

# EUROPEAN RACE BULLETIN

INSTITUTE OF  
**RACE**  
RELATIONS

## Election special

**A survey of relevant results and themes in national and local elections from October 2006 to May 2007 in a selection of European countries.**

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# Editorial

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The recently-launched Strangers into Citizens campaign in the UK is having an impact. Its call for a path to citizenship for long-term, refused asylum-seekers and visa overstayers became part of the Labour Party's deputy leadership contest, with three of the six candidates declaring themselves in favour of the idea. However, powerful voices within the Labour Party are warning against the perils of such an approach. One such is that of immigration minister Liam Byrne. In a Fabian Society pamphlet published in April 2007, Byrne warned that the issue of migration could lose New Labour the next general election. To back up his argument he claimed that in many European countries, including the Netherlands, the issue of immigration was so potent that it had lost centre-Left parties elections.

Yet, as this 'Election special' issue of the *Bulletin* shows, the facts from Europe do not support Byrne's reasoning. Centre-Left parties, which are open and honest about Europe's need for migrant workers and which support the regularisation of failed asylum seekers, can see off the Right challenge – if, that is, they have principles and determination.

In Spain and Italy, centre-Left parties, which have backed regularisation campaigns or modest immigration reforms, have been returned to office. In Denmark, where there is increasing support for a more humane approach towards failed asylum seekers from Iraq (and horror at the government's refusal to provide a safe haven for Iraqi interpreters serving in the Dutch command), support for the anti-immigration Danish People's Party is decreasing. For years, it had been the Kingmaker in Danish politics. This could now be set to change.

And Byrne's argument, when it comes to the Netherlands, is way off the mark. For this is the country where there has been the most startling shift in public opinion towards migrants and asylum seekers, induced, in large part, by the inhumane deportation policies practised by the previous centre-Right government and its infamous hardline interior minister Rita Verdonk. The Labour party (PvdA) emboldened by public opinion, supported calls for a freeze on deportations and a general amnesty for 25,000 failed asylum seekers prior to the general election of November 2006. It did not lose electoral support on account of this. On the contrary, it was returned. The PvdA is now the second largest party in the coalition government, with only two seats less than the Right.

In fact, a study of these and other electoral trends brings with it hope – albeit it tentative – that the corrosive influence of anti-immigration parties and the extreme-Right on issues of migration and asylum may be on the wane, in some parts of Europe at least. This is good news for Strangers into Citizens and like-minded campaigns.

While we can take some consolation on those matters, we should also be aware of a new line of attack. Extreme-Right parties are now pitching into Muslim communities with ever greater aggression, calling for bans on the hijab and on the construction of minarets on mosques. Debates about national values are descending into McCarthyite witch hunts. As the 'Islamic scare' replaces the 'red scare', Europe's Muslim communities are becoming more stigmatised and more vulnerable than ever.

**Liz Fekete**

**Editor, *European Race Bulletin***

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# Election special

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## FRANCE

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### At a glance

- In the first-round of the presidential elections held on 22 April 2007, FN candidate Jean Marie Le Pen saw his vote drop by 6.42 per cent from the last presidential contest in 2002.
- After Union for Popular Movement (UMP) candidate Nicolas Sarkozy called for a 'taboo free' debate on immigration, issues of national identity, immigration and law and order took centre stage in the first round of the presidential election with conditions in the suburbs emerging as a potent and divisive electoral issue.
- More minorities registered to vote than ever before – as thousands of small, vocal, political action groups representing Africans, Arabs and young people were formed.

### Results of first-round of presidential elections

Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) with 31.18 per cent of the vote, emerged as the most popular rightwing politician in thirty years in the first-round of the presidential election. Ségolène Royal (Socialist Party), who came in second place, scored 25.87 per cent and François Bayrou (Union for French Democracy), who came third, polled 18.57 per cent. FN candidate Jean Marie Le Pen, who had accused Sarkozy of stealing his policies on national preference, gained 10.44 per cent of the vote, compared to 16.86 per cent in 2002. Another extreme-Right candidate, Philippe de Villiers of the Mouvement pour la France (MPF) scored just 2.23 per cent of the vote in the first round.

During the run-up to the elections, Le Pen commented that 'Madame Royal has wrapped herself in the French flag in order to run after Mr Sarkozy who is himself, running after me.' After the first-round, Le Pen told his supporters to abstain from voting in the second. Philippe de Villiers urged his supporters to cast their votes for Sarkozy.

### National identity, security, immigration dominate the campaign

As security, immigration and integration came to dominate the first-round of the presidential election, Jean Marie Le Pen termed it proof of the 'Lepenisation of mentalities'.

### Nationalism takes centre stage

The electoral debate turned more towards themes of national identity and patriotism after UMP candidate Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the formation of a special immigration and national identity ministry. A history graduate living on the run down La Forestière estate in Clichy sous Bois, summed up feelings in an interview for the *Guardian* on 29 March, 'Nationalism is taking centre stage in the presidential election debate. They're saying love France or leave it. We might live in a hinterland, but we're French. What do we have to do to prove we love France too?'

### Sarkozy proposes national identity ministry

Nicolas Sarkozy was accused of pandering to the FN when he called for the formation of a special immigration and national identity ministry to oversee questions of immigration and national identity and pledged to pursue a tough line on illegal arrivals. 'France is an open country but it's not a wasteland where you can just set up as the wind takes you', he told a press conference in December 2006, citing as proof of his hard line approach on immigration the fact that expulsions had doubled in three years.

Critics of Sarkozy's proposal said that he was borrowing the language of the far Right, which often used terms such as 'national identity' as a way of attacking immigrants for diluting 'France's national character'. The anti-racist organisation MRAP accused Sarkozy of drawing 'on the darkest hours of France's past' and others compared Sarkozy's immigration ministry proposal to the laws of the Vichy regime, which had a special agency for Jews (the General Commissariat of Jewish Affairs).

On 14 March, around 100 academics signed a declaration affirming that they could not accept 'that a

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presidential election be fought on alleged contradictions between immigration and national identity'. Sarkozy's proposal also drew criticism from within the ranks of his own party. Azouz Begag, who is of Algerian descent, resigned as minister for equal opportunities in protest at Sarkozy's stance. Speaking on France 2 television, soon after Sarkozy's announcement, he described the 'mixture of a ministry of immigration and French identity' as 'indecent', saying that the proposed ministry was no more than a 'hook to go and look for the lost sheep of the National Front' and 'bring them back to the Republican fold'.

But a survey for *Le Figaro* found that 55 per cent of French people agreed with Sarkozy's proposal for a ministry and 65 per cent with his subsequent explanation that 'immigrants that join us must sign up to the national identity'. Sarkozy's comments were most widely supported by voters for the UMP, but also won strong backing from far-Right sympathisers and the UDF. Even 31 per cent of Socialist supporters were said to be sympathetic.

### **Patriotism – who flies the French flag?**

Sarkozy had already promised after the disturbances in Paris (see below) to place the 'national identity dispute' centre-stage. This, together with his pledge to create the new ministry succeeded in shifting the election firmly on to far-Right terrain – the debate centred on 'how best to be French'. Patriotism began to dominate the election, with Le Pen commenting that his rivals in the two main parties had stolen, and therefore validated, his message of 'France for the French'. Flag-flying and anthem-singing patriotism', now dominated the campaign

■ The *BBC News* (2.4.07) reported that at a news conference Sarkozy said that 'France is exasperated by the dispute over national identity, by uncontrolled immigration, by fraud, by waste'. He said there was 'an obvious link between 30 years or 40 years of a policy of uncontrolled immigration and the social explosion in French cities.'

■ Royal called on every French citizen to memorise the national anthem and keep a French flag in the cupboard for public display on Bastille Day. During a two-day visit to the Riviera region, around Nice, which traditionally votes right and extreme-right, she took the unusual step of playing the Marseillaise at her rallies. She subsequently called for the 'reconquest of the symbols of the nation', calling on all citizens to have a tricolour (French flag) at home. 'In other countries, they put the flag in the windows on their national holiday'. She promised that, if elected, she would ensure that the 'French know the Marseillaise'. Sarkozy congratulated Royal on following his lead on what it meant to be French.

■ Bayrou denounced the 'nationalistic obsession' that had infiltrated the campaign.

### **The suburbs in the elections**

Sarkozy was the only one of the major contenders not to visit the working-class suburbs where he was declared 'public enemy number one'. Bayrou, Royal and even Le Pen made visits, with Royal visiting Clichy-sous-Bois where the rioting began in 2005. She said she supported 80 of the 105 proposals in the community association AC Le Feu's (Enough of Fire) programme for change in the suburbs, but refused to support minority demands for the introduction of ethnic monitoring.

### ***Sarkozy declared 'public enemy number one'***

Angelique Chrisafisin in the *Guardian* pointed out that it was difficult for Sarkozy to visit the suburbs given that he was regarded by many there as 'public enemy number one' who 'talks like an African dictator'. Instead, he attended carefully prepared meetings with selected young people around France. The fact that he did not dare participate in a public walkabout in Clichy-sous-Bois prompted critics to ask how France could vote for a potential president afraid to traverse his own country. In April, Sarkozy called off a campaign visit to the Croix-Rousse neighbourhood in Lyon as some 200 to 300 demonstrators chanted 'racaille' and waved banners that read 'You are not welcome'.

### ***Le Pen visits Argenteuil***

In April 2007, Le Pen made a surprise 45-minute whirlwind visit to the Paris suburb of Argenteuil which was widely seen as a publicity stunt. A few dozen residents gathered to hear Le Pen tell them that they were part of the nation. He made much of the fact that he was visiting 'the forgotten territories of the Republic',

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making reference to the fact that Sarkozy had only just cancelled a visit to the more middle-class Croix-Rousse district of Lyon, saying that ‘While some want to “hose you down” to exclude you, we want to help you get out of these suburban ghettos where French politicians have left you, only to go on and call you “rabble”’.

### ***Royal visits Clichy-sous-Bois***

Clichy-sous-Bois is an ‘immigrant’ suburb of 28,000 people which comprises a collection of run-down high-rise apartment blocks on the north-eastern edge of Paris. Royal spent three hours there and laid flowers at a town memorial to 17-year-old Zyed Benna and 15-year-old Bouna Traore whose deaths sparked the riots in 2005. She then met a group of women working with troubled youth, pledging measures to help families and restore neighbourhood patrols that her rival Sarkozy had abolished. Royal told dozens of young residents, ‘You are not the problem. You are part of the solution to our problems.’

However, earlier on in the campaign, Royal had called for the military to be involved in training programmes for delinquent youths and for ‘putting school and family back at the centre of society’ – a coded way of promising to get tough with immigrant youth in the suburbs.

### ***Bayrou on the suburbs***

Bayrou was photographed by the press taking public transport to a poor suburb north of Paris. He criticised the state for being ‘ever present’ in middle-class France and permanently absent from the poorest centres of urban decay. He also visited Marseille accompanied by Azouz Begag, the former minister of equal opportunities who joined Bayrou’s campaign after resigning his post in April (see above). Bayrou told a rally, ‘Marseille has achieved a rare alchemy, that of a town that forged itself entirely from diversity’. Despite unemployment at 14 per cent – reaching 40 percent on some housing estates – Marseille was largely spared by the 2005 riots, which some attribute to a strong sense of belonging to the city across the ethnic divide.

