation zones' no-go areas for foreigners.

Growth of far-right violence

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation in conjunction with the journal *Stern* provides a regular web-based update on some of the most serious far-right related racist incidents that take place in Germany. In its compilation of thirty incidents, which took place in Germany in May, eighteen took place in Saxony, many in Dresden and surrounding cities such as Pirna. A similar picture looked set to emerge in June, with four out of the ten attacks reported by 9 June taking place in Saxony. The incidents come just a few months after one of the largest anti-immigrant protests was held in Germany in recent years in Dresden where 6,000 neo-Nazis marched in February 2009.

Experts feel that the NPD is not the only force behind the new wave of neo-Nazi violence. The 'autonome Nationalisten' or free nationalists, a radical, political segment of the far-right scene are growing in number. Due to internal fighting within the NPD, new, aggressive splinter groups have emerged, some of which are critical of the NPD which is seen as not militant enough. Dr Esther Lehert, who runs a counselling service to combat the far right in Berlin, feels that if key autonomous nationalist leaders continue to leave the NPD there will be more violence in store. And the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution is likewise concerned by the numbers of far-right extremists seemingly operating independently.

Migrants, those deemed foreigners, trades unions and Left organisations, and alternative youth organisations have all been targeted. Incidents documented by Amadeu Antonio Foundation and *Stern* include:

■ **1 May, Dresden:** Masked neo-Nazis, chanting right-wing and anti-Semitic abuse, attacked five members of the Initiative Courage as well as a passer-by at Dresden's main railway station.

■ **2 May, Pirna:** Syrian man suffered injuries to his hand after being attacked by a man who smashed a bottle of beer over his head.

■ **7 May, Pirna:** The premises of the SPD, the Linke constituency office and the Kulturbüro all vandalised in one night.

■ **7 May, Dresden:** Dresden Trades Union Council offices vandalised with extreme-right graffiti.

■ **10 May, Zschopau:** Three Iraqis, one Turk and one Lebanese man hospitalised after a gang attacked a kebab stand, with cries of 'Ausländer Raus' (foreigners go home) and spraying them with irritant gas.

■ **6 June, Brand Erbsdorf:** Three youths from the alternative scene attacked by neo-Nazis on the way home

from an open-air concert. One of the youths was hospitalised after being hit on the head with a metal bar.

■ *7 June, Dresden:* Three young Socialists identified by their SPD bags attacked by neo-Nazis at Dresden's main rail station, who made comments such as 'we used to gas lesbians and women's libbers' and 'vote NPD, not SPD'.

James von Brunn, the 88-year-old white supremacist who killed a security guard at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, was linked to Horst Malher, an infamous far-right extremist who for a time served as a lawyer for the NPD. (*Deutsche Welle* 10, 16.5, 10.06.09, Inter Press Service 5.5.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Independent* 8.3.09, *The Spiegel* 15.6.09, *German Local* 17.2.09)

NPD campaigns against mosques

The NPD has also been organising pickets outside German mosques, leading to protests from Muslim organisations in Erfurt, Thuringia where the local branch of the NPD announced a parade days after the murder of Marwa al-Sherbini (see page 25). Aiman Mazyek, secretary of the Central Council of Muslims said that the NPD was trying to whip up anti-Muslim feeling and that it was intolerable that such an organisation was able to obtain state funding. (*Earth Times* 7.7.09)

GREECE

Climate against migrants deteriorates following European elections

Following the European elections, and in particular the best result ever for the far-right Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), the New Democracy (ND) government announced a major crackdown on irregular immigration. It also invited all the opposition parties, including LAOS to attend a government debate on immigration, leading to a Dutch auction amongst the parties as to which could be the toughest on irregular migrants.

Far right gains

Two extreme-right parties contested the European elections: the openly violent Nazi party, Golden Dawn, and the ultra-right LAOS. While Golden Dawn did not manage to secure representation, LAOS scored 7.2 per cent of the vote and now has two MEPs (an increase of one).

Tensions escalate in Panteleimonas, central Athens

Both parties polled particularly well in the Athens neighbourhood of Agios Panteleimonas where large numbers of migrants live in squalid conditions in abandoned buildings parks and garages. Tensions in the area and other parts of Athens escalated and there were repeated violent incidents, some exploited by far-right parties which organised demonstrations in the area.

■ *24 February:* Hand grenade thrown at Migrants House in the central Athens district of Exarchia. No one was injured.

■ *9 May:* After the anti-immigrant Golden Dawn, carrying banners reading 'Foreigners mean crime' and 'We have become foreigners in our own country', marched in the Agios Panteleimonas area, dozens of far-right

demonstrators hurled stones and fireworks at a disused courthouse in Athens occupied by migrants, injuring five people. Migrants accused the police of doing nothing to protect them. Arsonists, believed to be from the far right, later torched a makeshift mosque in the same area. (German Press Agency 11.6.09)

There were also clashes between the police and demonstrators from the Muslim community protesting at the police's response to the mosque attack, as well as an incident where a police officer, reportedly, tore up the Qur'an. Towards the end of May, there were clashes between Muslims and the police during which forty-six people were arrested and fourteen people injured. It was after this that the Muslim prayer room was set alight, and five Bangladeshis trapped inside were injured. An estimated 400,000 Muslims in the greater Athens area pray in 130 windowless, airless basements or warehouses that operate as makeshift mosques in the absence of any official mosque in the Greek capital.

Government announces new law

The ND, which forms the government with a majority of just one, polled poorly in the European elections. Many amongst its rank and file are believed to support LAOS's programme and, soon after the European elections, the ND announced the introduction of new legislation which would give regional police more power to decide on asylum claims, create more removal centres and double the detention time for undocumented migrants from three to six months (with extra penalties for migrants who refuse to cooperate and a provision for immediate deportation of any foreigner charged with an offence that carries a sentence of three months imprisonment or more). Interior minister Prokopis Pavlopoulos also proposed the intensification of police sweeps in central Athens, more border guards to keep out 'illegal immigrants', and closer cooperation with foreign embassies to facilitate deportation. According to Naim Elghander, president of the Muslim Union of Greece, the Greek government should come up with another solution to the migration issue aside from deportation. 'These people need to be able to work and to contribute something back to society and should not simply be left out in the streets or sent back to their countries which are at war.'

PASOK calls for 'zero illegal immigration'

Following the government's announcement of new legislation, George Papandreou, leader of PASOK outlined an eight-point plan for zero illegal migration, saying that, because the government had no coherent policy, racism and intolerance were growing.

Police immigration swoops commence

Hanasis Kourkoulas of the organisation 'Deport Racism' fears the growing influence of the far right on state policy. Policing around Athens has been expanded since the election and there are more immigration identity checks, leading to an increase in brutality on the part of the police. On 12 June, there was a major police immigration swoop, leading to arrests of fifty-eight out of the 590 people stopped on the streets. Police say they will carry out further immigration raids once the government has fulfilled its promise of setting up a temporary reception centre in the capital. Many fear that the so-called reception centre will serve as a camp into which

migrants will be herded and processed for removal. (BBC News Online 9.5.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Washington Times* 1.6.09, Islam Online 28.5.09, Inter Press Service 23.6.09, German Press Agency 11.6.09, *Kathimerini* 13.6.09, Athens News Agency 14.6.09)

Fears about growing racism and intolerance

On 2 July, cleaners from the PEKOP trades union marched in Athens demanding that the authorities reopen the inquiry into the December 2008 attack on the general secretary of Athens Association of Cleaners and Domestic Staff. Constantina Kouneva, aged 44, was attacked by unknown assailants outside her home in the district of Petralona who forced her to drink sulphuric acid which has destroyed her digestive track and large portions of her face. She is still fighting for her life in hospital. Police believe that the attack may have been an act of revenge for her trade union activities, but others point out that this does not mean that those who carried out the attack were not drawn from the far right.

Protests are also drawing attention to the ongoing far-right inspired attacks on Pakistanis in the working-class Athens suburb of Aegaleo. There were repeated clashes between fascists and anti-fascists protesting against the presence of the leading fascist weekly *Stohos* in the capital.

In another incident on 21 June two shepherds were arrested after attaching two Bangladeshi migrant workers to their motorcycles and dragging them through the street after going to a migrants camp in Manolada, southern Greece and beating up another Bangladeshi man until he denounced his two fellow countrymen. (*Ekathimerini* 27.12.08, <www.libcom.org/news/cleaners-march-athens-demanding-kouneva-case-remain-open-03072009, AFP 21.6.09)

HUNGARY

Extreme-right party with street militia makes breakthrough in Europe

The extreme-right Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) won 14.8 per cent of the vote and three out of Hungary's twenty-two seats in the June European parliamentary elections on a low-electoral turn-out (36.3%). It was immediately accused by the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* of assiduously building up its own private army, the Hungarian Guard, which harks back to the wartime Hungarian Nazi Arrow Cross. On this result, Jobbik could become Hungary's third-largest political party at the next general election, which is set to take place in April 2010. There are growing fears that socially conservative groups may even form an alliance with Jobbik. The fact that Tettekesz, a police trades union had established a wide-ranging collaboration accord with Jobbik, seemingly in breach of Hungary's constitution, was also cause for concern. Jobbik scored particularly well in Debrecen, Hungary's second largest city where it came second, and in a few other cities it actually topped the list.

Focus on Jobbik

The Jobbik list was headed by Dr Krisztina Morvai, an

unlikely candidate of the far right, as she is a human rights lawyer, a self-proclaimed feminist (she wrote a book on domestic violence) and won a Red Cross 'Freddie Mercury' prize for promoting Aids awareness. According to the *Telegraph*, Morvai is careful to avoid inflammatory rhetoric and her speeches play directly to a populist sense among Hungarians that they are being treated as second-class citizens since joining the EU in 2004. But according to *Searchlight*, Morvai spread vile racist and anti-Jewish abuse on the internet in the run-up to polling day. She said: 'I would be greatly pleased if those who call themselves proud Hungarian Jews played in their leisure with their tiny circumcised d...s, instead of besmirching me.' 'Your kind of people are used to seeing all of our kind of people stand to attention and adjust to you every time you fart. Would you kindly acknowledge this is now Over. We have raised our head up high and we shall no longer tolerate your kind of terror. We shall take back our country.'

The party ran with the slogan 'Hungarian for the Magyars' and promised to extend Hungarian citizenship to Hungarian minorities living in countries that border Hungary. It focused on 'gypsy criminality' and the 'sell out' of Hungary to foreigners. It attacked other political parties as comprised of 'Jewish liberals' or 'Jewish Bolsheviks'. According to Jobbik, the Free Democrats and the Socialists have formed a 'Zionist Occupation Government'.