### **Paris street disorders become election issue**

Running street battles involving hundreds of mainly Arab and African youth around the Gard du Nord train station in Paris – the ‘gateway to the arduous journeys out to the run-down suburbs’, a kind of ‘Berlin Wall between the Paris of the rich and the poor’ – were taken up by all presidential candidates, with polls suggesting that the disorders sparked off by a violent arrest had boosted support for both Sarkozy and Le Pen. (As Sarkozy had, in the light of his presidential bid, stepped down as interior minister – his replacement as interior minister condemned the rioters, describing their action as tantamount to ‘guerrilla warfare’.)

### ***Presidential candidates respond***

Le Pen said that the violence proved that the FN’s ‘analyses and predictions’ were right and that French cities had become unstable due to ‘mass immigration’. Sarkozy defended the action of the police who used tear-gas and baton charges to control the rioters. ‘We are the only country where it is considered abnormal to arrest someone who doesn’t pay for his ticket. If the police is not there to ensure a minimum of order, what exactly is its role?’ Several days later, he accused the Socialists of showing leniency towards rioters. ‘A delinquent is a delinquent, a rapist is a rapist, whatever his age or the colour of his skin’, he said. The Socialist Party observed that Sarkozy’s legacy at the interior ministry had stirred up animosity between police and young people from the banlieues. The Gard du Nord clashes ‘illustrate the climate of tension, the gulf and the violence dividing the police and the population. The conditions for a relationship of calm and trust have urgently to be re-established’, said Julien Dray, spokesman for Royal. The Socialists drew a parallel between the station riot and an earlier incident in which police detained a Chinese illegal immigrant outside a junior school in Paris, sparking an angry stand-off with parents (see below). ‘The incidents in the Rue Rampal and those in the Gare du Nord point to a Sarkozy-inspired climate of tension, abuse of power, verbal violence and stigmatisation’, said PS deputy Jean-Christophe Cambadélis. That, he said, was the kind of France Sarkozy was promising.’

### **Pledges on immigration**

All of the three major candidates – Sarkozy, Royal and Bayrou – ruled out a blanket amnesty for ‘illegal immigrants’ although Royal and Bayrou hinted at more lenient attitudes to families and hardship cases.

Sarkozy made ‘selective immigration’ (matching workers to economic needs) a key electoral theme.

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Following the Paris riots (see below), Sarkozy said that France had become 'exasperated by uncontrolled immigration'. On a visit to Marseilles on 5 March 2007, Sarkozy said that he favoured the introduction of an 'integration test' for family reunion applicants. Using arguments put forward by the Dutch government, he said that integration, which demanded fluency in French and understanding of French institutions and values, had to be prepared for before departure from the home country. Sarkozy's comments were interpreted as an election ploy – since the majority of immigrants wanting to join family in France already had French as their first or second language.

Though Royal promised to restore the right to French citizenship after ten years in the country (something Sarkozy scrapped while in office), Sarkozy was the only candidate to advocate that foreigners be allowed to vote in municipal elections.

### **Deportation policies under spotlight after school incident**

Sarkozy – when still interior minister – was forced to intervene after an angry clash between school parents and police at the Rue Rampal infant school in the 19th arrondissement of Paris on 20 March 2007 which was blamed on his zealous deportation policies. The police had arrested the Chinese grandfather of a school student, claiming he was an illegal immigrant. When the school principal, Valérie Boukobza, attempted to intervene, she was accused of 'having struck the pane of a police car window many times' and having 'verbally attacked' a police officer, and was also taken into custody. Twenty principals of Parisian infant schools wrote to the chief education officer demanding a statement on 'the unacceptable violence' which occurred at the time of the arrest.

### ***Presidential candidates respond***

Left-wing parties, presidential candidates and Bayrou criticised Sarkozy for his zealous hounding of sans-papiers as the FSU, Sgen-CFDT, Southern Education, FO, the CNT, Unsa, CGT as well as the FCPE (the principal federation of parents of school students) and the education without borders network (RESF) denounced 'the arbitrary detention of the principal'. In a press statement, Royal stated that 'teachers are not an auxiliary branch of the police force' and that the police officers themselves 'were distressed to have to challenge the sans-papiers grandfather in front of the school and the children he had come to collect. This is not the France that we want.'

Whereupon Sarkozoy responded by saying there was no reason 'to turn this into a polemic'. Placing someone in police custody was a 'judicial decision' taken by an 'independent' prosecutor. On 23 March, a telegram was sent by the interior ministry to prefects reminding them of their legal duties in carrying out of measures for removing foreigners 'in an irregular situation'.

### **Sarkozy's campaign: authoritarianism and far-Right appeal**

Sarkozy's campaign, which focused attention on policies seen as authoritarian, was considered a break with the outgoing president Jacques Chirac's policy of freezing out the Front National.

### ***Sarkozy's appeal to FN voters***

Sarkozy said that only a taboo-free debate on immigration could wrest the debate back from Le Pen. At a rally in Marseille in March, Sarkozy declared, 'A country's immigration strategy is what will define its identity 30 years from now'. 'Republican parties need to talk about these questions. If they don't, they shouldn't be surprised that extremists seize on them.' In an interview on France 3 Television on 18 March, Sarkozy conceded that 'bringing back to the camp of the republic voters who have gone to the National Front is also my job'.

### ***Urging election officials to validate Le Pen***

During the run-up to the election, Le Pen constantly spoke of his difficulties in obtaining the 500 signatures from a total of 42,000 elected officials (mostly mayors, but also regional or departmental councillors, deputies, senators or members of the European parliament) necessary to validate his candidacy under rules designed to prevent frivolous candidates. As the FN has only around 150 elected officials of its own from which it could gain endorsement, it relied on other political parties to endorse Le Pen's candidacy. The prospect of Le Pen failing to make it to the ballot box was said to be worrying Sarkozy's supporters who hoped to harvest far-right votes in the second round.



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■ In November, the head of the UMP in the lower house, Bernard Accoyer, said that it was better for democracy if Le Pen was present in the first round. 'And it must be recognised that, even if I combat his ideas, Mr. Le Pen united a significant, important part of the French'. Accoyer reminded public officials that 'giving a signature so that this or that candidate can be present in the first round is in no way supporting the ideas of this or that candidate'. The comments caused an outcry and he was forced to explain himself: he was not suggesting that officials of the government party finally voted for Le Pen.

■ Prime minister Villepin also said that he would like to see 'the diversity of the presidential election preserved'.

■ An editorial in the conservative *Le Figaro* stated that it would be an electoral, institutional and moral 'cataclysm' if 'Le Pen wasn't there'.

■ Sarkozy's allies sent discreet signals to centre-right officials that endorsing Le Pen's efforts to make the ballot would be acceptable. 'You don't win by stopping people from running', Sarkozy told a mayors' conference in November. In late January, he went further, calling it 'desirable' that Le Pen would run, 'like all candidates who represent a current in public opinion'.

■ Sarkozy said there was no shame in trying to attract voters from the far Right. At an event in Nantes, western France, on 15 March, Sarkozy said that since 1983 'we have the strongest far-right in Europe, we must not carry on as if it does not exist. I want to talk to those who have moved towards the far right because they are suffering'.

■ A call by a top Sarkozy advisor for the introduction of proportional representation in parliamentary elections was seen as a gift to the FN as proportional representation would make it easier for smaller parties to enter parliament.

### ***Authoritarian populism***

Journalist Naima Bouteldja, writing in the *Guardian* (18.4.07) drew attention to the dangers posed by Sarkozy's 'authoritarian populism' revealed not just in his attacks on the independence of the media and judiciary but also in his recourse to genetic explanations for juvenile delinquency and sexual deviancy.

### ***Genetic explanations for crime***

In the course of the general election campaign, Sarkozy caused uproar when he said he was 'inclined... to think that people are born paedophiles and it's a problem that we can't cure this pathology'. Prior to this, at a cabinet meeting in June 2006, he presented a bill on the prevention of juvenile delinquency based on an earlier parliamentary report's findings that youth deviancy materialised in infancy and linked ethnicity with criminality. The government later jettisoned the most controversial measures which would have imposed mental-health assessments from the age of three to detect behavioural disorders 'leading to delinquencies'.

### ***New strategy in Front National campaign***

The FN's new strategy was masterminded by Le Pen's daughter, the lawyer and Paris regional councillor Marine Le Pen, who, as campaign director, was attempting to 'de-demonise' her father's image. As voter registration among poor black communities, skyrocketed, Le Pen attempted to appeal to African and Arab voters. He continued his attempt to portray himself as the force against the old French elites and the FN as the party for workers with policies driven by social concern.

### ***Manifesto and election pledges***

At a two-day convention in Lille in February, Le Pen launched the FN's 'programme for government'. (The choice of Lille was not accidental for it was an industrial area situated in the formerly industrial Nord-Pas-de-Calais which had been hard hit by recession.) The FN's manifesto, dubbed a 'response to the 20 major problems facing France', featured the expected issues – immigration, crime, support for the death penalty and measures of national preference, including pledges to end benefit payments to foreigners, create 75,000 more prison places and pull France out of NATO. The FN promised to scrap health care for 'illegal immigrants', abolish immigrants' minimum-wage entitlement and limit child benefit to French nationals in order to save 18.5bn Euro.

Le Pen sought to temper his message with, what was described in the *Independent* (26.2.07) as a 'save the planet evangelism'. The message of concern for the environment was laced with allusions to the ills of immigration. Education, too, according to *Searchlight* (May 2007), was prominent in the FN's campaign. The FN claimed that the national education system had 'been abandoned into the hands of socialists and Islamist

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supply teachers'. The FN called for the removal of teachers' right to strike and the revision of the school curriculum to purge it of 'Marxist' influence.

### ***Appealing to Arab and African voters***

In a crucial change, Le Pen sought to encourage French voters of African and Arab descent to vote for the FN. In an interview with *Paris Match* he described himself as 'a man of the centre right' and said that he accepted that immigrants who were prepared to integrate as part of the French nation could stay.

First, in September 2006, Le Pen gave a speech at the revolutionary battlefield of Valmy (on the anniversary of the victory over an invading Austro-Prussian army) in northeast France, in which, for the first time, he called on 'French people of foreign origin' to join his movement. Then in November 2006, the infamous black comic Dieudonné was invited to attend the FN's annual fair at Le Bourget, where, in a symbolic gesture, the two men shook hands. Le Pen subsequently gave an interview to an Internet site run by associations in the banlieues in which he said he had 'never spoken of the superiority of one race over another'. 'I am demonised, just as the banlieue is demonised', he said. At another point, Le Pen stated that anti-Semitism could be funny when expressed by a comedian such as Dieudonné.

In December 2006, Le Pen unveiled an election poster specifically targeting black and Arab voters. For the first time, a non-white person appeared on FN literature. Drawing attention to past failed integration policies, it bore the image of a young black woman making a thumbs-down sign alongside the slogan 'Left/Right – They've Broken Everything'. It was part of a series of posters designed to cover the whole electorate, and the last showed Le Pen walking with the six individuals (including the black woman) featured on the posters – beneath the slogan 'Together, Let's Lift France back up'.

Marine Le Pen denied that the poster campaign contradicted the FN's national preference policies. Those she said had nothing to do with racism, but were about giving priority in employment, housing and social benefits to people of French nationality.

In January 2007, according to *Times Online* (7.1.07) Le Pen said, 'I am a French patriot, not a xenophobe ... I want peacefully to reunite the maximum number of French people of all origins. Some from immigrant backgrounds can be an asset if they are integrated through their work and their will to link their destiny to that of our country. But I don't want France to serve just as an inn or brothel to all the populations of the world who want to come here.'