The problem of anti-Semitism

The *Telegraph* was also disturbed to find that publications supportive of Jobbik's aims and freely available at its press conferences were openly anti-Semitic. The 5,300-strong police trade union Tettekesz (meaning 'ready for action'), which collaborates with Jobbik, has also been accused of anti-Semitism.

Fidesz implicated: *Searchlight* has expressed concern about Jobbik's links with the Hungarian Citizens' Party, Fidesz. Although the more respectable Fidesz may distance itself from Jobbik on a rhetorical level, at the grassroots the two parties work closely together, in at least 200 constituencies, states *Searchlight*. Fidesz similarly warns against Roma criminals and it is believed that its support for a US-style 'three strikes and you are out' law, aimed at punishing persistent lawbreakers, is a code for targeting the Roma community. Fidesz's rhetoric against the present Socialist government, as entangled and enmeshed with 'alien interests', appears to draw on an ancient Hungarian anti-Semitism in which Jews were described as 'aliens' out to take over Hungary. According to research by the Progressive Institute for Political Analysis (PIPA), as many as 35 per cent of Fidesz members would welcome Jobbik's presence in the Hungarian parliament.

Hungarian Guard street militia target Roma

The Hungarian Guard, which was formed in 2007, has an estimated 3,000 members. In December 2008, the Municipal Court of Budapest ruled that the group should be disbanded as it 'means to create a climate of fear', while its activities – the marching of its members in Roma-populated settlements and the speeches of its leaders – constitute a breach of the rights of other citizens. The appeals court verdict in July 2009 held that it should disband at once on the grounds that its 'men-

acing, militaristic demonstrations' generate 'ethnic tensions and constituted a threat to public order'. Already, Jobbik has shown its disdain for the Supreme Court ruling - at a mass rally in Budapest on 10 July, members of the European parliament and public figures donned the Hungarian Guard's black and white uniform in open defiance of the court. 'The Guard is the force that will protect those who are scared and live in fear of crime' MEP Krisztina Morvai told the rally. *Searchlight* was critical of the fact that the Hungarian police allowed the Hungarian Guard to demonstrate unchallenged through Roma ghettos where, according to Jobbik's vice president Csanád Szegedi, 'our money pays for gypsies to breed'. It is also concerned that Judit Zima, the head of Tettekesz was fourth on Jobbik's European parliamentary list.

The *Telegraph* also concurred with *Searchlight's* assessment that this uniformed street militia, the stated aim of which is to prevent crime by the country's half-million strong Roma community, bears a disturbing resemblance to the Arrow Cross, Hungary's second world war fascist militiamen, who collaborated with the Nazis in killing tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews. According to Jobbik spokesman Zoltan Fuzessy, the Hungarian Guard's uniforms are simply national folk costume. 'But there is a problem with the Roma and we need to talk about it.'

Czech politicians concerned

On 16 June, the chair of the Czech Social Democrats called on the Hungarian government to stop the spread of the dangerous ideas of Jobbik. Jobbik demands the abolition of the Benes decrees which provided for the confiscation of the property of ethnic Germans and Hungarians and allowed for the transfer of the groups from Czechoslovakia after the second world war. Jobbik also wants a revision of the Trianon peace treaty signed after the first world war in 1920 and which diminished the territory of the former Hungary to its current size.

Anti-Roma racism

The Jobbik campaign took part against the backdrop of a frightening escalation in anti-Roma violence in Hungary, during which a Roma man and his child were shot dead fleeing from their house following an arson attack on 23 February in Tatarszentgyorgy (the authorities initially wrongly claimed that the house caught fire due to an electrical fault). On 16 May, a rally against hate crimes and violence organised by the Hungarian Democratic Charter and the Roma Civil Movement took place in Budapest.

Roma delegation visits Hungary

The European Roma and Travellers Forum staged a four day high-level visit to Hungary in March 2009 in which it visited villages in which Roma were subjected to violent attacks. The fact-finding mission urged the authorities to set up a specialised high-level task force to examine criminal attacks against the Roma and expressed concern that government programmes are not being implemented at a local level due to a huge communication gap. (*Searchlight* May, June, July 2009, *Budapest Times* 17.5.09, *Telegraph* 24.5.09, Amnesty International Report 12009, European Roma and Travellers Forum press release, 16.3.09, *JTA News* 14.6, 3.7.09, German Press Agency 11.7.09, *Prague Daily Monitor* 15.6.09)

IRELAND

Irish millionaire founds European-wide Eurosceptic party

Multi-millionaire Declan Ganley, founded a new party, Libertas, to contest the European elections, and hundreds of Libertas-affiliated candidates stood across Europe. Ganley predicted that more than 100 Libertas-affiliated candidates would win seats but, in the event, it made no breakthrough in Ireland and secured just one MEP, the French nationalist Philippe de Villiers, known for his anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric. (*Economist* 29.6.09)

ITALY

Racism and intolerance grow following European elections

Race, immigration, national identity and national security became major themes in the run-up to the June European elections. The intensity of the debate prompted a warning from President Giorgio Napolitano, at a conference in Rome of European foundations, that social tensions could be inflamed by 'public rhetoric that - also in Italy - does not hesitate to incorporate intolerant and xenophobic tones'. Meanwhile, the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* warned of 'the growing similarities between the far right and the governing coalition'. The truth of the matter, *Searchlight* wrote, is that the far-right supporter faces a dilemma: whether to vote for Roberto Fiore's New Force (Forza Nuova) or Luca Romagnoli's Tricolour Flame, in the full knowledge that they have little chance of winning seats; or opt for Berlusconi and the Northern League, which are no less xenophobic. In the event, the electorate ditched the marginal far right, and voted in droves for Berlusconi's People of Liberty (35.3 per cent of the vote), as well as the Northern League, which doubled its vote from 5 per cent in 2004 to 10.2 per cent today. The Northern League now has nine MEPs.

New alliance of the Italian right

In March, a unified party of the Italian right, the People of Liberty (PdL), previously an electoral coalition of the two parties, was formed from Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Come on Italy) and the post-fascist National Alliance (AN). But there are already tensions within the new party, with Gianfranco Fini (of the now disbanded AN) warning of 'Caesarism'. The Northern League retained its separate identity.

Italy's 'bar-room racism'

For the US magazine, the *Nation*, recollecting Berlusconi's comments following the election of President Barack Obama ('he's young, handsome and deeply tanned'), and Umberto Bossi's remark (Italians don't want 'the Bingo Bongos' living here), what defines the current Italian administration is 'bar-room racism'. Over and over again, the governing coalition and its allies in the Northern League define themselves in opposition to immigrants, indeed in opposition to a 'multi-ethnic Italy' that allegedly threatens the country's national identity.

According to *Searchlight*, the Northern League 'proclaims the most violent anti-immigrant, anti-Islam and homophobic views to be heard in Europe today, certainly on a par with and at times beyond those of the BNP'. The Northern League constantly whips up fears about an 'invasion' of boat people from Africa. During a radio interview on RAI Radio 1, interior minister Roberto Maroni claimed that around two million Africans were ready to set sail from Libya to Italy.

There were more extremist comments from politicians in May when the Northern League's secretary in Milan set the tone for the European parliament elections by suggesting that certain subway coaches should be reserved for the Milanese (see below). Matteo Salvini's comments prompted a public outcry and a defence from Berlusconi who backed Salvini's explanation that his proposal was only meant as a 'quip, a provocation'. While the Northern League called for a freeze on immigration from non-EU countries, this policy is not (as yet) supported by the new PdL.

Introduction of 'push-back policy' for boat people

The backdrop to the elections was the government's decision, at the instigation of the Northern League, to rescind the right to asylum from boat people who would henceforth be turned back before they arrived on Italy's shores. (This has been popularly described as *respingimenti*, the 'push-back' policy, and also involves joint sea patrols by Italy and Libya as part of a Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation Treaty between Rome and Tripoli signed in August 2008.) The Northern League pressed for precisely such a policy through the influence of its most prominent parliamentary representative, interior minister Roberto Maroni. He had argued that non-Italians committed more crime and that the way to 'guarantee the highest possible levels of security' was 'first and foremost by combating clandestine immigration'.

On 6 May, the first such turning-back occurred when 227 migrants, rescued off the Italian coast, were returned, without any screening for refugee status, to Libya, which has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. According to the interior minister, this action comprised a historic 'turning point' in the campaign against illegal immigration. Maroni told a news conference on 7 May, that this was 'the first time we have affirmed the principle of repulsion in Mediterranean waters to the country from which the migrants had left, not their country of origin ... Today, in the name of all countries of the European Union, we have developed a new model to fight clandestine immigration - that is, to repulse at sea all those who try to enter illegally.'

UNHCR ridiculed: The UNHCR's opposition to the so-called 'push-back' policy was the subject of electoral ridicule. At an election campaign rally for the June European parliament elections reported by the ANSA news agency on 18 May, defence minister Ignazio La Russa (AN) said the UNHCR was not worth much, and described UNHCR spokesperson Laura Boldrini as either 'inhumane' because she wants us to keep the illegal immigrants in holding centres and then expel them, or 'criminal' 'since she wants them to escape once they've reached Italy'. Such 'unmotivated personal attacks are unacceptable and will not swerve the UNHCR's commit-

ment in carrying out its mandate and humanitarian mission', said High Commissioner Antonio Guterres. As the diplomatic row continued, foreign minister Franco Frattini reminded the defence minister that international organisations deserved respect.

The new legislative framework

New security legislation approved by the lower house in May (subsequently ratified by the Senate at the beginning of July) was seen as a victory for the Northern League as it had fought for its introduction for around a year. The legislation introduced fines of up to 10,000 Euros on illegal immigrants who would be expelled, a possible jail sentence of up to three years for those who rented houses to illegal immigrants, an increase in time migrants could be detained in holding centres prior to deportation, an imprisonable offence if children were forced to beg (a measure viewed as targeting the Roma).

An obligation on doctors and school principals to report illegal immigrants who used services (dubbed the 'duty to denounce') was dropped, after widespread opposition. (Several Italian NGOs formed the campaign 'Forbidden to denounce. We are doctors and nurses not spies!') At the beginning of July, an open letter signed by some of Italy's most famous writers, was sent to the press condemning the legislation as the 'reintroduction of race laws' (a reference to the infamous Race Laws introduced by Mussolini). The European Commission announced that it was examining the legislation to see whether it complied with EU law.