### ***Divide and rule***

Quoted on *BBC News*, Ahmed El Kely, news editor of the radio station, Beur FM, said there were signs that Le Pen's message was getting through via his daughter who did not use racist or xenophobic language. 'Le Pen is trying his best to seduce different components of the French republic – the blacks, the Arabs, the Jews also – to divide, to rule', El Kely observed.

### **Issues in the campaign of Philippe de Villiers**

Philippe de Villiers launched his presidential bid on behalf of the MPF at an election rally in Paris on 20 January. His speech covered the traditional themes of the extreme right – law and order and unregulated immigration. A major focus was the 'clash of civilisations', the 'reconquest of Western civilisation' and the defence of its 'identity' against the 'Islamic threat'. He opposed Turkish entry into the EU and attacked on the unions and the right to strike.

In an interview with *Le Monde* (21.3.07) he staked his claim as the patriotic candidate who would defend France through a policy of zero immigration, protect large and small farmers, factories, businesses and call centres (which were moving to China), end family reunification and health and educational rights for sans papiers.

### **The election impact on minority communities**

#### **The 'immigrant' vote becomes crucial**

Eighty-five per cent of the electorate turned out to vote in the first round of the presidential election. Those of immigrant origin, particularly young people from the banlieues, registered to vote in unprecedented



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numbers, forcing politicians to address a potential voter pool previously written off as politically insignificant. About 70 per cent of the immigrant population consider themselves on the Left. According to Angelique Chrisafis, the record number of people registering to vote on the housing estates has pushed the electorate to its highest number in twenty-five years, forming a potentially powerful swing vote.

The increase in voter registration is said to be attributable to the 2005 suburban violence and Le Pen's second place showing in the 2002 presidential election.

■ *The Observer* (8.4.07) reported that in Seine-Saint-Denis, the department which suffered most in the riots 18 months ago, there was a rise of nine per cent in voter registration, double the national average. The level was even higher in specific areas, such as Aulnay-sous-Bois, where the riots started.

### **African and Arab youth mobilise**

Thousands of small, vocal, political action groups representing Africans, Arabs and young people have sprung up in suburbs across the country, challenging the political monopolies held by unions and other organisations. One of these, AC-le-feu, a neighbourhood association in the suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois launched a programme for change in the suburbs. Set up after the riots, one of its aims is to encourage young people to vote in the elections. According to Yves Munguama, an economics student and head of a youth group in Villemomble, north of Paris, 'The new young voters are hugely motivated to turn out because of growing racism and discrimination'. He and other black or Arab young men on his estate had been told by local employers there was no work, only to find white friends were offered interviews. When Mr Munguama, who is French, managed to get a part-time job as a security guard in a bank, his employers told him to change the name on his badge as its African sound would offend customers.

Many French rappers, so as to get young people from deprived banlieues to register to vote, put short briefings on their records. They were motivated by a threat of a repeat of the elections of 2002. An issue of *Libération* was edited by Diams, a female rapper, who made clear her objections to Sarkozy and Le Pen (though not revealing whom she would vote for). But not everyone was hostile to Sarkozy. Musician Doc Gynéco and Feniski of Saipan Supa Crew believed that there were parts of Sarkozy's economic programme that would benefit black people. Sarkozy was the only candidate to support affirmative action as in the US.

### **Candidates address ethnic monitoring debate**

Classifying people by their ethnicity is illegal in France – as the state believes all people should be equally French with no differential. This means that no direct questions can be asked that would determine the exact ethnic, racial or religious makeup of society. French census-takers ask immigrants about their place of origin, but not their race, ethnic or religious background.

But during the election, the taboo on ethnic monitoring was broken. The Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN) carried out a survey of all the prospective candidates to ascertain their views – Sarkozy and several other candidates came out in favour of ethnic monitoring, while Royal was against. Patrick Lozes, head of CRAN, is in favour of race-based surveys. 'Every time you ask about somebody's grandparents, you are continuing to say they are somehow less French', he said.

In a parliamentary debate, Sarkozy broke with the consensus and said that racial and ethnic data would help combat social problems, from discrimination to juvenile delinquency. 'If we refuse to recognise the composition of French society, then how will we integrate those whose particular identity we deny?'

Forty academics and campaigners published a petition in *Libération* against 'ethnic statistics', warning they could lead to 'confrontation' between groups. Royal said she was opposed to the statistics because she feared information could be used to keep records on individuals. Instead she wanted to be president of a 'mixed-race' France and proposed anti-racist measures such as forcing companies to reassess their recruitment policies.

### **Minority groups call for statistics**

Minority groups argued that racism and discrimination were being swept under the carpet. Community workers on run-down ethnically mixed housing estates warned that nothing had been done to stop racial discrimination despite the worst riots in nearly forty years in 2005. With non-white graduates with top-class degrees arguing that CVs went unanswered because of the colour of their skin or non-French surname, the

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government has banned the requirement for a photo on job applications, introducing the principle of 'anonymous CVs', but the law has yet to come into effect.

## **The presidential elections and the Muslim community**

On 5 February, in a Q&A session on prime time TV, Sarkozy elaborated on his notorious comments about unruly young *racaille* (scum) of foreign origin in the banlieues. 'France, either you love it, or you leave it', said Sarkozy, adding that 'Nobody is forced to live in France. And when you love France, you have to respect her ... When you live in France, you respect her Republican rules, you don't practise polygamy, circumcise your daughters or slaughter sheep in your bathroom.'

Azouz Begag, the former junior minister responsible for equal opportunities who resigned after Sarkozy called for the new immigration and identity ministry, made damaging claims about Sarkozy in a book he published in April. In 'A Sheep in the Bathtub' (a reference to the remark above), he accused Sarkozy of unfairly stigmatising the North African community.

Despite Sarkozy's disparaging remarks about Muslim customs, he has attempted to build links with certain sections of the religious community. In April 2007, he promised to promote the building of new mosques and take steps to cut the dependence of French Islamic bodies on foreign support. In an interview with *Le Croix* he said 'What good is it to tell our Muslim compatriots that they have the same rights as everyone else, if they're forced to pray in cellars and garages.' He also appointed several advisors of North African origin to his team, including Rachida Dati, the daughter of a Moroccan father and an illiterate Algerian mother, who is seen as a French success story having grown up with eleven siblings in a tower block in Chalon-sur-Saône and rising to become a magistrate.

## **June parliamentary elections: calls for more ethnic minority representation**

The Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN) said that it hoped to field 100 ethnic minority candidates in the June parliamentary elections and called on political parties to include candidates from ethnic minorities on their list. There are currently 10 black deputies in the 577-seat lower house National Assembly, all from French overseas territories in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. Among the 555 elected in mainland France, none are black or of Muslim North African origin. The Socialist Party is fielding around 15 candidates from ethnic minorities. Sarkozy's UMP is not fielding any.

One of these is Rachid Nekkaz, a 34-year-old businessman of Algerian origin who mounted a bid for the presidency but failed to win enough official endorsements to qualify for the race.

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# NETHERLANDS

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## At a glance

- While the November 2006 general election returned a coalition government of Christian Democrats, Liberals and Labour, the extreme-Right Freedom Party (PvV) unexpectedly won nine seats.
- On the eve of the general election, the Liberal (VVD) integration and immigration minister Rita Verdonk made the burqa an election issue by proposing that it be banned.
- In the run-up to the May local elections, the Freedom Party by launching an extraordinary attack on Labour politicians of Turkish and Moroccan origin who held dual nationality, introduced a McCarthyite tone to Dutch politics.
- In May 2007, the new government announced a general amnesty for 25,000 failed asylum seekers.

## Results of general election – November 2006

Twenty-four parties – including four from the far-Right: the PvV, One Netherlands, Party for the Netherlands (PvN) and List Pim Fortuyn (as List Five Fortuyn) – contested the Dutch general election in November 2006.

Overall, neither the centre-Right nor the centre-Left won the seventy-six seats necessary to secure a parliamentary majority. The Christian Democrats (Christen Democratische Appèl CDA) now have forty-four seats in the lower house (total 150), the Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid PvdA) has forty-two and the free market liberals (Volkspartij Voor Democratie VVD) have 26 seats.

Only the PvV, out of the four extreme-Right, anti-immigrant parties that contested the elections, won seats. It is exceptional in that it was only recently formed in March 2006, has no local branches and exists solely to represent the interests of its maverick leader Geert Wilders. (Wilders was once a parliamentarian for the VVD but left to form his own party.) The PvV now has nine seats, previously it had one. In his home town of Venlo, in the south of Netherlands, Wilders polled almost 18 per cent of the vote.

Internal disputes, it seems, account for the dismal performance of the other extreme-Right parties. Simon Fortuyn, the younger brother of Pim Fortuyn, walked out of LPF in disgust at the in-fighting and stood for One Netherlands, a party dominated by the Liveable Rotterdam councillor, Marco Pastors. The PvN is led by a former migration minister, Hilbrand Nawijn, once a member of the LPF, who is also a councillor in the town of Zoetermeer, where his List Nawijn has five seats on the local council.

Political commentators warn that there are now two main blocs in the Dutch Right – one supporting the hard-line VVD politician Rita Verdonk, the other backing Geert Wilders' PvV. There is speculation that Verdonk may leave the VVD to form her own right party. Verdonk saw a huge surge of support during the election campaign. Within the VVD, she got more preference votes than the more moderate party leader Mark Rutte – the first time in Dutch political history that a party member on the candidate list got more votes than its leader.

## Results of provincial elections – March 2007

The provincial elections for the First Chamber which took place in March 2007 saw large losses for the List Pim Fortuyn. Although the PvV did not contest the provincial elections as it did not have sufficient candidates in all twelve provinces, it succeeded in dominating the debate during the run up to the elections through launching an extraordinary attack on PvdA politicians with dual nationality (see below).

## General election campaign themes

Several weeks before the general election, political analysts described the campaign as being fought mainly over social and economic issues. The reason why immigration and integration were barely mentioned, it was suggested, was due to a political convergence amongst mainstream parties which meant that there was little to be gained from playing the 'tough-on immigration card'. In a one hour prime time TV debate among the top six candidates, the word Muslim was not mentioned once. Political scientist Wouter van der Brug of the University of Amsterdam said the mainstream parties were ducking the Muslim issue. 'It's not in their interest', he said. 'They can only lose votes to the more radical right, because public opinion is very anti-Muslim.'

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Nevertheless, as the election drew nearer, both VVD candidate Rita Verdonk and PvdA candidate Geert Wilders broke this apparent political consensus.

### **Verdonk – tough on immigration**

Minister Rita Verdonk (VVD) attempted to present herself as a successful gatekeeper against uncontrolled migration. The *International Herald Tribune* (17.11.06) reported her boasting in an interview that that number of immigrants arriving under new family reunification rules had fallen from 40,000 per year when she took office in 2003 to just 50 per week. 'We've got immigration under control, and that has to remain so', she told *NRC Handelsblad*. 'True refugees who face danger in their own land are welcome. But that's only about 10-20 per cent of requests. Most asylum seekers come because this is a wealthy country.'