Vigilantism: mobilising around fear

The security decree - issued two days after two Romanians were arrested for the widely-publicised rape of an Italian teenager in Rome - also sanctioned the creation of citizens' patrols and authorised the hitherto illegal sale of pepper-spray, ostensibly to increase security on Italian streets. During the Senate debate about the law, centre-left lawmakers accused the government of violating the rights of immigrants and said that the citizens' patrols risked becoming vigilante groups taking the law into their own hands. The organisation EveryOne drew attention to other disturbing governmental powers including that to dissolve organisations on the grounds of 'suspicion of terrorism' and close internet sites that defended or instigated delinquency. EveryOne expressed concern that the government would use these measures to attack groups which defended the rights of immigrants, refugees and the Roma, adding that a great deal of official intimidation of these organisations already existed.

According to the *Guardian* (2.5.09), polls reveal an abnormally high level of fear among Italians - of crime, of immigrants and of the consequences of globalisation. And through the mobilisation of this fear, the Italian government, in bringing in the security decree, has implemented a law-and-order crackdown, elements of which go far beyond what is considered acceptable in other parts of Europe. The law and order measures in the security decree were seen as brought in on the back of media coverage of a number of rapes, most blamed on foreigners, especially Romanians. Politicians were accused of stoking up fears that they might subsequently find difficult to control. On February 18, after the two Romanians were arrested for rape, a paper

owned by the Berlusconi family, reported 'The Romanian beasts have been caught'. But three weeks later, DNA tests ruled the Romanian suspects out. 'The whole country was duped on a path of hasty and crude racism' stated an editorial in *La Stampa*. 'The discovery that these two Romanians accused of rape are not guilty is a real slap in the face for our national conscience.'

The citizens' patrols were criticised by the Vatican as 'an abdication of the state' and by the police union Sil-Cigl as unhelpful and confusing. But interior minister Maroni said the formation of organised groups of volunteers, avoided do-it-yourself patrols where people would take justice in their own hands. The Northern League mayor of Treviso told the *Financial Times* that immigrants would not be allowed to join the new citizens' patrols set up to fight crime, 'because they are not Italian'.

Controversy over Italian National Guard

After the European elections, on 15 June, the government announced that it would ban the Italian National Guard from organising citizens' patrols. This far-right group had held a press conference in Milan hosted by the Italian Social Movement on 13 June to announce its formation, and that it would be organising citizens' patrols. Members of the far-right group - compared to Mussolini's Black Shirts - wear uniforms featuring an imperial eagle, a symbol often associated with fascism. Jewish groups vowed to set up 'counter-patrols' if groups like the Italian National Guard were allowed to operate to ensure that such vigilante groups did not commit crimes themselves.

No to 'multi-ethnic' Italy

As new arrivals of boat people sparked off debates about crime and national identity, Berlusconi told a news conference (as cited by the *Washington Post* 9.5.09) that 'the left's idea is of a multi-ethnic Italy. That's not our idea, ours is to welcome only those who meet the conditions for political asylum.' The Northern League reacted with joy to his comments which Roberto Calderoli said represented 'a revolutionary change from the past'. But opposition leader Dario Franceschini said that Berlusconi must accept that it was inevitable that Italy would become multicultural and accused the prime minister of using the topic to divert attention from his marital woes and the economic downturn.

On 5 June, Berlusconi was asked to justify his remark that Milan 'seemed like an African city' and that he 'could not accept' that Italian cities were becoming like this. He has also criticised the numbers of Chinese living in Prato.

Northern League Milan segregation plan

The Northern League's secretary in Milan, Matteo Calvinist, set the tone for the Milan elections with his proposal to designate subway carriages exclusively for the use of registered Milanese residents and women, claiming that the idea was simply an extension of current arrangements reserving seats for the disabled and pregnant women and would combat the feeling that residents of Milan have become second class citizens. 'One's thoughts go back to the affair of Rosa Parks, the black woman who refused to give up her place on the bus and inspired Martin Luther King's struggle', said Dario Franceschini, leader of the Democratic Party.

Berlusconi and power

According to John Hooper, writing in the *Guardian* (2.5.09), Berlusconi enjoys an accumulation of influence and popularity no other leader of Italy has enjoyed since Mussolini. Of most immediate concern are his repeated attacks on the judiciary, his use of procedural measures to curb parliamentary debate and his declared plan to reform the constitution to create a directly elected president with much broader powers. (It is widely believed that Berlusconi intends to stand for the presidency after stepping down as prime minister.) Central to Berlusconi's power, has been his grip on the Italian media. He is the principal shareholder of three of Italy's seven national television stations. Three others, run by Italy's public broadcasting service, RAI, are indirectly answerable to him as prime minister. The non-governmental monitor of international press freedoms, the Freedom House has, in its report, downgraded Italy from having a 'free' to a 'partly free' press.

Far-right parties in the European elections

The electoral law, which had previously allowed small parties to win seats under a version of proportional representation, has recently been changed so as to restrict representation to parties gaining at least 4 per cent of the national vote. Thus while the far-right New Force (FN) led by Roberto Fiore increased its share of the vote on last year's general election, it lost its sole seat in the European parliament, with just 0.5 per cent of the vote. Fiore campaigned for the expulsion of an estimated 150,000 Roma from Italy, and for keeping Turkey out of Europe in order to protect its Christian roots. Fiore topped the FN candidate lists in all five electoral constituencies.

The Tricolour Flame, led by Luca Romagnoli, made an alliance with the Social Right group to contest the elections but also failed to meet the new threshold, with just 0.8 per cent of the national vote. (*Adnkronos* 12.2, 15.4.09, BBC News Online 7.3, 9, 13.5.09, Associated Press 10.5.09, ANSA.it 18.5.09, *International Herald Tribune* 14.5.09, *Daily Telegraph* 15.5.09, *Guardian* 28.3, 2, 9.5, 23.6.09, *New York Times* 8.5.09, *Financial Times* 4.3.09, Associated Press 23.2.09, PICUM Newsletter, February 2009, *Nation* 2.2.09, Reuters 13.3, 2.7.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Migration News Sheet* July 2009, *Independent* 6.6, 3.7.09, see also < www.everyonegroup.com >)

Serious racial violence in run-up to the European elections

Racial violence against the Bangladeshi community in Rome led Bangladesh's ambassador to Italy to issue a statement calling on the Italian authorities to take action.

Rome

Around the beginning of February, a day after four Romanians were arrested for allegedly gang-raping a young Italian woman in the town of Guidonia, on the outskirts of Rome, separate groups of Albanians and Romanians were beaten up during a march organised by a small far-right party. Rome's Mayor Gianni Alemanno warned against holding 'entire communities' responsible, but the attacks, which included a letter bomb that blew out the windows of a Romanian-owned shop, continued. (BBC News Online 4.2.09)

Below is a list of some of the most serious attacks that took place in Rome in the run-up to the European elections.

■ **8 February:** Police acknowledge racial motivation for an attack on three teenage migrants by a man who tried to set them alight with a spray can and a lighter. The assailant had previously been arrested in December 2008 for racially motivated attacks. He told the police, 'You are not supposed to arrest me, you are supposed to arrest those immigrants'. (*Adnkronos International* 12.2.09)

■ **11 February:** Bangladeshi trader had his market stall trashed and was badly beaten by three Italian youths who called him a 'dirty nigger'. (*AKI* 12.2.09)

■ **30 March:** Mohammed Basharat, Pakistani migrant, suffered a brain haemorrhage after being severely beaten by a group of Italian youths. (*AKI* 15.4.09)

■ **13 April:** Saba Sow, a 30-year-old Senegalese migrant factory worker, lost the sight in his left eye after he was racially abused and attacked by a gang, one member of which grabbed a bottle, broke it on the pavement and stabbed him in the face. One man arrested and charged with assault with racial hatred as an aggravating circumstance. The mayor of Rome condemned the attack.

Milan

■ **Early May:** A vigilante group in Milan, operating under the name of 'Death Company', attacked a number of Romanian ethnic Roma with pepper spray. (See <<http://www.everyonegroup.com>>)

The Northern League in the regions

At the same time as the European elections, there were local elections in Italy.

First black mayor elected near Milan

In Voggoi, near Varese, east of Milan, Italy elected its first black mayor, paradoxically, for the anti-immigrant Northern League. Sandy Cane, who is Italian-American, does not believe that it is a contradiction for a black woman to represent an anti-immigration party and regarded Matteo Salvini's remarks about segregating train passengers by race as a joke. (*Independent* 10.6.09)

Treviso Northern League mayor fuels racism

The Northern League controls the city of Treviso through mayor Giancarlo Gentilini, nicknamed the 'Lion of Treviso', who is being investigated for incitement to racism after a speech in which he exhorted citizens to have 'children of my race, the race of the [river] Piave, that which must command Treviso'. He is also quoted in the *Nation* as saying that Muslim immigrants should go 'piss in their own mosques'. Even though immigrants make up nearly 10 per cent of the population around Treviso, Gentilini's concept of integration rests on Italianisation. Hence he does not tolerate the formation of mosques. 'There were never mosques in Treviso', he told the *Financial Times*. 'They tried to pray in public places but got sent away.' Gentilini suggests that until relations with Islam are resolved nationally, Muslims should pray at home 'like we do before going to bed'. (*Financial Times* 4.3.09)

LATVIA

Extreme-right party gains seat in European parliament

Three extreme-right parties contested the European elections but only For Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) managed to secure representation. With 58,997 votes, it now has one MEP. The Osipova Party, which is linked to the Russian neo-Nazi scene, and 'All for Latvia' failed to gain representation. For Fatherland and Freedom merged with the Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) in the 1990s. Some of its members regard the Latvian Legion – the Latvian units of the Waffen SS – as brave patriots who fought against Stalin's Soviet Union. (*Searchlight* July 2009, *Guardian* 22.6.09)

LITHUANIA

No far-right gains in elections, but intolerance towards homosexuality grows

The Lithuanian Centre party fielded candidates, but its 3.09 per cent share of the vote was not enough to win it any seats. Despite the far right's failure to gain representation, Lithuania has come under the spotlight for the growing intolerance within the mainstream debate. Immediately after the elections, the Lithuanian parliament agreed a bill that would ban the dissemination of information to young people that was deemed to promote homosexuality. Information about homosexuality, the government argues, can harm the mental health and physical, intellectual and moral development of young people. The legislation was backed by the right-wing populist Order and Justice party. Petras Grazulis, who co-sponsored the bill, said that it would be a step towards the raising of 'healthy generations unaffected by the rotten culture overwhelming them'. (*Searchlight* July 2009, *Deutsche Welle* 15.7.09)

MALTA

Unprecedented levels of xenophobia reported in run-up to European elections

In the run-up to the European elections, the issue of irregular migration was a dominant theme, leading to concern from the parliamentary Foreign and European Affairs Committee that the unexpected increase in boat arrivals in the winter months was fuelling unprecedented levels of xenophobia, rooted in frustration against the EU's inaction on the matter. An understanding between the two main parties, the Nationalist Party (PN) and the Labour Party (PL), that the national interest on immigration should take precedence over partisan politics, broke down on 5 May, with angry accusations levelled at Joseph Muscat, the Labour Party leader, for breaking the consensus.

Meanwhile, National Action (Azzjoni Nazzjonali, AN), an anti-immigration party founded in 2007 and led by

Dr Josie Muscat (not to be confused with his namesake, the Labour Party leader), a medical entrepreneur and former Nationalist Party MP, ran in the European parliament elections for the first time. And once again, the far-right maverick, Norman Lowell, contested the elections under the banner of Imperium Europa, despite a controversy over a suspended prison sentence for incitement to racial hatred (the Electoral Commission had ruled that this did not debar him from standing). But neither of these parties was able to capitalise on the issue of irregular migration, partly because other parties had established a monopoly on attacking the poor and the displaced.

National action plan to force detainees to work

Under a ten-point programme to contest irregular migration announced in February 2009, AN leader Muscat declared that immigrants in detention centres should be forced to work for their food and lodging. 'Nobody eats and drinks without working except the sick and the elderly', he said, adding that after a few days of rest, illegal immigrants should be taken to clean and fix roads, paint lamp posts, fix walls and perform other works. The proposal was denounced as a system of forced labour. The AN also sought to capitalise on disturbances at a detention centre, issuing a statement calling for the suspension of Malta's obligations under the Geneva Convention and the Dublin II treaty. The party said the government should refuse to take in any more illegal immigrants and that those who did manage to land should be given safe means to carry on their journey.

Mainstream parties squabble over immigration management role

The 2008 European Asylum Pact includes a clause for transferring refugees from border states throughout the EU. But such 'burden-sharing' under the Pact is voluntary. All Maltese mainstream political parties want this to change. Ever since April 2009 and the so-called Pinar case (the wrangle between Italy and Malta over who should assume responsibility for over 140 migrants rescued by a Turkish cargo boat forty miles from Lampedusa), Malta has attempted to liaise with Libya and Italy over new arrivals, pressing for a more concerted EU 'burden-sharing' deal.

On 5 May, the PL and the PN engaged in open warfare, after the PL put out a statement on illegal immigration which the PN said betrayed the national interest. The PN claimed that PL leader Muscat, through an 'irresponsible position', was serving the interests of the Italian government, which had an interest in taking over Malta's search and rescue area and the Flight Information Region. The PL MEPs were accused of having a dismal record on illegal immigration, abstaining during votes on detention policy and the repatriation of migrants. This was compared to the actions of PN MEPs, who had helped shape the European parliament's policy on immigration, by increasing the Frontex budget and securing its backing for amendments to the Dublin regulations and mandatory burden-sharing.

Later, both the Maltese government as well as opposition PL leader Joseph Muscat made statements welcoming Italy's decision to return immigrants rescued at sea to Libya, although Muscat said that he hoped that

it was not just an election ploy in the run-up to the European elections and that such removals would continue after 6 June. Home Affairs Minister Dr Mifsud Bonnici gave more cautious support, and suggested the setting up of a checkpoint in Libya to monitor the flow of fleeing Africans as well as a plan whereby Africans seeking protection would have the right to make formal applications at a base in Libya staffed by the UNHCR, Libyan and EU officials.

Then, on 29 May, prime minister Lawrence Gonzi once again accused the PL of turning illegal migration into a political football. The PL accused the government of being weak on immigration. (*Malta Today* 17.5.09, *Times of Malta* 19, 23.2, 5, 10, 12, 29.5.09)

NETHERLANDS

Islamophobic Freedom Party second in European elections

The extreme-right Freedom Party (PvV), led by Geert Wilders, banned from Britain for 'hate speech' and facing trial in the Netherlands for inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims, scored its biggest victory yet, seizing 15 per cent of the vote and second place in the European parliament elections. (At the last general election in 2006, Wilders scored 6 per cent of the vote.) In this, the PvV's first contestation of the European elections, Wilders' party won four out of the Netherlands total of twenty-five seats. The PvV will remain independent of any parliamentary group in the European parliament.

While the Conservatives polled most votes, they lost two seats. The biggest losers were the Labour Party, pushed back into third place (down three seats). Turnout was around 40 per cent, similar to the last European elections, and many of the smaller parties such as Democrats (D66) and the Green Party (up one seat) also scored well.

Wilders to remain as MP

The Dutch election system is such that a candidate can win a seat with enough preference votes or based on the party's total number of votes. This meant that Wilders, although officially number ten on the PvV list, could have taken up a seat in the European parliament, should he have wished to do so. But in order to do so he would have had to give up his Dutch parliamentary seat. Immediately after the election, Wilders said that he would not take up a seat in the European parliament in protest against an institution that needed to change.

PvV campaign themes

The PvV's slogan was 'We are going for the Netherlands' and 'Defend Dutch interests in the European parliament'. The PvV list of largely unknowns, was headed by Barry Madlener, a former councillor for Liveable Rotterdam. According to *Searchlight*, the list consisted of a former policeman, former parliamentary assistants to the PvV, a media freelancer, a columnist and a civil servant from the foreign ministry. The PvV pledged to campaign for the abolition of the European parliament, for Bulgaria and Romania to be kicked out of the EU and promised to

destroy the EU from 'within'. Turkey should not be allowed to enter the EU because according to Madlener, 'Turkish culture is an Islamic culture and incompatible with our western culture'. Madlener told the *Volkskrant* that Turkey could 'be a good trading partner and a good neighbour, but certainly not a family member'.

A base in various cities

The *Volkskrant* newspaper has a link to an interactive map that displays the election results and the cities where the PvdV was the winner. In the Christian Democrat prime minister's hometown of Capelle aan de IJssel, the PvdV was the highest-scoring party with 22.5 per cent of the vote as it was in Leyllystad, where it achieved 23 per cent of the vote. Other major cities where it did notably well were The Hague (33.7%), Limburg (31.1%), Almere (27%) and Gouda (17.5%).

Other parties also exploit migration issues

Labour and migration were important topics of debate in the run-up to the election, with the Christian Democrats favouring a strict policy based on skills, while the Labour Party called for a blue card similar to the American green card for migrant workers. Barry Madlener said that the Netherlands had become a 'Valhalla' for illegal immigrants, leading to unsafe neighbourhoods populated by illegals who then got medical support and education for their children. 'That sounds harsh', he said 'and that's exactly what it is'.

Alarming level of support amongst schoolchildren

In a mock election staged among 15,000 pupils in 140 schools in the Netherlands in the week prior to the elections, Wilders scored more than 19.2 per cent, ahead of all other parties (the Labour Party was second with 18.6 per cent of the vote).

Finally, Wilders prosecuted

In May, Geert Wilders lost his appeal against prosecution for inciting hatred and discrimination against Muslims, particularly for comparing the Qur'an to *Mein Kampf* and Islam with fascism. On the website of the PvdV, Wilders said, 'It is a political trial. I am being prosecuted for saying about Islam what millions of Dutch people think. Freedom of speech is in danger of being sacrificed on the altar of Islam.'

Negative stereotyping of Muslims blamed for rise in Islamophobia

René Danen, president of Nederland Bekent Kleur (Netherlands shows its colours), pointed out that while the foreign media routinely described Wilders as 'extreme-right', the Dutch media, including NRC, did not call the PvdV by its name, preferring to describe it as 'populist' or 'anti-Islam'. Anti-Muslim speeches by Geert Wilders and the huge media coverage he gets is believed to have increased Islamophobia, and even the association of Dutch municipalities now agrees that the major issue in many towns is the growth of far-right extremism. It is also leading to a situation where many Dutch Muslims, despite feeling that the Netherlands is their home, are so fearful for the future that they are considering emigrating. In a poll commissioned by the current affairs TV-programme Netwerk, in response to Wilders' European election success, 57 per cent of the 319

Turkish and Moroccans interviewed said that they felt less welcome in the Netherlands; 51 per cent said they would consider leaving. In addition 75 per cent felt that they were judged more negatively since the rise of Wilders and four out of ten reported an increase in discrimination. Turkish-born Rotterdam councillor Hamit Karakus warned that children of Turkish origin feel they are not accepted in Dutch society and that the popularity of the PvdV was fuelling support for a small but growing minority of radical Muslims in the Netherlands.

Research by the Nicis-Istitute (based on 225 questionnaires sent to Dutch citizens of Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese origin, living in Rotterdam) also indicated that young people of migrant origin do not feel welcome in the city. And elderly Muslims fear that the rise of the PvdV could herald their deportation from the Netherlands, leading mayor Aboualeb to comment that it is very important that the 'new Dutch', the children and grandchildren of first-generation migrants, identify with Rotterdam and the Netherlands as their home.

But some Young Moroccans have responded by setting up a new website <<http://www.wijblijvenhier.nl/>> ('We're here to stay'). (NRC 15.12.08, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, Radio Netherlands 20.5.09, *Guardian* 5.6.09, *Volkskrant* 27, 28, 5, 3, 4, 16.6.09, *Washington Post* 11.6.09, *Muslim News* 30.6.09, NRC 30.6.09, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/binnenland/article1209988.ece/In_woonplaats_Balkenende_is_PVV_de_grootste>)

What implications will Wilders' success have for the government?

How will the government react to Wilders' victory, and the inroads he seems to be making into the Labour Party's share of the vote? Will it seek confrontation with Wilders, or will it take up his anti-immigration themes?

Focus on 'import brides'

Immediately after the elections, on June 8, the new minister of integration Eberhard Van der Laan interviewed by *De Telegraaf* said that the continuing influx of poorly-educated marriage partners from Morocco and Turkey (whom he described as 'import brides') placed an unbearable burden on Dutch society. The government was seeking ways of ending the 'inflow of unskilled marriage candidates because it negates all the energy and money invested in integration'. The Christian Democrats and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) welcomed the move, saying that the government had finally recognised the 'relationship between large-scale immigration and unsuccessful integration'. Government figures suggest that 15,330 so called 'import brides' entered the Netherlands in 2008.