The PvdA – traditionally the party which attracts ethnic minority voters – was initially attributed with attempting to diffuse the immigration issue. Nevertheless, in the closing hours of the election, its leader Wouter Bos said that he agreed with much of the government's immigration policy, but it should be tempered with what he called a return to the Netherlands' 'traditional acceptance of newcomers'. He also said that he would grant citizenship to thousands of people whose asylum applications had been rejected and who were living in the country illegally.

### **Verdonk follows Wilders and calls for burqa ban**

Five days before the general election, integration minister Rita Verdonk told parliament that she was going to investigate whether it was legally possible to ban the burqa. This proposal had originally been put forward in November 2006 by Geert Wilders, who had called for it to be banned from the street because it was an offensive symbol of the oppression of women.

Verdonk issued a statement saying that 'The Cabinet finds it undesirable that face-covering clothing – including the burqa – is worn in public places for reasons of public order, security and protection of citizens.' She told parliamentarians that face-covering clothing was a symbol of division (between the West and Islam) and was not in keeping with the integration of Muslims and the emancipation of women. The 'time of cosy tea-drinking' with Muslim groups was over, natives and immigrants should have the courage to be critical of each other.

**Background:** A commission of seven experts, including lawyers, an 'Arabist' and an imam, was set up after Wilders had called for a ban. Its focus was said to be on the broad issue of integration and it was to balance the constitutional rights of citizens with public opposition to the burqa. It ruled that a ban on the burqa would not contravene Dutch law.

**Criticism:** Only a few dozen women in the Netherlands wear the burqa. Muslim organisations and human rights groups said that the government was pandering to the extreme -Right. Naima Azough, an MP with the Green party, who is Muslim, said the ban was not in keeping with the country's history of tolerance and said that the Dutch government was playing on people's fears of Islamic extremism to win votes. The proposal did not come from public pressure but was initiated by Verdonk. 'The result will simply reinforce the perceptions of Muslims that they will never be accepted in Dutch society.'

**Attitude of PvdA:** The initial reaction of the PvdA was to describe the proposal as an election stunt to win right wing votes for the VVD. But in the run-up to the provincial elections (see below) the Labour party's stance was not so straightforward according to an assessment in the *NIS News Bulletin* (5.3.07). Integration minister Ella Vogelaar, speaking at an election meeting, said that calls for a ban were a 'symbol of the fear of Islam'. But PvdA leader and vice-premier Wouter Bos, speaking at the same meeting, said that society's opposition to a phenomenon like the burqa should not be dismissed as racism.

### **Wilders launches anti-Islamic campaign in run-up to provincial elections**

In an interview with *De Pers* daily, Wilders stated that 'Islam is a violent religion. If Mohammed lived here today, I could imagine chasing him out of the country tarred and feathered as an extremist.' He warned of a 'tsunami of Islamisation' in a country to one million Muslims. 'I know that we're not going to have a Muslim majority in the next couple of decades, but it is growing', he said. 'You no longer feel that you're living in your own country. There is a battle under way and we must defend ourselves. There will soon be more mosques than churches here.' 'If Muslims want to stay here they must tear out half of the Koran and throw

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it away. They shouldn't listen to the imam. I've read the Koran ... and I know that there are enough awful things in it.' (Wilders admitted later to not having read the Koran.)

Wilders continued to stoke up fears. In an interview with the *Limburger* newspaper in February 2007, he said that Dutch values were the values of the 'Enlightenment' and that he would have Mohammed 'tared and feathered as an extremist and deported if he were in Holland today'.

On 4 March, in the same week that he publicly invited all Muslims to leave the Netherlands, Wilders entered a motion of no-confidence in two of the Labour Party (PvdA) secretaries of state appointed to the new cabinet because they held dual nationality.

### **Dual nationality dominates run-up to the provincial elections**

Wilders, as well as Rita Verdonk, succeeded in making the issue of dual nationality a dominant issue in the run up to the March 2007 provincial elections – and beyond. The PvdV had submitted a motion proposing an amendment to the law on Dutch citizenship that would keep the newly-appointed Labour party state secretaries Ahmed Aboutaleb and Nebahat Albayrak out of the newly-formed cabinet because of their dual nationality. Wilders said that Albayrak would be working in the interests of the Turkish people. On 1 March 2007, Mark Rutte, leader of the VVD committed his party to supporting 'concrete legislation' which would prevent people from holding dual nationality in the future.

### **Verdonk's last move**

On the eve of her departure from government, Verdonk said on TV that even Princess Maxima should give up her Argentine passport. (Argentines, like Moroccans, are prohibited by the laws of their home country from relinquishing their nationality.) Verdonk did not comment on the PvdV motion but said that she would prefer that MPs and government members held only Dutch nationality. 'I think it is very important that MPs and ministers give off the message that they are proud to be Dutch.'

### **Wilders attacks Muslim cabinet members with dual nationality**

Ahmed Aboutaleb (PvdA) is of Moroccan descent and had been proposed as the new cabinet secretary for social affairs. His party colleague Nebahat Albayrak, had been proposed as the cabinet secretary of state at the justice ministry and is of Turkish origin. The PvdV stated that both MPs and government members should be banned from having dual nationality because they are in danger of being confronted with a conflict of interests. Its original motion asked that the regulation be immediately applied by the new government, But, under pressure from parliament, this clause was removed from the motion. The PvdV was then forced to abandon its proposal under pressure from the speaker of parliament Gerdi Verbeet who interrupted PvdV MP Sietse Fritsma's introduction of the motion. Verbeet said the PvdV was casting doubt on the loyalty of MPs and government ministers with dual nationality and as Speaker she could not accept this.

### **MPs respond**

MPs reacted fiercely to both the PvdV motion and also to comments made by Rita Verdonk. 'I find any doubt about my loyalty incomprehensible', said Aboutaleb.

Ahmed Marcouch, city district mayor of Amsterdam's Slotervaart district, called the whole debate absurd. 'You don't serve in public office in a country that you don't care about.' 'Loyalty has nothing to do with dual nationality.' He pointed out that 'There is little discussion of dual nationality in traditional immigration countries like Canada, Israel and the US.'

There are 1 million residents with dual nationality, according to Statistics Netherlands. Between 1992 and 1997, dual nationality was permitted by justice minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin.

### **The debate continues**

Wilders had succeeded in setting the political agenda. Emboldened, he set out next to attack PvdA MP Khadija Arib, accusing her of divided loyalties, citing her consultation work for the Moroccan government as conflicting with her parliamentary role. This led to an emergency parliamentary debate in which Wilders claimed that it was a 'serious problem that an MP was working for a foreign government'. He said that it was a 'scandal' that Arib had said during interviews that she was glad she had two passports because she would



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be able to leave the country if people like Wilders came to power and that on radio she had claimed to be loyal to neither the Netherlands nor Morocco. The faction leader of the Green-left GroenLinks, Femke Halsema, accused Wilders of 'double standards', pointing out that Liberal VVD MP Hans van Baalen did paid advisory work for the Taiwanese government. The PvdA then ordered what it described as a routine inquiry into the nature of Ms Arib's activities on the Moroccan council. PvdA member Roland Plastrek said that it might be necessary to prevent any possibility of 'double allegiance' by requiring dual nationals to swear allegiance to the Dutch constitution.

### **Liberal party supports ban**

On 1 March, Mark Rutte, leader of the VVD, called for 'concrete legislation' to prevent people holding dual nationality in the future. He stressed that his proposal was not aimed at challenging Ahmed Aboutaleb's and Nebahat Albayrak's positions in the cabinet. While he had no doubts about the loyalty of the two junior ministers, he did believe that Ms Albayrak should give up her Turkish nationality (it is not possible for Aboutaleb to give up his Moroccan nationality). Rutte said that his proposal would stop similar cases in the future.

Rutte's intervention was then taken up by Wilders who used it as proof that there was 'growing political support against her dual nationality'. He also claimed that the Socialist Party (SP) leader Jan Marijnissen supported his view, a claim that Marijnissen denied despite having said in an interview in the *Telegraaf* that it 'would be a 'positive move' and good for 'public perception' if the ministers gave up their dual nationality. A spokesperson for Mark Rutte said that he had never called on Albayrak to give up her Turkish passport since, according to the law, the choice was hers.

### **Private member's bill**

A private member's bill is being submitted by two MPs (one PvdA and one CDA) aimed at putting an end to the practice of municipalities automatically registering children of parents with different passports as dual nationals.

### **Who gains from polarised debate?**

On election day, the new state secretary for social affairs, Ahmed Aboutaleb, known for his laconic response to attacks by Wilders, made an emotional plea, saying that he had never felt so unsafe in the Netherlands as in the past days. He was not referring to any danger or attack on his person but rather to the 'undercurrent in Dutch society that does not want me here'.

A poll from Maurice de Hond suggested that if the PvdV had participated in the provincial elections, it would have received fourteen seats, five more than it actually holds in parliament at the moment. The *Expatica* news agency commented that the electorate seems to be rewarding Wilders for the commotion he had stirred up.

### **Analysis: McCarthyism and the new Dutch nativism**

Lesley Thomas, of American-Dutch dual nationality, in a critical piece in *Expatica News* compared Wilders attacks to McCarthyism in the US. Wilders, she argued had stoked up an 'Islamic scare' similar to the 'red scare' of McCarthyism. She pointed out that the 'dual nationality' hysteria has damaged the political careers of State Secretaries Ahmed Aboutaleb, Nebahat Albayrak and Khadija Arib. 'They have been accused of being potentially disloyal and their reputations have suffered.' Thomas pointed out that in Wilders' column in *NieuwNieuws* he stated that with the addition of the two new state secretaries Ahmed Aboutaleb and Nebahat Albayrak to the Dutch cabinet, the Moroccan and Turkish governments had infiltrated the heart of Dutch power.

### **Opposition mounts**

Following the provincial elections, there have been a plethora of initiatives against Wilders and what some describe as the new Dutch nativism. Even well-known critics of Islam such as Afshin Ellian and Sylvain Ephimenco sought to distance themselves from Wilders.

The former Amsterdam PvdA alderman Michael van der Vils has launched the website, aimed at stopping



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the rise of Wilders, amidst growing criticism that Wilders is 'outside of the law', the 'leader of a fascist party', that is 'anti-democratic and similar to the Nazis'. In an interview with *Nederlands Dagblad*, Geert Wilders complained that a conspiracy was out to get him and it was encouraging a climate of 'hate and aggression' whereby someone might think that 'illegal means are justified to stop me and my people'. Prime minister Balkenende, at his weekly press conference, said that one might ask one's self whether 'comments from Mr Wilders have also contributed to a climate of respect'.

Another initiative against Wilders was launched by the Together Against Racism Committee which organised a debate 'What is the answer to Geert Wilders'. (Wilders, unhappy that he was being portrayed as a racist, tabled parliamentary questions about the debate.) According to organiser Miriyam Aouragh, Wilders had crossed a line in politics with his attack on politicians with dual nationality and comments like 'Muslims should rip out half of the pages of the Koran if they want to stay in the Netherlands'. Aouragh called Wilders' claim that he was only repeating what people in the Netherlands felt, disingenuous. He was doing more than that: 'I think he is stirring up racism. On the one hand, there are people with certain feelings of resentment, but he is providing them with an answer in the form of a scapegoat.'

The Contact Organisation for Muslims and the Government (CMO) said that Wilders' comments were proving harmful for relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Nasr Joemann said he would raise the demonisation of Islam with the new Dutch cabinet.