Wilders calls for deportation programme

In a statement broadcast on Danish TV, Wilders said that 'millions, tens of millions' of Muslims who commit a crime or 'start thinking about jihad or sharia' should be stripped of their Dutch nationality and deported. Integration minister van der Laan challenged him on the grounds that he had got his statistics wrong. (*Dutch News* 17.6.09, *Europenews* 8.6.09, *Expatica News* 10.6.09)

Neo-Nazi scene boosted by Wilders and focus on Muslim extremism

In the annual edition of the Racism and Extremism Monitor published by the Anne Frank Foundation and Leiden University in December 2008, researcher Jaap van Donselaar warned that while Muslim organisations were being monitored, the activities of the extreme-right went virtually unnoticed. The decision by the justice department not to prosecute Wilders for some of his racist comments, was also criticised. Extreme-right demonstrations have grown significantly, and the government's focus on Muslim radicalism gave the extreme-right a fillip. Sympathisers of the extreme-right have been involved in racially motivated incidents, while negative stereotyping of Muslims was affecting young people's perceptions. An opinion poll showed that over 50 per cent of Dutch, non-Muslim 14- to 16-year-olds have negative attitudes towards Muslims. Violence against Muslims, particularly Moroccans, has increased. The monitor cited a passage from the annual school inspection report which stated: 'Schools are much more likely to face "white" extremism and clashes between native Dutch students and students from an immigrant background than religious extremism.' (See <<http://www.annfrank.org/>>)

POLAND

Dismal showing for far right as Law and Justice party seizes agenda

The extreme-right racist and homophobic League of Polish Families (LPR) made a dismal showing in the European parliament elections, with just 1.14 per cent of the vote it lost all its ten previous seats. Another once powerful far-right party, Self-Defence, also scored poorly, securing just 1.5% of the vote.

Governing party campaigns for Christian Europe

But there is little comfort from the demise of the extreme right, for the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), that was the elections main winner, seems to have incorporated its homophobic agenda. The *Economist* magazine also criticised its use of Christian themes. At a rally in the city of Bialystok, PiS leader, Jaroslaw Kaczynski stated 'If Europe is to be strong, it has to be Christian. And today it is anti-Christian, and especially anti-Catholic.'

Decline of extreme right

This seems to be the last straw in a period of dramatic decline for the League of Polish Families, which was the second biggest party with 16 per cent of the vote at the last European parliamentary elections. It was even, from 2006-07, a junior partner in the coalition government with its leader, Roman Giertych, serving, for a while as education minister. But since then it has declined electorally, and despite having fought the election under the Libertas label, it won no seats. During the election, it allied itself with the All Polish Youth League of Polish Families. (*Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Guardian* 23.6.09)

ROMANIA

European elections see breakthrough for extreme right

The Greater Romania Party (PRM), under the leadership of the notorious Corneliu Vadim, made a breakthrough in the European elections, securing 8.7 per cent of the vote, which translates into three MEPs. This means that one of its candidates, the flamboyant businessman Gigi Becali, has gone from a prison cell to a seat in the European parliament in less than two months. Becali is currently under criminal investigation on kidnapping charges but has vowed to bypass a ban on his travelling outside Romania while criminal proceedings are pending so as to take up a seat in the European parliament. Becali, a shepherd who rose to be a successful businessman and the owner of a football club, used his money to build churches and is very popular in Romania. His association with the Greater Romania Party is said to be the reason for its current success. (*Searchlight* July 2009, Associated Press 9.6.09)

SLOVAKIA

Slovak National Party gains first MEP

The extreme-right Slovak National Party (SNS) won its first seat in the European parliament, scoring 5.5 per cent of the vote. Led by Jan Slota, the SNS ran on an anti-Hungarian, anti-Roma and anti-Jewish ticket.

Nationalism dominates campaign

The election campaign as a whole was characterised by nationalism, with Slovak-Hungarian relations being at the centre of the main debate. The SNS was accused of playing the 'Hungarian card'. Historically, relations between Hungary and Slovakia have been tense, but after the SNS joined the Slovak governing coalition in 2006, things took a turn for the worse. Jan Slota is known for his inflammatory rhetoric against Hungarians. (EurActiv.com 5.6.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, Inter Press Service 5.5.09)

SLOVENIA

No inroads for Slovene National Party

The anti-migrant, pro-Serbian Slovene National Party, led by Zmago Jelinci, failed to gain representation at the European parliament, scoring 2.88 per cent of the vote. (*Searchlight* June, July 2009)

SPAIN

No gains for far right but mainstream parties fuel racism

Not one of the five far-right parties that stood in the

European parliamentary elections gained representation. This could be due to the strong stance on immigration taken by the mainstream parties.

Immigrants link scapegoating to economic downturn

In the months proceeding the elections, and in the face of rising unemployment, the two mainstream parties competed as to which could be toughest on immigration with immigrant organisations saying they feared that in the current economic climate they were being turned into scapegoats. Fears about the economic downturn resulted in the ruling Socialist government launching a programme offering jobless legal immigrants a lump sum if they agreed to go home for a few years until the economy recovered. Labour Minister Celestino Corbacho also visited Bucharest to sign an agreement to make it easier for unemployed Romanians to return home. Extra funds were also made available to NGOs to assist immigrants who desired repatriation, but did not have the funds. The Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia said that statements put out by the government at a time of economic crisis fuelled resentment against immigrants. An opinion poll published in March 2009 by the *Financial Times* stated that around 70 per cent of Spaniards were in favour of their government asking unemployed immigrants to leave the country.

Far-right parties contest elections

The website cafebabel.com provides information on the far right parties. The European elections were contested by the Social Republican Movement, Authentic Falange, National Democracy, Falange (FEJONS), National Front (FN) and Spain 2000.

■ *Spain 2000* is headed by Jose Luis Roberto, a well-known lawyer and businessman from Valencia (where Spain 2000 has two local councillors). The party is against globalisation and immigration and sees itself as similar to the FN in France.

■ *The Falange*, headed by Manuel Andrino, is also against immigration and globalisation and campaigned against Turkey's entry into the EU. 'We cannot comprehend nor accept that in... the EU, there could be included those states which will never form part of Europe, nor of western civilisation, such as Turkey', argued Andrino.

■ *The National Front* was formed by ex-members of the Falange and is headed by Jose Fernando Cantalpiedra. It too models itself on the FN in France and is against immigration.

Moroccans targeted by police

Migrants complained of increasing police harassment as a memo leaked to the press suggested that the government had instructed one particular police station in Madrid to arrest a quota of thirty undocumented migrants a week, adding that Moroccans were a priority because they could be expelled from Spain cheaply and were accepted by their home government with a minimum of fuss. The president of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers, Kamal Rahmouni, said that the instructions were not 'worthy of a country governed by the rule of law. If police issued targets for arresting Moroccans, it would lead to a situation where people were harassed simply because of their physical appearance'. (Acció Popular Contra la Impunitat, www.accio-popular.org, cafebabel.com 16.3.09,

Associated Press 18.2.09, Javno.com 16.2.09, www.diagonalperiodico.net 10.6.09, *Rights and Freedoms*, Number 104 10.6.09, *Migration News Sheet* June 2009, *Think Spain* 15.7.09)

'Xenophobia is sweeping the country'

According to the Movement Against Intolerance, there are around 4,000 racist attacks in Spain each year, but still there is no standard police procedure for detecting these crimes or protecting the victims. In its 2009 *Raxen Report*, it stated that in the three regions of Comunidad Valenciana, Madrid and Catalunya, over one half of last year's racist incidents take place. However, racist violence was also spreading to other hitherto relatively unaffected areas (Andalucia, the Balearic Islands, Aragón, Castilla & León and Murcia) due to the spread of 'neo-fascist' behaviour in Spain. According to Esteban Ibbara, 'a wave of xenophobia is sweeping the country'. The only reason that 'it hasn't made it to parliament in the shape of a political party yet... is because it is too fragmented'.

Insufficient monitoring of far right

The far right, downgraded by the police into 'urban tribes', is insufficiently monitored, despite the fact that every year virtually every big city sees a repetition of the 'hunts' led by neo-Nazi groups. In the absence of institutional change, the Progressive Union of Public Prosecutors called for the creation of a specialised prosecution service to handle hate crimes.

Focus on Valencia

Far-right violence in the Valencia region has gone on unchecked. Political organisations, community centres, trade union offices, alternative bars been attacked with impunity, and fifteen devices have exploded over the last two years. Campaigners say not a single person has been arrested. More than thirty organisations have now come together to form the People's Action Against Impunity. (Acció Popular Contra la Impunitat, www.accio-popular.org, cafebabel.com 16.3.09, Associated Press 18.2.09, Javno.com 16.2.09, www.diagonalperiodico.net 10.6.09, *Rights and Freedoms*, Number 104 10.6.09, *Migration News Sheet* June 2009, *Think Spain* 15.7.09)

SWEDEN

No representation for far right but violence against refugees grows

Neither the far-right Sweden Democrats (SD), nor the breakaway National Democrats (ND) managed to secure representation in the European elections. But this could be put down to the mainstream parties' monopolisation of the immigration theme.

Parties differ over immigration

Immigration was a theme in the run-up to the elections, though there were some surprises. The Christian Democrats opposed the centre-right coalition government's proposal to restrict family reunification rights and called for a more generous attitude towards

refugees. The Moderate Party, however, called for stricter immigration policies, via the introduction of integration contracts, limitations on where immigrants could settle and withdrawal of Swedish citizenship from those naturalised citizens who committed criminal acts.

Far-right racism exposed

The SD share of the vote at 3.3 per cent was down from the last general election, but up from the last European elections where it scored 1.1 per cent of the vote. It needed 4 per cent of the vote to gain one MEP and this was the first time that its support slid in recent elections. The SD leadership attempted to present the party as democratic and not racist. But during the election campaign, three journalists from Swedish Radio News attended party meetings in major cities, equipped with hidden microphones. Racist comments made by party members against refugees and immigrants as violence-prone criminals and diseased parasites that did not want to work or integrate were then broadcast on public service radio and TV. The party refused to apologise for the comments.

Violence against refugees

■ **9 May:** Thirty out of seventy refugees, mostly from Iraq, said they would leave the town of Vännäs in northern Sweden after being harassed outside their apartment by a gang of between thirty and fifty youths in an incident they believe was racially motivated. The police denied that the attack was racially motivated, putting it down to local tensions. (*Migration News Sheet* June 2009)

■ **2 June:** Police said that an attack on a refugee centre run by the Migration Board in Karlskoga, Örebro, was arson. Flammable liquid was poured through the letterbox and lit. The centre is both an office and a residential centre and there was one family and one single person living there at the time of the attack. The office caught fire but thankfully everyone was evacuated safely. The refugee centre has experienced other attacks in the past. (UNHCR Baltic & Nordic Headlines 15.5.3.6.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009, *Karlskoga Tidning* 2.6.09, *The Local* 30.3.09, *Svenska Dagbladet* 17.2.09, *Migration News Sheet* June 2009)

UK

Far right and UKIP make significant gains in Euro elections

The anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic UK Independence Party (UKIP) scored 16.5 per cent of the vote in the European parliamentary elections (making it the second-largest British party, after the Conservatives, in the European Parliament with thirteen seats). The British National Party (BNP) also made its most significant breakthrough in British politics, gaining, for the first time ever, two seats in the European parliament (6.2 per cent of the vote). Its leader Nick Griffin was elected as MEP in the North West while Andrew Brons – once, in the 1950s, a member of the National Socialist Movement which was founded in honour of Hitler, as well as, in the 1970s, the chair of the National Front – won a seat in Yorkshire and Humberside.