### **Critics of Islam turn against Wilders**

A number of intellectuals associated with the group 'Friends of Ayaan Hirsi Ali' have attacked Wilders for going too far. But these intellectuals have been ridiculed for double standards. *De Groene Amsterdammer* published a sarcastic column about the intellectuals' 'change of heart' and awarding them 'the woollen sock' in mock admiration.

Sylvain Ephimenco, one of a group of intellectuals known as 'The Friends of Ayaan Hirsi Ali', wrote an open letter to Geert Wilders published in the 12 March edition of the magazine *Opinio*. It stated, 'You are using pseudo-theological one-liners about the Koran and the Prophet to intentionally create as much resentment as possible among offended Muslims.' Other intellectuals who backed Hirsi Ali have also said that Wilders has gone too far and that he has turned their words of criticism against Islam into caricatures. These include Afshin Ellian (who has called for the Koran to be banned as a source of inspiration for terrorism), author Leon de Winter, philosopher Bart Jan Spruijt and the sociologist Paul Scheffer. However, sociology professor J.A.A. van Doorn said that Sylvain Ephimenco's indignation over Geert Wilders' attacks on Islam did not ring true. 'Geert Wilders actions and statements follow on naturally from what Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her admirers have been saying for years.' Professor Van Doorn added that it was too late for these commentators to pull back. 'The aforementioned commentators would do better to ask themselves whether they are not complicit in Geert Wilders' crusade.'

### **Government policies since the election**

#### **Calls for asylum amnesty places caretaker government in crisis**

The general election was originally scheduled for May 2007 but was called early after the centre-right coalition collapsed in June 2006 following recriminations over its handling of the disputed citizenship of Hirsi Ali and infighting over immigration. Following the general election, the old cabinet remained in power in a caretaker role while talks were held between the parties on the formation of a new coalition government. It soon ran into difficulties over its asylum policies, with the PvdA supporting calls for a general amnesty for thousands of asylum seekers who came to the country before April 2001. A parliamentary motion in support of a general amnesty was passed at the end of November by a majority of one in the 150-seat parliament. An opinion poll had showed 63 per cent of Dutch people supported an amnesty.

**Parliament v Verdonk:** Difficulties arose after Rita Verdonk (still at this point the integration and immigration minister) chose to veto the parliamentary motion saying it might have led to 200,000 illegal immigrants applying for residence. 'This is going to lead to a gigantic burden... we simply can't carry out' the motion, she said. The outgoing CDA leader Balkenende criticised Wouter Bos for forcing the issue of a general amnesty, saying that it should be discussed during coalition formation talks and that Bos was trying

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to enforce his will via a 'coincidental majority' in the new Lower house of parliament.

The scene was thus set for a confrontation between Verdonk and parliament which issued Verdonk with an ultimatum stressing that she must comply with parliament's demand that there should be a temporary freeze on deportations. In December, an emergency parliamentary debate was convened during which Verdonk refused to extend the freeze on deportations, even though parliament had voted for it. 'I am not prepared for a suspension. I have said that after this debate I'm going to uphold the immigration law.' When the cabinet backed Verdonk and refused to pass the parliamentary motion, parliament passed a no confidence motion in Verdonk. Refusing to resign, a defiant Verdonk insisted that as a member of a caretaker government, she could not be ordered to change policy by a new parliament, nor could she be forced to resign.

The caretaker government was facing a standoff with parliament. Subsequently, on 14 December the prime minister announced that while the caretaker government was in place the expulsion of long-term asylum seekers would be frozen until a new cabinet was installed, after which the new government could legislate for a general amnesty. And Verdonk was forced to hand over her immigration portfolio to justice minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin (whilst retaining the integration portfolio and responsibility for youth protection, crime prevention and rehabilitation.) VVD leader Mark Rutte – who had initially threatened that all VVD ministers would resign if Verdonk stood down – said the party had only yielded to parliament's demands for the sake of the 'governability of the country'.

It was soon to emerge, however, that the vagueness of the suspension of deportations for rejected asylum seekers had created insecurities. Judges were said to be unable to interpret the criteria in the letter from the prime minister which was couched in extremely vague terms. The Dutch Refugee Council said that while the suspension of deportations had given people secret hope, there was great alarm because no one knows how the general asylum policy would develop.

Clarity on the issue was finally achieved in May 2006 when the new government announced an amnesty for failed asylum seekers who arrived before April 2001 but had not been deported. 'This is the end of a hopeless situation for many people' commented Edwin Huizing, director of the immigrant aid organisation Vluchtelingenwerk. 'They finally have a future to look forward to.' The Freedom Party thought otherwise. PvdV MP Sietse Fritsma said 'I am just shocked', adding that she was appalled that thieves, abusers and violent offenders sentenced to just under a month in prison will be issued residence permits.

### **New government forced to ditch unworkable immigration rules**

In the new government, Ella Vogelaar (PvdA) replaced Verdonk as minister of integration. Vogelaar withdrew the bill submitted by Verdonk which would have made it possible to deport criminal Antillean and Aruba youth. Vogelaar said that the bill was ineffective and difficult to implement, that there was no support for it and it would only have affected a small group of young people anyway.

The withdrawal of the proposed bill was criticised by the VVD and the PvdV which were united in their call for an emergency debate. VVD MP Henk Kamp said that the Netherlands should be able to send away uneducated young people from the Antilles and Aruba who were in trouble with the law. But minister Vogelaar said that she would not resubmit the deportation plan to parliament; instead she would find other ways to deal with problem youth, including making efforts to help these young people make a better life for themselves.

**No support for legislation restricting residence rights:** The Christian Democrats (CDA) have withdrawn support for a motion demanding that the cabinet amend legislation so that foreigners may only apply once for a regular residence permit for work, study or family reunification. The motion had been initiated by the PvdV and even passed by parliament before it emerged that it was not legally possible to block a foreigner from applying for a residence permit more than once. The CDA accepted the cabinet's arguments and withdrew its support, although it still maintained that other means should be found to block fraudulent claims and abuse of procedures. The Liberals (VVD) are not happy and claim that the government has adopted an 'obstinate' position towards the PvdV motion.

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## **New approach to integration?**

The PvdA minister Ella Vogelaar (Living, Neighbourhoods and Integration) told parliament that the integration project initiated by the previous government was not getting results and that more than half the participants on assimilation courses had failed to reach the required language level in 2005. The coalition partners in the government agreed that a 'delta plan' was needed to help older and newer immigrants catch up. PvdA MP Staf Depla lamented this 'first setback' and wondered whether all the money spent has been wasted, now that it turned out that people could not speak proper Dutch after the language course. PvdA MP Barry Madlener pointed out that the integration project had given rise to an enormous industry. 'And one that produces nothing'.

On the other hand, it seems that too many prospective immigrants are passing the language test that they have to take at the Dutch embassy in their home country before being allowed to come to the Netherlands. In the first year that the Netherlands introduced the integration exam at its embassies abroad some 90 percent of the 4,434 participants passed. The government's response is to make the language test more difficult.

## **Survey of multiculturalism**

Following the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, integration minister Rita Verdonk appointed four 'intervention teams' to study multicultural tensions, primarily among youth. In January, the teams presented their final report which stated that failures at a local authority level to gain a clear picture of the complex problems of a multicultural society had led to a situation where Paris-style riots in poor Dutch cities could occur. Local municipalities had oversimplified the issues, resulting in one-sided measures, often carried out poorly. The recommendations stressed the need to improve youth policies, with a focus on a thorough study of multicultural problems. Greater resources should be given to the municipalities and a national taskforce should be set up to study multicultural youth policies. Three of the old teams argued that they should stay in place to launch new initiatives, reduce tension between ethnic groups, improve youth safety and accessibility of youth welfare offices. But the team which focused on domestic violence asked to be disbanded because the main problem examined, that of the sexual exploitation of women tricked by pimps and forced into prostitution, should be tackled differently.

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# AUSTRIA

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## *At a glance*

- General election held on 1 October 2006.
- The combined vote of extreme-Right parties was 15.1 per cent. Extreme-Right posters read: 'Foreigners minus 30 per cent', 'Home Sweet Home instead of Islam', 'German instead of "don't understand"' and a 'Free woman instead of the obligation to wear a headscarf'.
- Jörg Haider retained premiership of the state of Carinthia.
- Turkish minority felt increasingly threatened.

## **October 2006 general election result**

Two extreme-Right parties contested the October 2006 general election. Together they gained 15.1 per cent of the vote. The Freedom Party (FPÖ), led by Heinz-Christian Strache, secured 11 per cent of the vote (21 seats in parliament out of a total of 183). The Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ), led by Jörg Haider, secured 4.1 per cent (7 seats).

The BZÖ is strongest in Carinthia where Jörg Haider, is state premier. Here, the BZÖ secured 24.9 per cent of the vote as compared with the FPÖ's 7.3 per cent.

The overall result of the general election means that Austria is now governed by a coalition comprising Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP).

## **Campaign themes**

### *More deportations*

Both of the extreme-Right parties campaigned on the issue of deportations, vying with each other as to which party could deport more foreigners. The BZÖ promised to reduce the number of foreigners by 30 per cent over the next three years. Its posters stated 'Foreigners Minus 30 per cent'.

Deportation of foreigners was linked to the issue of crime and unemployment. The FPÖ said it would immediately deport asylum seekers and other foreigners who commit crimes.

BZÖ candidate Peter Westenthaler said that 300,000 foreigners should be expelled in the next three years. According to him, 300,000 foreigners are living in Austria without authorisation. Those targeted for expulsion would be foreigners 'unwilling' to integrate and unemployed for a long period of time.

### *Against Islam*

The FPÖ highlighted the threat posed by Islam with posters in Vienna which stated 'Home Sweet Home instead of Islam'. These posters were seen as an attack on the settled Turkish community.

### *Protecting welfare against immigration*

Other slogans used by the FPÖ during the campaign were 'Welfare state instead of immigration' and 'Secure pensions instead of millions of asylum-seekers'. It also said that the number of foreign children whose mother tongue was not German should be capped at 30 per cent in certain public schools.

The slogans appeared alongside pictures of FPÖ

leader Heinz-Christian Strache, who even produced a rap song in which he attacked 'people who don't value our culture' and argued that for those who 'don't want to integrate' should be 'off to your homeland'. Further lyrics stated 'I am for the people' and 'for us Austrians remaining masters in our own house' 'I won't willingly let my mouth be stopped no matter how much the do-gooders may rage'.

## **Impact of the extreme-Right campaign**

The extreme Right helped create a climate which legitimised institutional violence against failed asylum seekers and other foreigners during the deportation process. Its call for more forced deportations needs to be set against the background of two highly publicised cases which involved extreme human rights abuses of foreigners. In 1999, a rejected Nigerian asylum seeker, Marcus Omofuma, suffocated after being 'taped up like a parcel' with his mouth covered and nostrils partially sealed during a deportation from Vienna to Sofia. And the recent general election took place as four police officers were convicted of offences arising out of a brutal attack on a Gambian who was racially abused and threatened with a mock execution during a forced deportation attempt in April 2006. (Further information on these cases can be found at <http://www.irr.org.uk/2006/november/ha000025.html>)

Now, two Austrian businessmen have announced that they are in negotiation with several governments across Europe for a new airline exclusively for the deportation of failed asylum seekers. The 'Deportation Lines' project aims to bring in the new 'Asylum Airlines', which will be operative within three months, complete with padded cells in which refugees and migrants can be locked up without having to be physically restrained by the police during the flight. An Austrian lawyer Hermann Heller says Asylum Airlines will provide a 'professional service' that will make deportations faster.