Background

In the run-up to the European elections, there was widespread anger against politicians as the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper ran a series of revelations about MPs excessive expenses claims. Thus, while the BNP actually scored a lower per centage of the vote in the North West region where it won a seat than it had in 2004 – the slump in Labour support meant the BNP's share of the vote increased. While nationally its share of the vote was 6.2 per cent, this is just 1.3 per cent more than in 2004.

The UKIP campaign

UKIP now has thirteen seats (up one). Led by Nigel Farage, its candidates included Deva Kumarsi, who is originally from Sri Lanka and lost his job as a postmaster after he refused to serve customers unless they spoke English. UKIP scored particularly strongly in the north-west, where it increased its per cent of the vote by 3.7 to 15.8.

UKIP's campaign sought to cash in on the anger generated by the MPs expenses revelations, despite the fact that Ashley Mote, elected UKIP MEP for south-east England in 2004, was jailed in 2007 for falsely claiming £65,000 in benefits. Another former UKIP MEP, Tom Wise, is facing prosecution for alleged false accounting and money laundering relating to his EU expenses. He denies the charge.

The BNP's campaign

The BNP was led by Nick Griffin, a former member of the National Front who has a conviction for inciting racial hatred, and was returned as an MEP for the north-east area. During its campaign, it adopted the slogan 'Battle for Britain' and promised 'the largest and most sophisticated campaign in the history of patriotic politics'. Its decision to use the image of Winston Churchill and use quotes from one of his speeches, drew the ire of Churchill's grandson who called the manipulation of his grandfather 'offensive and disgusting'. BNP campaign pledges included opposing the EU and its 'dangerous drive... to give 80 million low-wage Muslim Turks the right to swamp Britain' and setting up a voluntary repatriation scheme for immigrants.

Areas of strength

The BNP scored an average of 9.8 per cent of the vote in Yorkshire. The BNP did well in Burnley (17%), Rotherham (15%), Doncaster (12%) and in Barnsley where its share of the vote doubled from 8 per cent in 2004 to 17 per cent. In Burnley, where it also won a county council seat, its share of the vote dropped from 17 to 15 per cent. In Bradford, Nick Griffin's campaign rested on the claim that Britain's Asian community was carrying out 'not immigration, but colonisation', aiming to take over, rather than mix in.

Both BNP MEPs attributed their support to a vote against racism. 'This is ordinary decent people in Yorkshire kicking back against racism, because racism in this country is now directed overwhelmingly against people who look like me', said Nick Griffin who said the BNP victory was vindication of the party's stance. Immigration, he said, had become harmful to Britain, particularly with the spread of radical Islam.

Targeted areas

There are twelve UK constituencies (elections are via a version of proportional representation for a total of 72 MEPs) and the BNP targeted the north-west of England, particularly Greater Manchester and Merseyside, for its primary UK campaigning. In 2004 European parliament elections, it won 6.4 per cent of the vote, on a low turnout of 41.1 per cent.

Who supports the BNP?

Academics Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford examined a large sample of those who in the past voted for the BNP. They found that the BNP is gaining new support principally from older, less educated, white working-class men – in other words voters from Labour's traditional base. The two authors believe that roughly one-fifth of white British voters share most or all of the BNP's views, even though most find it difficult to vote for the BNP, either because of the BNP's association with extremism, or because there is no BNP candidate to vote for.

Search for European allies

The BNP has failed to make it into any grouping in the European parliament. Nevertheless, it has forged links with Hungary's Jobbik group and its paramilitary offshoot the Hungarian Guard. BNP deputy leader, Simon Darby, spoke at a Jobbik and Hungarian Guard rally in April 2009, and also attended an international far-right rally in Milan in April organised by Roberto Fiore, once an Italian MEP and leader of Forza Nuova. At the Hungarian rally, Griffin compared immigration in Britain to 'Roma criminality in Hungary' and noted that 'the BNP and Jobbik share similar resistance from the media'.

Legal challenges

The BNP constitution bars black people from joining the party and the Equality and Human Rights Commission accused it of a breach of the Race Relations Act. Its employment practices are also to be subject to legal challenge, as European parliamentarians receive an annual staff budget of Euros 210,480 to spend on employees in the European parliament or the UK, and employment law prohibits direct or indirect discrimination. In the BNP's 'Language and Concepts Discipline Manual' the BNP states that black Britons and Asian Britons 'do not exist' and that the correct term to use should be 'racial foreigners'.

BNP linked to US hate crime

There was renewed focus on the BNP's violent past when it emerged that the US white supremacist who killed a security guard at the Holocaust memorial museum in Washington had attended meetings of the American Friends of the British National Party (AFBNP). The AFBNP was set up to raise funds for the BNP from far-right activists in the US. (*Daily Telegraph* 15.5.09, *Agence France Presse* 22.5.09, *New Statesman* 16.4.09, *Guardian* 3, 8, 9, 12, 13, 24. 6.09, *Red Pepper Online* <www.redpepper.org.uk/Holding-back-the-BNP>, BBC News Online 6.5, 8.6.09, *Searchlight* June, July 2009)

County Council and mayoral election results

On 4 June, in elections for twenty-seven county councils and seven unitary seats, the BNP won three county

council seats: Padiham and Burnley West in Lancashire, Coalville in Leicestershire, and South Oxhey in Hertfordshire. The BNP put up 450 candidates, concentrating on Essex, Hertfordshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Leicestershire (East Midlands). It also put forward mayoral candidates in Hartlepool, North Tyneside and Doncaster.

English Democrats capture Doncaster

In Doncaster, in an unforeseen event, the English Democrats' candidate was elected mayor. The English Democrats want every public building to fly the English flag, tight immigration controls, devolution and the reunification of dismembered Yorkshire. (*Observer* 7.6.09)

Far right pose major terrorist threat

Scotland Yard's counter-terrorism unit has redeployed officers to increase its monitoring of the extreme right. It fears that right-wing extremists may stage a deadly terrorist attack in Britain to try to stoke up racial tensions. The counter-terrorism command, SO15, has also been asked to examine what the economic downturn would mean for far-right violence.

In July, a white supremacist was convicted of planning a terrorist bombing campaign after police discovered he had turned his bedroom into a bomb factory. (*Guardian* 7, 15.7.09)

Northern Ireland: Romanian Roma leave Belfast after racist campaign

Many of the estimated 110 men, women and children, the majority of whom were Roma, who were subjected to a sustained campaign of racist intimidation in Belfast, have left Northern Ireland and returned to Romania. The city's lord mayor described the violence as a 'stain of shame over Belfast'. Over several nights crowds stoned the homes of the families, smashing windows and posting extracts of *Mein Kampf* through letterboxes. After the violence started to escalate from 11 June onwards, Romanians were forced on 16 June to take temporary shelter in the City Church (which was subsequently vandalised) and later a leisure centre, after being hounded from their homes in south Belfast, close to the Village, a loyalist enclave. (There were further attacks in east Belfast.) The Housing Executive paid for the families to return to Romania.

Who carried out the attacks?

There has been much discussion about the far-right sympathies of those who carried out the violence, and whether they were linked to organised racist and fascist groups. On 15 June, during a rally called to show solidarity with the Romanians, a group of youths, chanting Combat 18 slogans, attacked the demonstrators with bottles and bricks, with some giving Nazi salutes. Both main loyalist paramilitary groups, the UNF and UDA, condemned the racist attacks and said none of their members were involved. However, the Village, the loyalist enclave, has for some time been a pressure point for racism in the province. Since the middle of the decade, foreign nationals – Chinese, Poles, Slovaks and now Romanians – who have moved to the area have been the targets of racists.

Police claimed that there was no evidence that the

neo-Nazi terror group Combat 18 had organised cells in the Greater Belfast areas. While the far right remains electorally irrelevant, small neo-Nazi organisations are trying to exploit the upsurge in racist violence and many fear that with the main loyalist paramilitary movements decommissioning their illegal weapons, a vacuum has been created on the ground which the far right seeks to exploit. As one senior UDA member told the *Observer* newspaper (21.6.09) 'We have a job on our hands now persuading an entire generation that grew up looking up to men who took up arms for the loyalist cause that violence is not the answer'.

The UDA spokesperson fears that neo-Nazi groups are now exploiting disaffected young Protestants. The gangs who carried out these attacks, he said were 'copy-cat racists' who were adopting Combat 18's name to instil fear into the immigrant community. Such groups would include the Ulster British People's Party (UBPP), a breakaway faction from the BNP, which had warned of further racially motivated violence ahead. And a racist and hate-filled message from Combat 18, warning Romanian gypsies that 'Loyalist C18 are coming to beat you like a baiting bear', was broadcast by text and email all over Northern Ireland.

Police and local authority criticised

Two teenagers, believed to be young disaffected Protestant loyalists with far-right sympathies, have been arrested. Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde defended the Police Service of Northern Ireland from accusations that it had not done enough to respond to racist attacks on Romanians.

In addition, Belfast City Council was criticised for its failure to assist loyalist communities tackle racism in areas where Combat 18 has been attempting to recruit. The *Belfast Telegraph* reported that twelve loyalist groups from the Greater Belfast area applied over a year ago for assistance for community workers to take part in anti-racism training, but twelve months later the council had not even considered the application from the charity, Forward Learning.

Solidarity and support

There was wide support for the families from political parties, trades unions, churches, Amnesty International and the traveller community. Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's deputy first minister, stood beside the Democratic Unionist party minister Jeffrey Donaldson to condemn the attacks. On 2 July, a public rally was held in Belfast where trade union leaders spoke up for migrant workers, condemned the racist violence and called for more resources to be made available for 'anti-racism champions in every community, across the creeds and the classes'. The common complaint against the Romanians and east European migrants in general is that they are taking away jobs and begging on the street. 'Whether they are begging or not, no-one has the right to attack, intimidate or hurt them', said McGuinness, who said that what happened to the Romanians was no different from the sectarian street murders and 'punishment attacks' that still occurred in Northern Ireland. Peter Bunting at the rally on 2 July also faced down the 'taking our jobs' myth, stressing that 'migrant workers are filling jobs which need to be done, and paying taxes which pay for public services.

They are collecting far fewer benefits than they are entitled to, such as universal child benefit'. 'The health service could not function without skilled immigrant labour. Our most vulnerable, our aged and our ill, are being cared for by migrants. We owe them.'

Racist violence on the increase

The incidents were the latest in a series of eruptions of racist activity. Racially-motivated crime has more than doubled over the last five years in Northern Ireland. In 2003-2004 the Police Service of Northern Ireland reported 453 racial incidents but in the last twelve months more than 1,000 incidents of racial hate crime have been recorded. Today, 40 per cent of racist incidents involve violent crime, while the rest are against property.

■ In April, forty-six families, mainly from Poland, fled their homes in the Village, south Belfast, after a series of attacks by a racist gang. The incidents came in the days that followed a football match between Northern Ireland and Poland at which there had been trouble between fans. The police investigation continues and is centred on youths with far-right links.

There were further attacks, in the days following the attacks on the Romanians.

■ A Hindu priest and his family were forced out of north Belfast after youths tried to break down the doors of the Indian Community Centre, where the family lived, while the priest's wife was alone inside.

■ On 22 June City Church, which had provided shelter for the Romanians, was vandalised and three men arrested. (BBC News Online 23.6.09)

■ Anna Lo, Northern Ireland's only ethnic minority assembly member, was warned by the police of a serious threat to attack her home. (BBC News Online 30.6.09)

■ On 22 June in County Tyrone a Polish couple with 4-year-old boy left their home after numerous racist attacks. (*Migration News Sheet* July 2009)

In Coleraine, where a Catholic man was killed by a Protestant mob, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) has led a campaign to stop a mosque being built.

Legacy of sectarianism

Neil Jarman from the Institute of Conflict Research in Belfast, who conducted several studies into racism in Northern Ireland, believes that one legacy of Belfast's long history of sectarianism has been the creation of a sub-culture where 'anyone slightly different becomes a target for intimidation'. While the number of racially motivated incidents are increasing, sectarian crime remains steady. (*Guardian* 17, 18, 19, 25.6.09, *Scotland on Sunday* 21.6.09, BBC News Online 18.6.09, *Independent* 18.6.09, German Press Agency 17.6.09, *Observer* 21.6.09, *Belfast Telegraph* 26.6, 2.7.09, *Economist* 25.6.09, *Searchlight* July 2009)

Racist murders

Germany: Why did Marwa al-Sherbini die?

On 1 July, Marwa al-Sherbini, a 31-year-old Egyptian woman who wore the headscarf and was three months pregnant, was brutally murdered in a Dresden courtroom by a German man of Russian descent who declared 'you have no right to live.'

Marwa al-Sherbini was stabbed eighteen times in the space of thirty seconds. It was a frenzied attack, clearly motivated by racism and Islamophobia. Yet the German state and media were, for at least a week after her death, in a state of denial. The press reported it as a neighbourhood dispute, with headlines such as 'Murder over quarrel over swing'. Amidst widespread anger in Egypt, the press officer at the German embassy in Cairo declared the murder an isolated case and a 'criminal act. It has nothing to do with persecution against Muslims.'

As the funeral of Marwa al-Sherbini took place in the northern Egyptian city of Alexandria and attracted huge attention across North Africa and the Middle East, the German public and media at last woke up to the anger that the murder, and its apparent denial, was causing in the Muslim world. On 10 July, the minister of foreign affairs wrote to his Egyptian counterpart expressing sympathy for Marwa al-Sherbini's family, adding that 'xenophobia and Islamophobia have no place in Germany.'

Facts speak for themselves

Marwa al-Sherbini was married to an Egyptian academic Elwi Ali Okaz who is a pharmacist studying at the internationally renowned Max Planck Institute. Al-Sherbini, also a pharmacist, was suing the man who went on to attack her (formally identified only as Alexandre W) after he insulted and threatened her in a local playground, calling her an 'Islamist', a 'terrorist' and an 'Islamist whore'. Marwa al-Sherbini, who wore a headscarf, was part of a legal challenge over this insulting behaviour. In the first instance, a district court convicted Alexandre W for his actions and ordered him to pay a fine of 780 Euros. However his behaviour towards Marwa al-Sherbini during the course of this trial was so threatening and insulting that the prosecuting attorney deemed that he had learnt nothing from the conviction and ordered a second prosecution which would probably have resulted in a prison sentence.

At the second trial and as al-Sherbini was finishing her testimony, Alexandre W leapt up and, in a frenzied attack, stabbed her repeatedly while shouting, 'You have no right to live'. Marwa al-Sherbini's 3-year-old son was in court and witnessed his mother's brutal murder. In the bedlam that followed, several bystanders were injured, including al-Sherbini's husband, Elwi Ali Okaz, who was shot and seriously wounded by a police officer who has now been placed under investigation pending a possible criminal prosecution. Elwi Ali Okaz was initially taken to hospital in a coma but his condition subsequently improved.

Jewish and Muslim communities united against Islamophobia

Stephan Kramer, the Secretary General of the German Jewish Council, was one of only a handful of non-Muslim voices in Germany willing, from the word go, to describe the murder as motivated by Islamophobia. Kramer gave his solidarity to the Muslim community and alongside Aiman Mazyek, Secretary General of the Central Council of Muslims, visited Elwi Ali Okaz in hospital. 'We want to send a signal against Islamophobia', said Stephan Kramer, adding that the 'meagre' reaction of the authorities to the murder was 'absurd'. Muslim and Jewish leaders were due to meet with the Saxon prime minister and the Intercultural Council's call for a public demonstration of solidarity with the victim's family was followed by a public service on the steps of Dresden's city hall during which an estimated 1,000 people laid single white roses beneath large photos of the dead woman.

Anger in Egypt

The Egyptian ambassador, Ramzi Ezzeldin Ramzi and Marwa al-Sherbini's brother attended mourners' prayers at the Berlin Dar el-Salam Mosque, after which the body was flown to Egypt for a burial in Alexandria, which was attended by several Egyptian government officials. Al Jazeera's Rawyeh Rageh, was at the funeral and noted that 'The local council here in Alexandria, the victim's hometown, has decided to name a street after

her and the press is describing her as the “Hijab Martyr”.

Indeed, throughout Egypt, there was widespread popular anger. While much of this was exploited by the government to feed its own agenda, it cannot obscure the fact that the German authorities have for too long ignored the rising Islamophobia and prejudice towards women who wear the headscarf. Over half of Germany's states ban women teachers and civil servants from wearing the headscarf which is widely seen as a sign of ‘holding onto one's own culture’ and a ‘refusal to integrate’. Nabil Yacoub, who previously directed a local council for immigrant affairs in Dresden, points out that abuse of Muslim women who wear the headscarf is widespread. Many women are attacked or discriminated against on account of religious clothing, but do not report attacks to the authorities. Marwa al-Sherbini was different and decided to fight back. She was due to go back to Egypt in three months and, tragically, must have believed it would be safe to take a stand.

Who is to blame?

Kathrin Klausing, a researcher on Islamic issues who compiles the website Musafira (<http://www.musafira.de/>), says that all eyes are now on the prosecuting authority, to see what charges are brought against Alexandre W. She does not see the prosecuting authority, which has instructed the police to start a murder investigation and has described the killer as clearly ‘driven by a deep hatred of Muslims’, as the real culprit. ‘The real responsibility for this awful case lies with the increasingly anti-Islamic and racist climate in society, an atmosphere in which politicians and public intellectuals and celebrities have played a great part.’ It is a view reiterated by Sulaiman Wilms, head of communications at the European Muslim Union, who told Al Jazeera that the murder was linked to ‘public-media discourse’. ‘People are looking for victims and Muslims are sometimes seen as a viable option.’

Both the police and prosecuting authority immediately confirmed that Alexandre W was a ‘notorious xenophobe’. But a week after the murder, another disturbing and overlooked fact emerged. According to *Der Tagesspiegel*, Alexandre W had asked Marwa in the courtroom ‘Do you have the right to be in Germany at all?’. He then went on to threaten her stating ‘When the NPD comes to power, there'll be an end to that. I voted NPD.’

Alexandre W was referring to the neo-Nazi National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) that, in the June 2009 local elections in several federal states, secured 176 seats on regional and city councils. It is in Saxony - of which Dresden is the state capital - where the NPD is strongest, trebling its seats to a total of seventy-six. In February 2009, 6,000 neo-Nazis marched through Dresden in the largest far-Right demonstration in Germany in recent times. Researchers Olaf Sundermeyer and Christoph Ruf who spent two years infiltrating the NPD for their book *Reisen in der National Befreite Zone*, interviewed many ex-members who said that NPD members hoard weapons at their party regional headquarters in Jena and dream of rebuilding Hitler's Third Reich. The authors believe that the downturn in the economy and unemployment are factors playing into the hands of the NPD, which, in some areas of eastern Germany, is attempting to create ‘national liberation zones’ - no-go areas for foreigners.

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation, in conjunction with the journal *Stern*, provides a regular web-based update of some of the most serious far-right related racist incidents that take place in Germany. In its compilation of thirty incidents that took place in Germany in May, eighteen took place in Saxony, many in Dresden and its surrounding towns. Migrants, those deemed foreigners, trades unions, members of left parties and alternative youth groups have all been targeted. It remains to be seen what part of Alexandre W's warped and psychotic thinking was shaped by organisations like the NPD and what part the Islamophobia inherent in public and political discourse - which targets in particular Muslim women who wear the headscarf - has played.

Footnotes

Many thanks to Kathrin Klausing in the preparation of this article and to Elliot Perkins for translating the Amadeu Antonio Foundation list of neo-Nazi violence. (An English-language translation of the list can be obtained from IRR, email: liz@irr.org.uk). Facebook pages have been set up for Marwa al-Sherbini, see Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php>). Further information from Musafira (<http://www.musafira.de/>). Or email: info@musafira.de. The regional employment and integration office, RAA Sachsen, which offers advice to victims of racism, has also issued a statement condemning the murder as Islamophobic. See RAA Sachsen (<http://www.raa-sachsen.de/>) or email: opferberatung.dresden@raa-sachsen.de, tel: 00 351 88 94174.