Posters attacking Islam were widely seen as attacking the Turkish community. Selim Yenel, Turkish ambassador to Austria, interviewed by the *Boston Globe*, said that those Turks who had kept visible features of their traditions had become a political commodity with which rightists fuelled xenophobia. 'With regard to Turkey and Turks, the extreme right parties are building up fears which didn't exist ... and we are really dismayed by that.'

Since the election, there have been calls for the resignation of the newly-elected FPÖ MP Wolfgang Zanger who said on television (as quoted by *ejpress*) that 'Of course Nazism had its good sides, only we don't want to see them today'. He added that Adolf Hitler had 'given hope' to people in depressed Germany.

## **Evidence of FPÖ links to the extreme-Right**

There is growing evidence to suggest that FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache has had close contact with the neo-Nazi scene. In mid-January, photos (supplied by a disgruntled former FPÖ member) surfaced in the media showing Strache aged 18 taking part in paramilitary exercises with individuals some of whom are known to the authorities as neo-Nazis. One picture showed Strache giving what looked like the Hitler salute. But the ambiguity of his gesture allowed Strache to declare jokingly that he had must have been ordering three beers. Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (SPÖ) was



criticised for playing down Strache's past as 'youthful folly'.

Strache was re-appointed head of the party with an overwhelming majority of delegates' votes (95%) at the party conference in Innsbruck in June 2007. In his speech, Strache claimed that Austria's social security system 'attracts immigrants in the same way that light attracts moths'.

The Dokumentations Archiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW) report on rightwing extremist activity in Austria (April 2007) stated that in recent years some FPÖ members had been more willing to have contacts with overtly extreme-Right groups than before. It cited the fact that Christoph Töffler, head of the Carinthian section of the FPÖ's youth movement wrote an article in *Deutsche Stimme*, the newspaper of the German NPD. In it, Töffler maintained that an 'organised Umvolkungs Machinery' existed and that 'Woe betide anyone who openly identifies with one's German roots and is proud of the 1000-year-old history of his people. Then the bloodhounds of the state will be on his tail immediately.' [Umvolkung refers to a process of undermining the cultural roots of one's ethnic group.]

**Sources:** *Searchlight* (November 2006), *The Boston Globe* (28.9.06), *Guardian* (1.10.06), <<http://www.no-racism.net/>> (30.8.06), *European Jewish Press* (10.11.06) <<http://www.ejpress.org/>>, *The Age* (Melbourne) (14.3.06), *Jungle World* (7.2.07) *Migration News Sheet* (July 2006), *Die Standaard* (4.6.07). See also the website of Archiv des Österreichischen Widerstandes at <<http://www.doew.at/>>.

**Key article:** 'Deportation class a reality with Austrian business plan', (*Statewatch*, Vol. 17, no. 1, January-March 2007)

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## BELGIUM

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### *At a glance*

- General election to be held in June 2007.
- Elections for city and provincial councils were held on 8 October 2006, during which the Vlaams Belang (VB, Flemish Interest) got mixed results. Despite a drop in its percentage share of the vote, the VB was only prevented from gaining control of some municipalities by a coalition of the traditional parties.
- The Front National (FN) made gains in Wallonia.
- In Antwerp, civil servants from an immigrant background have expressed concern about a climate hostile to cultural diversity.

### *October 2006 city and provincial council elections*

#### *Vlaams Belang (formerly Vlaams Blok)*

In the elections for city and provincial councils held on 8 October 2006, the VB's share of the vote fell from 24.2 per cent in the 2004 regional parliamentary elections to around 21 per cent. Despite this, it remains the largest party in many municipalities where only a coalition of the traditional parties has managed to keep it out of

local government (in Schoten, Lier, Stabroek, Boom, Borsbeek and Aaist, for instance). At a provincial level, it gained 6 per cent of the vote in Flanders. It also made gains in smaller and more rural communes. In some rural areas, the party managed to poll 15-20 per cent.

In Belgium's second largest city, Antwerp, the VB remains the largest party on the provincial council. The Socialist party was credited with stemming a more rapid rise. Nevertheless, the VB held onto all of its seats in Antwerp, polling 33.5 per cent of the vote (0.5 per cent more than in 2000). After the election, the VB claimed that it did not do as well as expected because of the immigrant vote and the fact that other political parties have pushed fast-track citizenship for migrants. The VB's leader Filip Dewinter conceded that the share of the VB's vote in cities may have peaked and stated that in future the party would concentrate on rural areas.

### *Front National*

In Wallonia – but not in Brussels – the FN made extensive gains, from six seats in 2000, to 27. (Its best result was in 1994, when it won 35 seats.) Some 24 of its 27 seats are in the Hainaut industrial belt, particularly in Charleroi, Mons and La Louvière. The FN's rise was hampered by the presence of several other extreme-Right parties – the result of splits within the FN – such as the Force Nationale and Front Nouvea de Belgique.

### *Campaign themes*

The VB concentrated on attacking immigration and calling for the independence of Dutch-speaking Flanders, Belgium's economic powerhouse, from the poorer French-speaking south. According to VB leader, Filip Dewinter, interviewed in the *Observer* (8.10.06), Flemish nationalism is desirable as 'They are of Latin genes, we are from Nordic racial stock'.

The VB linked immigration to the cause of Flemish nationalism through its call on voters to build 'Secure, Flemish Liveable' through fighting street crime. Dewinter used a television debate to claim that crime in Antwerp had risen by 10 per cent since the ruling Socialist-led coalition took power in 1994. He has also said that politicians were ignoring the 'silent majority of native Europeans who are suffering from increasing illegal immigration, criminality and politically correct thinking'. According to Stefaan Walgrave, a political science professor at the University of Antwerp, the party's stance on immigration and crime is its main draw. 'They frame immigration as a crime issue'. They also highlight what is seen as the 'incompatibility of Muslim and western culture'.

### *The VB in Antwerp*

In Antwerp, where Filip Dewinter ran for mayor, the VB concentrated on attacking multiculturalism as well as illegal immigrants and the Muslim community. On the other hand, Dewinter deliberately courted the Jewish vote, calling on Jews to unite with the VB against Islamic fundamentalism.

Dewinter focused on what he described as the problem of Muslim ghettoisation. He called for a limit on the building of mosques. 'Whole neighbourhoods of Antwerp are almost Islamised. If we were in power we would allow Islamic people to have prayer houses but not on

the corner of every streets.' He stated that immigrants should be compelled to learn the Dutch language and Flemish culture. Illegal immigrants, Dewinter told the *Financial Times* (7.10.06) comprise about 6.5 per cent of the city's population of 450,000.

#### *Targeting Jewish voters*

Antwerp has a Jewish quarter where about half Belgium's Jewish community has lived for hundreds of years, with a traditional focus on the diamond trade. On the other sides of the rail tracks is Borgerhout, home to 30,000 or more Arabs of mainly Moroccan descent. VB's Filip Dewinter says that 'In the Jewish community we have about 30 to 35 per cent of the vote ... That's official because we know our score over there in the Jewish neighbourhood.'

#### **Impact of the extreme-Right campaign**

Political analysts blame the rhetoric of the VB for a rise in racist violence. Recently, a network of extremist militants with homemade bombs were discovered to be operating in the Belgian army.

The VB's dominance in Antwerp also seems to be having a detrimental effect on the political culture in the local authority and other institutions as the following incidents indicate.

■ An Antwerp police officer has been convicted of offences arising out of the leaking to the VB in 2005 of an internal confidential document classifying extremist and terrorist organisations. (The VB, then Vlaams Belang, had been included on the list.)

■ Senator Mimount Bousakia has been collecting evidence from civil servants from an immigrant background who complain they are being harassed because of the perception that they have been hired solely because of their ethnic background.

■ Following the local elections, the new ruling coalition (comprising Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals) is proposing a ban on civil servants wearing a headscarf when they come into contact with the public. Saida El Fekri, of the Immigrant Women's Platform, which organised a demonstration, said that the proposed ban was very disappointing and meant that the coalition was not following policies that benefit all citizens of the city. 'By taking this decision Antwerp is making a mockery of its slogan "The city belongs to everyone".'

#### **Other electoral issues**

##### *More ethnic minority candidates*

There was a more than tenfold increase in the number of elected politicians of (non-European) immigrant origin in the region of Brussels (from 13 to 145), with big increases in the representation of councillors of Moroccan origin (94 out of a total of 145), followed by those of Turkish origin (22) and Congolese (13).

##### *Refugee groups remind Socialists of regularisation promise*

The Coordination contre les Rafles, les Expulsions et pour la Régularisation (CRER) held a demonstration in front of the Socialist headquarters in January to remind the PS of its promise to step out of the next government if the question of regularising immigrants was not seri-

ously addressed. The PS confirmed its intention to help in the regularisation of asylum seekers by clarifying the legislation and building objective criteria.

#### **Following the elections, VB exploits race issues**

Many newspapers have focused on the story of Wouter Van Bellingen, an alderman from Sint-Niklass who has faced racism from many white couples who are refusing to be married by a black alderman. The VB has attempted to exploit this crude racism by casting doubts on Van Bellingen's national allegiances. In March, Filip Dewinter invited Van Bellingen to lay a wreath at the statue of Wouter Van Bellingen's great uncle Amedee Verbruggen. Although Wouter Van Bellingen's birth parents were Rwandan, he was adopted by a Flemish family shortly after birth. His great uncle, though adoption, Amedee Verbruggen (1886-1990) was a soldier on the front in World War 1 and is seen as having laid the foundations for the Flemish movement.

#### **Concerns about exploitation of race issues in the run-up to June federal election**

There are concerns that, in the run-up to the June 2007 federal election, the Dutch-speaking Liberal party (VLD) will make reform of the nationality law an election issue. In a book published in March, minister of interior Patrick Dewael (VLD) called for integration to become a condition for acquiring Belgian nationality.

In fact, nationality law reform has long been a demand of the Vlaams Belang. The Christian Democrats and their allies have made it clear that a revision of the nationality law would be a matter that it wanted to include in the programme of the next government.

##### *Research racialising crime statistics could become election tool*

Minister of interior Patrick Dewael (Flemish Liberal VLD) has commissioned Marion Van San, a Belgian doctor of Political and Social and Cultural Studies, to carry out a study of illegal immigrants. It was commissioned after Van San challenged him on a TV programme about previous research that she says was blocked because it showed a connection between crime and foreigners. Another politician, Flemish minister Marino Keulen (VLD), has become involved, having been shocked by the reaction of social workers who had visited a problem neighbourhood in Antwerp. Dewael wishes to gain insights from the report as to how illegal immigrants enter the country and how they survive. Keulen wants to find out how they make use of social services.

In 1999, under previous minister of justice Marc Verwilghen (VLD), van San had been commissioned to carry out a study into the proportion of foreign youth in crime as compared to the total. Van San claims that her investigation was blocked and finally ignored because it proved the connection between foreigners and crime and politicians were afraid that the VB would use it as an excuse to attack foreigners.

Dewael pointed out that Godfried Engbersen, professor of the National Social State and Social Equality at Erasmus University, Rotterdam, was carrying out research into illegal immigrants in Belgium. He would interview people from Antwerp, Ghent (East Flanders) and Brussels.