Malta: The death of Suleiman Ismail Abubaker

At the beginning of June 2009, Suleiman Ismail Abubaker, a 28-year-old Sudanese migrant, died in hospital as a result of injuries following a beating by a nightclub bouncer in Paceville and a kicking by at least one passer-by when he lay losing consciousness on the ground. No politician made a statement condemning the killing of this Sudanese migrant, who had temporary permission to stay in Malta on humanitarian grounds. On 13 June, a peaceful demonstration to remember Suleiman and to challenge racism was organised by the Movement Graffiti. 'We are convinced that this first death in our country caused by racism cannot be left unnoticed', declared the organisers.

From Darfur to Malta

Suleiman Ismael Abubaker arrived in Malta in 2005. He originally fled Darfur in 1996 and made his way to Libya, where life became increasingly hard. In June 2008, Ismael Abubaker had been involved in a previous incident in Paceville, described in tourist brochures as the 'nightclub capital of Malta'. In this incident, Ismael Abubaker and another immigrant complained of being beaten by police officers. Four police officers were suspended, and one brought to trial, but the case collapsed due to conflicting police evidence and the fact that witnesses could not identify the offending police officer beyond reasonable doubt. It also seems, though reporting in the newspapers is not clear, that Mr Abubaker had himself originally pleaded guilty of assaulting police officers during that incident, but he had done so because he did not understand what was going on in court and was unaware that he had filed a guilty plea.

Although he was to die eleven days later, the incident that led to Suleiman Ismael Abubaker's death occurred on 29 May 2009. Two French students, Maxim Gault and Clement Majon, who were with him when he tried to enter a nightclub gave testimony in court. They said that their friend, who had been refused entry because he was drunk, was punched by a bouncer with a blow so severe that he was thrown to the ground. After Suleiman was helped up, he stumbled and hung on to a signpost, only to be kicked down again by an unknown passer-by.

Ismael Abubaker had been living at the Marsa Open Centre and his friends there, who had no idea that he was in hospital, had been scouring the island in search of him, only to find out he was dead through newspaper reports. Concern mounted when he failed to turn up for his third and final interview with the International Organisation for Migration, as part of his application to resettle in the US. A friend who asked not to be identified told the newspapers that he believed that the hospital should have made more attempts to track down Suleiman's next of kin or friends. 'Is there no system in place or is it because he's an immigrant not much effort was made?', he asked.

Arrest of nightclub bouncer

The nightclub bouncer, Duncan Deguara, was arrested and subsequently charged with causing serious injury, followed by death. He was also charged with working as a bouncer without a licence from the competent authority. Indeed, it is the question of licensing security staff at nightclubs, rather than racism, that has been foremost in parliamentary debate over the death. Following a parliamentary question tabled by Labour Party MP Carmelo Abela, the government announced that it was considering introducing new legislation whereby the services of bouncers would be regularised. Presently anyone employed in a bar or a nightclub can work as a bouncer without having to get a special licence for the purpose. Many individuals, such as police officers, work as bouncers without a licence because their full-time jobs prohibit them from doing such work officially, reports the *Times of Malta*.

But the *Times of Malta* went on to link the issue of unlicensed nightclub bouncers to discrimination against black visitors to nightclubs in Paceville. When it asked the government what it was doing to tackle concerns over repeat incidents of black people being turned away from nightclubs, a government spokesperson completely sidetracked the question, replying instead that as the number of crimes reported in Paceville in 2008 had decreased by 17 per cent this showed that the increased police presence in Paceville was having a positive impact. When asked if bouncers have a licence to act tough, a spokesperson for the Home Affairs Ministry said 'As with all citizens, bouncers are not allowed to manhandle, beat or commit any other criminal offence at the expense of another person.'

Racism in Paceville

The Moviment Graffiti said that this was not an isolated incident but there was 'rampant racism' in Paceville. It was no secret that black people were denied entry to the majority of the town's clubs, with those that have an ID card showing that they are migrants or refugees most likely to be refused. Plenty of people in Paceville try to enter clubs when they are drunk, but they are not beaten to death for doing so, concluded the Moviment Graffiti.

Its claims of widespread discrimination are backed up by the *Times of Malta*, which says that reports that blacks or dark-skinned people are prohibited from entering Paceville clubs have become more frequent. In eighteen months, there were six reports involving bouncer beatings that were serious enough to make the headlines.

Sources

DI-VE 11.6.09, *Times of Malta* 10, 11 14.6.09, *Malta Today* 14.6.09, <<http://www.maltastar.com/>> 11, 24. 6.09.

Further information from Moviment Graffiti, 60A Strait Street, Valletta, Malta. Email: info@movimentgraffitti.org. Web: <<http://www.movimentgraffitti.org/>>

Fear and loathing in Belfast

By Phil Scraton

In a personal statement, Phil Scraton sets the recent attacks on Roma in South Belfast in the wider context of persistent anti-Traveller racial violence in the UK.

Over thirty Roma families, including many young children, were forced to leave their homes in South Belfast and within a week most families left Ireland, following several weeks of sustained violent attacks. The police were slow to react and the families were left virtually unprotected.

Sports halls are places of fun, energy and exhilaration. They free us from our worries, liberate our minds and exhaust our bodies. But they are also the first port of call when profoundly distressing events unfold. After Hurricane Katrina they were mass dormitories for survivors, at Hillsborough the stadium's hall was designated a temporary mortuary and, earlier this year, they were short-term home for those made homeless by the Victoria fires. Like churches, they become places of sanctuary and suffering.

In Belfast's Ozone sports hall, exhaustion, suffering and fear were written on the faces of the men, women and many young children exiled from their homes by those who wear racism and sectarianism as badges of honour. Families sat amid possessions hastily packed in black polythene bags. Introducing myself, trying to communicate, I choked as people initially withdrew, intimidated by my skin.

Thirty years back

In an instant I was back thirty years in Liverpool working with Irish Traveller families. Then, as now, I recognised the barriers of self preservation raised by those enduring the realities of hatred and regulation in equal measure. Involved with the on-site Travellers' school in contesting imminent evictions and in reading and writing letters for families, I was trusted - but these were families that endured daily the direct impact of unremitting interpersonal and institutionalised racism.

I visited the West Midlands where, during an unlawful eviction, three children died in a fire as a trailer had been ripped from its jacks. The moment I met the families will never leave me. Johnny 'Pops' Connors described his experiences of surviving as an Irish Traveller in a hostile world: 'my wife kicked black and blue by the police in her own trailer three days before the baby was born; my little son very badly injured and my trailer smashed to pieces; the hospital refused to treat us; the councillors said, "kick them out at all costs"'.

Although I lived in Toxteth, this was my first experience of extreme race hate. What kind of men would recklessly evict Travellers, killing their children in the process? What kind of state, supposedly an advanced, inclusive, democratic state, would sanction such acts of brutality? What kind of an investigative and inquisitorial system would deliver verdicts of accidental death? Why did academic research and the care professions seem unconcerned?

Nothing prepared me for that experience. The intense odium and unrestrained violence directed towards Irish Travellers that led to the killing of three children; the lack of public outrage or media coverage appeared to condone what had happened. It seemed that by their very existence, by their way of life, Gypsies and Travellers had brought death to their own door.

Back in Liverpool on the windswept site of urban dereliction that was Everton Brow, home to over fifty Irish Traveller families, the local community demanded evictions, threatening the use of direct force. Leaflets dropped through letter boxes throughout the area spewed a hateful message: 'Tinkers Out! The residents of Everton are sick of the filth and squalor brought to their community by Irish tinkers. Local councillors' promises have come to nothing. If these dirty parasites are not removed we will do the job ourselves. They are a danger to the health of good and decent families. This is an ultimatum: get the tinkers out, or else.'

The city council responded in typical fashion. At four in the morning, in the half light of midsummer dawn, a posse of private hire bailiffs approached the site along deserted inner-city streets. Accompanied by land rovers and lorries, the hired hands were protected by a phalanx of Merseyside police officers.

The police encircled the site while the bailiffs knocked up families. Men, women and terrified children,

all in various states of undress, attempted to halt the eviction. The bailiffs hitched the trailers to their lorries and wrenched them from their mounts.

A few weeks later a Warrington councillor called for a 'final solution' to the 'gypsy problem'. Given the genocide directed against Roma prior to and throughout the Holocaust, his outburst was calculated to instil fear within the local travelling population.

Roma, classified as genetic asocials by the Nazis, have remained the ultimate, collective illustration of 'otherness'. Even their mass deaths have been erased from our collective memory, their suffering marginalised. As historian Ira Clendinnen notes, Gypsies and Roma remain 'largely absent from discussions of the Holocaust, as they are absent from the monuments which memorialise it'.

In this climate of hate the portrayal of the 'outsider' is literal. There is no adoption of, or adaptation to, a distinct cultural identity, no room for a negotiated acceptance of a different way of life. The daily reality of life on Everton Brow was local authority harassment, local community attacks and heavy-handed policing. While men and women defended their homes and families, their children screamed in fear.

Six years ago, 15-year-old Johnny Delaney was killed by young racists in Ellesmere Port. He lived with his family on the Travellers' site in Liverpool. Knocked to the ground, he was repeatedly kicked and one of his attackers stamped on his head with both feet. Later he said Johnny deserved the kicking 'because he was only a fucking gypsy'.

Giving two young men sentences of four and a half years for manslaughter, the judge concluded there had been no racial motive. This outraged Johnny's father and mother, Patrick and Winifred, who campaigned tirelessly to have the killing recognised as racist.

In 2006 Patrick died. One tribute stood out: 'Patrick took every opportunity to challenge the inequalities that Gypsies and Travellers experience in the criminal justice system. He was destroyed by the lack of justice to such an extent that it killed him.'

The racism that took these lives is the racism that exiled the Roma this week. It is the racism, alongside sectarianism, that has been mobilised to 'cleanse' communities of all but those who have a shared cultural heritage. We cannot stand by and let this happen.

I stood with Jimmy Lovelace amid the rubble, mud and squalor of the Everton Brow site. That day he'd gone to the local pub and ordered a pint of beer. No one responded: 'The fella just looked straight through me.' Naively I asked, 'Did he have a "No Gypsies" sign on the door?' Jimmy smiled wryly and responded, 'No. It wouldn't be lawful.' There was a pause. Then he added, 'he's got the sign in his head'.

When politicians talk of generating 'social inclusion' and academics promote 'social capital' they seem oblivious to the experiences of 'outsiders', of what it takes to deal daily with the brutal realities of 'otherness'. That was the fear in the faces of those I met at the Ozone.

Racism and sectarianism are alive and well, their currency is hatred and their consequences implicate us all.

Phil Scraton is Professor of Criminology in the School of Law, Queen's University, Belfast. His most recent books are *Power, Conflict and Criminalisation*, *The Violence of Incarceration* (with Jude McCulloch) and *Hillsborough: The Truth* (new edition).

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