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### **Extreme-right Dedecker List party formed to contest the federal elections**

A new political party has emerged to challenge the Vlaams Belang's monopoly on the extreme Right in Flanders in the run up to the June 2007 federal elections. The Dedecker List is led by Jean-Marie Dedecker, who was expelled from the Flemish Liberal Democrat Party (VLD) in October 2006. Jurgen Verstrepen, until recently a VN MP in the Flemish parliament and a well-known radio presenter, has joined the party and will head the Dedecker List in the province of Antwerp.

**Sources:** *Migration News Sheet* (November 2006, April 2007), *The Bulletin* (12.10.06), *Searchlight* (November 2006), *Observer* (8.10.06), *Financial Times* (7.10.06), *Euronews* (17.10.06), *Jewish Chronicle* (2.2.07), *Expatica News* (22, 23.1, 29.3.07), Suffrage Universel website <<http://www.suffrage-universel.be/>>.

**Key article:** 'Belgium: right-wing populist threatens far-right vote' (*Searchlight*, June 2007).

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## **BULGARIA**

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### **At a glance**

- Next general election June 2009.
- In the October 2006 presidential elections, extreme-Right Ataka coalition candidate Volen Siderov won through to second round.
- Roma and Turkish minorities increasingly feel under threat.

### **Presidential elections – October 2006**

TV host Volen Siderov, the ultra-nationalist far-Right candidate for the Ataka coalition, won through to the second round of the Bulgarian presidential election in October 2006 having secured 21.5 per cent of the vote. However, the incumbent Socialist president Georgi Parvanov easily secured victory in the second round, securing 75.9 per cent of the vote as against Siderov's 22.7 per cent.

Some political commentators characterised the vote for Siderov as a protest vote, saying that voters did not see him as a fascist but someone willing to challenge the status quo. There seems little doubt, however, that Ataka has built up its support by attacking religious and ethnic minorities. Analysis would suggest that centre-Right voters transferred their allegiance to him, and this was put down to the lack of an appealing non-Socialist alternative.

Siderov is the head of Attack National Union, part of the Ataka coalition which also includes the National Movement for the Salvation of the Fatherland, the Bulgarian National Patriotic Party, the Union of Patriotic Forces and Militaries of the Reserve Defence. Ataka was formed two months before the June 2005 general election, when it secured 8.2 per cent of the vote and 21 seats in parliament (total 240). Due to internal disputes, its number of seats have now dwindled to twelve. Some Ataka parliamentary deputies have left the party after disputes with Siderov while others have been expelled as a result of scandals involving the obstruction of justice and accusations of paedophilia.

### **Presidential campaign themes**

Ataka is associated with extreme racism, particularly against Roma and Turkish minorities. It is said that Siderov attempted to tone down the rhetoric during the presidential elections, concentrating on denouncing the common political priorities of the other parties, particularly over the EU and NATO membership, the war in Iraq and US military bases in Bulgaria. Nevertheless Siderov promised to scrap news programmes in Turkish on Bulgarian National TV. And, responding to accusations of anti-Roma racism, he said that he did not wish to turn Roma into soap, but, instead, would send soap bars to be used in Roma populated areas.

### **Background on Ataka politicians Siderov and Stojanov**

Ataka is a relatively new political party, formed only in 2005. The media says that the group's supporters chant slogans at rallies such as 'turning gypsies into soap', an allegation that Siderov has denied in the courts. However Siderov claims that most of Bulgaria's Roma minority are work-shy welfare scroungers, prone to criminality and to selling their female children. 'How do you expect me to treat normally somebody who sold his daughter like an animal? This is a 12- or 13-year-old girl. No one else is doing this, only the Roma', he said. 'They do a lot of other crimes too, murder, rapes, burglary, when police come to investigate these crimes and understand the suspect is a Roma they drop the investigation because they fear an ethnic arrest. This is not right.' Attesting that 'truth is more important than political correctness', Siderov complained that it was ordinary Bulgarians, not the Roma, that were the victims. 'Racism is when Bulgarian citizens get killed or raped and no one does anything to catch the criminal', he said. 'This is racism against Bulgarians in their own country.'

At a rally in Sofia in March 2006, attended by 50,000 people, Siderov declared that 'Bulgaria is not yet free. Bulgaria is still under Turkish rule'.

His step-son, Dimitar Stoyanov, now represents Ataka in the European parliament. He was an EU observer in 2006 when Livia Jaroka, a Hungarian MEP who is a Roma won the award for European parliamentarian of the year. Whereupon Stoyanov sent an email to every MEP complaining that Jaroka did not deserve the award, because she was neither beautiful nor young enough. 'In my country there are tens of thousands of Gypsy girls who are much more beautiful than this honourable one', wrote Stoyanov in an email to colleagues. 'You can even buy yourself a loving wife aged 12 or 13 ... The best of them are very expensive – up to 5,000 Euro each. Wow.' Her also told the *Daily Telegraph* that 'There are a lot of powerful Jews, with a lot of money, who are paying the media to form the social awareness of the people ... They are also playing with economic crises in countries like Bulgaria and getting rich.'

### **Government minister accused of discrimination against Roma**

The Evroroma party has called a comment made by Labour and Social Policy Minister Emiliya Maslarova, who referred to Roma women as 'incubator mums and cuckoos' who ought to be stopped from giving birth to children they later abandon, an 'expression of open discrimination'.

**Sources:** Sofia News Agency (27.10.06), *European*

*Jewish Press* (no date) <<http://www.ejpress.org/>>, *Guardian* (14.10.06), *Searchlight* (February 2007), *Independent* (16.1.07) *Novinite* (19.4.07)

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## CYPRUS

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### *At a glance*

- Last general election May 2006.
- New measures to promote integration of immigrants welcomed by anti-racist groups.

### *Will new integration measures end gross exploitation?*

Interior minister Neoclis Sylikiotis has drafted a proposal to boost the integration of immigrants which would include the creation of a committee of specialists from various government departments. The Movement for Equality, Support and Anti-Racism (KISA) has called it 'a step in the right direction' although it was concerned that the committee did not include representatives of civil society.

KISA sees that this new initiative is important as, in the past, the Labour Ministry has said that there was no need for an integration policy, as Cyprus only had temporary migrants. It wanted the ministry to go further though and introduce measures to fight racism and discrimination. KISA is still worried about the position of 100,000 migrants who are not in possession of valid immigration papers and has called for the resignation of the director of the Civil Registry and Migration Department for failing to deal with the gross exploitation of immigrant workers in Cyprus.

**Sources:** *Cyprus Mail* (28.3, 5.4. 07)

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## CZECH REPUBLIC

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### *At a glance*

- Elections for bicameral parliament held in June 2006 (Chamber of Deputies) and October 2006 (Senate) leading to coalition government.
- Concern mounts about the anti-Roma attitudes of the deputy prime minister, Jiri Cunek (Christian Democratic Union- Czech People's Party KDU-CSL).

### *Deputy prime minister stokes anti-Roma sentiment*

The Deputy prime minister Jiri Cunek (also minister for local government) was forced to distance himself from the neo-Nazi far Right and fend off calls for his resignation after the far Right expressed approval for his views on Roma. In an interview with the tabloid daily Blesk, Cunek characterised the Roma as feckless and messy, playing on a victim status to gain state subsidies. Romanies, according to Cunek, are 'sunburnt people who make mess with their family and put up fires in the square'. According to Cunek, 'My behaviour has never had racist or xenophobic motives. On the contrary, I have always sought an equal approach to all.'

### *Background on Cunek*

Cunek is leader of the KDU-CSL. As mayor of Vsetin, north Moravia, he achieved notoriety for his decision to evict dozens of Romany families from a dilapidated house and move them to container-like flats on the town outskirts and, some, even to other regions in Moravia. He has made a rapid rise in national politics over the last six months – elected to parliament in October 2006 and subsequently elected as chair of the Christian Democrats before achieving ministerial posts in the new government. He presently faces corruption charges over allegations that as mayor of Vsetin he accepted a bribe. There have been calls for his resignation and he had already been stripped of parliamentary immunity to allow for a possible criminal prosecution.

### *Far-Right approval comes at price*

The ultra-Right National Party expressed approval for Cunek and said it was considering holding a demonstration in his support. According to chairwoman Petra Edelmannova, protests against Cunek held outside parliament were proof of 'outrageous Gypsy arrogance'. Czech society 'resented Romany style of life and the fact that they live to the detriment of the system'. But the far-Right approval came at a price. There are growing calls for Cunek's resignation. But so far, prime minister Mirek Topolánek (Civil Democrats, ODS) has made it clear that he will not ask Cunek to resign.

### *Roma groups launch criminal action*

In mid-April, fourteen Romany organisations and 100 individuals filed a criminal complaint against Cunek, on the basis that his statements constituted defamation of an ethnic group, undermining fundamental rights, such as equality, irrespective of ethnic origin.

**Sources:** Czech News Agency (5.4.07), *Prague Daily Monitor* (13, 16.4.07), Radio Prague (12.4.07).

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## DENMARK

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### *At a glance*

- With the next general election due in 2009, the governing coalition of Liberals and Conservatives is increasingly distancing itself from the Danish People's Party.
- While the opposition Danish People's Party is attempting to polarise the debate on immigration, internally it is in disarray. Nineteen members have been expelled within its local chapters since 2006 and a leading MP was forced to resign after allegations that he gave Nazi salutes while drunk.
- Mainstream politicians have been outraged that a Muslim woman who wears the headscarf is standing as an MP.

### *Cracks emerge in the ruling coalition's approach to immigration*

Denmark's governing coalition of Liberals (Venstre, lead party) and the Conservative People's Party tend to rely on the Danish People's Party (DF) for support, hence the government's tough approach to immigration. But over recent months, cracks have emerged within this coali-

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tion and the DF's hard line on immigration no longer seems to hold sway. At the same time, opinion polls show that the DF's strategy of polarising the debate on immigration may have finally led to a popular backlash.

#### *Shifts in public opinion over immigration*

The results of a survey published in January suggest that 75 per cent of the public do not want to see any further tightening of immigration legislation. (Another January poll suggested overwhelming support for the right of Iraqi asylum seekers to work and gain education while they await change in their home country.) According to political commentator Hans Jorgen Nielsen of Copenhagen University, the results of the survey made it clear that 'the government can't fight the next election campaign on immigration as it did in the last two general elections, even though it will be under pressure from the Danish People's Party to repeat the same trick.' The Social Democrat Party accused DF leader Pia Kjaersgaard of trying to suck up to the public after she said that she was satisfied with current immigration legislation and saw no need for further restrictions.

#### *Disagreements within ruling coalition over return of Iraqi asylum seekers*

Amidst growing concern about the fate of 600 Iraqi asylum seekers, whose applications have been dismissed but are refusing to return to Iraq, the DF and the Liberals started to work together on an agreement to accelerate the Iraqis' return. Whereupon the Conservative People's Party disagreed with the policy, calling for an improvement in the Iraqis' living conditions. DF politician Soren Krarup described the proposal as a strange suggestion. 'Asylum centres aren't hotels and just because people refuse to accept a decision doesn't mean that we have to provide luxury accommodation. They can go home to Iraq tomorrow if they aren't satisfied.' But in March 2007, the Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Venstre) announced that the government was considering improving the Iraqis' living conditions, with the possibility of education, traineeships or vocational training in order to improve their qualifications for when they return.

#### *Divisions over fate of Iraqi interpreters employed by military*

Amidst considerable concern within the Danish military over the fate of 20 Iraqi interpreters who had been translating for its forces in Iraq, the DF sought to overturn any attempts to grant asylum to this vulnerable group. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Soren Gade (Venstre) initially refused to countenance any request for asylum but softened his stance following a plea from the military leadership at the Danish defence HQ in Southern Iraq. According to the DF's Soren Espersen, if Denmark helped these interpreters all those who had helped Danes in Iraq would claim asylum.

#### *Government resists further attempts by DF to polarise the immigration debate*

The ruling coalition government has rejected a proposal by DF spokesman Soren Espersen for the Nordic agreement on freedom of residence to be repealed if it emerges that the agreement will make it too easy for immigrants with Swedish residency permits to establish themselves in

Denmark. It is particularly worried about Iraqis coming to Sweden. (Sweden took in a total of 1,400 Iraqi citizens in November 2006, whereas just 62 made their way to Denmark in the same period.) The DF accuses the Swedish government of having an 'irresponsible' immigration policy. The DF is to propose that refugees should be denied permanent residency, regardless of the time they have spent in Denmark. (The current situation is that permanent residency is granted after seven years unless a criminal offence has been committed.)

#### *Growing protests at unworkable immigration reforms*

A new immigration law, stipulating that to obtain a residence permit religious preachers and those seeking family reunification must pass a language exam and a test on the Danish social system, is being opposed, even by DF members, as too rigid. The law was passed with an eye to Islamic preachers with radical views but, in order for it be brought into statute it has to be non-discriminatory. The law is now affecting Christian priests who serve foreign religious communities in Denmark. In the past, Polish, Vietnamese and Tamil Catholics all had their own priests. And African nuns and priests from Asia are also experiencing difficulties. According to Hans Henrik Lund of the Protestant Church Integration Service, 'Learning Danish is hard enough in any case, but doing so outside the country is almost impossible'.

Family reunification reforms that stipulate that a married couple must have a closer relationship with Denmark than any other country are also creating problems. Thousands of Danes who started a family while abroad now find that they cannot bring their family home to Denmark. After strong protests the law has been relaxed. It no longer applies to those who have had Danish citizenship for at least 28 years. And those families that are affected are finding alternative ways of bringing their families in, through study or work.

Proposals to prevent forced marriages are also affecting young Danes who get married while studying abroad and now find they cannot bring their spouses back to Denmark, as the new rules stipulate a minimum age of 24 before a couple can get residence rights in Denmark.

#### *Prosecution of DF for racism fails*

The public prosecutor has announced that evidence provided by a citizen's initiative that high-ranking members of the DF were racist (consisting of numerous public comments made primarily against Muslims) provided insufficient evidence to support a formal charge of racism. Sixty-six citizens, including prominent media personalities, came together to research the dossier which primarily quoted the public speeches of DF leader Pia Kjaersgaard, MEP Mogens Camre, Soren Krarup and former party MPs Louise Frevert and Morten Messerschmidt. According to prosecutor Karsen Jjorth, the reported statements all fell within the boundaries of free speech. Van Greve, law professor at the University of Copenhagen, disagreed, saying that some of the comments were very similar to those in the past which have been successfully prosecuted.

Pia Kjaersgaard reacted with glee to the judgement, stating that the attempts to press charges against her and her colleagues was an example of the misuse of anti-racism legislation. A press statement issued by the 66 citizens stated that Jjorth's decision has made it impos-

sible for the courts to decide where the line between propaganda and actual political debate ought to be in relation to international conventions and national laws’.

### **More allegations that DF politicians are racist**

The DF spokesperson on European issues, Morten Messerschmidt MP resigned from the party after allegations appeared in the *Berlingske Tidende* newspaper that he sang Nazi songs and gave a Nazi salute at festivities marking the season opening of Tivoli Gardens. Although he denied the allegations and had been supported by journalists from the tabloid *Se og Hor*, he resigned. He will continue to sit in parliament as an independent.

Previously, Messerschmidt and MPs Soren Krarup (who is also a vicar) and MEP Mogens Camre were reported to the body responsible for upholding Danish anti-discrimination legislation after highly-publicised statements criticising Muslim women wearing headscarves and homosexuals, who they implied were handicapped. According to Mogens Camre, the prospective parliamentary candidate, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, who wears a headscarf, (see below) needed ‘psychiatric treatment’ and all those who wear the headscarf are ‘brainwashed little creatures’. MP Soren Krarup’s attack on Ms Abdol-Hamid, for wearing a headscarf that he considered a symbol of ‘totalitarianism’ similar to the swastika, was criticised by the prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen. ‘I don’t care at all for the comparison’, he said. ‘The Nazi swastika is a symbol of the most totalitarian ideology the world has ever seen while the headscarf is a religious symbol.’

### **Political parties question Danish Muslim woman’s parliamentary campaign**

In 2006, Asmaa Abdol-Hamid – a 25-year-old Muslim who came to Denmark from Palestine when she was 6 – became the first Muslim woman to host a Danish TV show wearing a headscarf. But after she announced that she intended to stand for parliament in the 2009 elections for the leftwing Unity List in Copenhagen, mainstream parliamentarians questioned her adherence to the values of Danish society. The DF said she was not fit to stand for the national assembly.

#### *Background to Asmaa Abdol-Hamid’s candidacy*

Asmaa Abdol-Hamid, a former social worker from Odense and local politician, hosted a TV show aimed at promoting dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims in Denmark in the wake of the cartoon crisis. She describes herself as a feminist, a democrat and a Socialist who opposes the death penalty, supports abortion rights and could not care less what goes on in other people’s bedrooms. But when she announced her intention to stand for parliament, politicians from across the political spectrum (including members of the Red-Green alliance) immediately questioned her views on gender equality, gay rights and the death penalty. They say that the fact that she refuses to shake hands with men (instead she greets them by laying her right hand on her heart in Muslim tradition) is proof of her unsuitability for electoral office. This view is supported by Hamid El Mousti, a member of Copenhagen’s city council who said, ‘I’m from Morocco and we shake hands with women. If you do not salute people, communication between you and others will be very bad.’

### **Politicians say parliamentarians cannot wear a headscarf**

The DF is up in arms about her candidacy. But its belief that a parliamentarian cannot wear a headscarf has some support in parliament where a debate about what constitutes appropriate dress for a parliamentarian has developed. But Helle Thorning-Schmidt, leader of the Social Democrats, told *MetroXpress* newspaper that she did not think a ban on the headscarf would adhere to parliamentary rules which only state that a person should be ‘well dressed’.

Nevertheless, the DF continues its attempts to polarise the debate and set the agenda. Soren Krarup MP (see above) questioned whether addressing parliament wearing a headscarf was constitutional and later compared the headscarf to the swastika. Two other DF politicians, Morten Messerschmidt and MP Mogens Camre have made similar comments. Camre who said that women wearing headscarves were ‘brainwashed little creatures’ later withdrew his comments.

Supporters of the Red-Green Alliance have also criticised her candidacy. Benito Scicizzam a noted historian and Communist politician who generally endorses the Red-Green Alliance, criticised the party for support of what he describes as a religious issue and one that goes against the principle of gender equality. Nahid Riazi, the Socialist People’s Party equality spokesperson, speaking to the public service broadcaster DR said that ‘From a feminist standpoint, it’s tragic and sad that a left-wing party – one that should unconditionally stand up for equality between the sexes – has special rules for Muslim women who behave in a manner that promotes gender discrimination.’

#### *Abdol-Hamid launches her campaign*

Ms Abdol-Hamid, who lives in a one-room council flat with her six sisters in the ‘ghetto’ of Vollsmose, in the town of Odense, says her mission is to fight for an impoverished underclass. ‘This is such a rich country. But we have people in Denmark in deep poverty and nobody helps them. For me the welfare system is very close to Islam. But we need to change the government’. On the issue of the headscarf she says that there are even people in her own party who think she is oppressed for wearing the headscarf. ‘It’s like they really think I’m dumb. They’re taking away my individuality. We need the right to choose. It’s up to us whether or not we wear headscarves’. ‘They think I’m a woman from the Middle East. No, I’m a Danish Muslim.’

**Sources:** *Frankfurter Rundschau* (12.1.07), *Politiken* (9, 18, 22.1, 13.2, 27, 28.3.07), *BerlingskeTidende* (10, 15, 16.1.07) *Jyllands Posten* (18, 22, 28.1.07), *DR* (18.12.06, 25.1.07), *Associated Press* (27.4.07), *The Local* (29.1.07), *Jyllands Posten* (28.1.07), *Copenhagen Post* (20, 23.4, 10, 16.5.07), *Migration News Sheet* (June 2007).

A translation and compilation of stories from numerous Danish newspapers on the debate over whether Iraqi interpreters should be given refuge can be found at *UNHCR Baltic and Nordic Headlines* (27-28 2.07, 27.3.07).

**Key article:** Ian Traynor, ‘Feminist, socialist, devout Muslim: woman who has thrown Denmark into turmoil’ (*Guardian* 16.5.07)



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# EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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## *At a glance*

- Next European parliament elections 2009.
- In January 2007, new extreme-Right bloc, Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS), launched (21 MEPs from 7 countries). ITS promises to 'reverse migration flows' and protect Europe's 'Christian values'. It states that 'identity' is the key issue in Europe today.
- European parliamentarians unite to prevent ITS gaining leadership positions on key committees.

## *Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty*

Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty (ITS), the new extreme-right bloc in the European parliament, was officially launched on 15 January 2007 during the plenary session of the European parliament. It brought together 20 MEPs from seven countries. The largest grouping is the French Front National (FN). Bruno Gollnisch, deputy leader of the FN, leads the group and the Austrian Freedom Party's sole member, Andreas Mölzer, is general secretary.

## *The history of the extreme Right in parliament*

In the past, the extreme-Right has found it difficult to form a bloc as the rules of the EU parliament (785 members) stipulate that an official caucus in the chamber needs to have representatives from at least five countries, and a minimum of nineteen MEPs. But the extreme Right has, for short periods of time, successfully met this criterion. From 1984 to 1989, the 'European Right' was led by Jean Marie Le Pen and the 'Technical Group of the European Right' existed from 1989-1994.

## *Launch and membership of ITS*

In the parliamentary chamber, Gollnisch launched the group stating that it 'will speak on behalf of 23 million Europeans who would not be represented without us'. 'We will be the Parliament's conscience. We will be vigilant defenders of the peoples and nations of Europe who want our continent and civilization to be great.'

The membership comprises:

- Austria:** (1) Freedom party (FPÖ);
- Bulgaria** (1): Ataka party (National Union Attack);
- Romania** (6): Partidul Romania Mare (Greater Romania Party); Dimitru Cozea (Independent)
- Belgium** (3) Vlaams Belang (VB);
- France** (7) Front National (FN);
- Italy** (2) Lista Mussolini, Fiamma Tricolore
- UK** (1) Independent. Ashley Mote, former member of United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). (Mote was suspended from UKIP in 2004 when he faced prosecution for housing benefit fraud and has since sat as an independent.)

Concerned that it might struggle to survive, ITS has entered into negotiations with the Italian Northern League and the League of Polish Families to add its members by the time of the 2009 European parliament elections.

## *Programme*

The new group say it is a 'union of patriots' and outlined a tough programme aimed at 'reversing the migration flows' of immigrants from outside Europe. It also oppos-

es any future enlargement of the EU. It will work for the interests and the sovereignty of each EU member state and is committed to 'Christian values' and Europe's traditional heritage. It opposes a 'single bureaucratic and monolithic European super-state'. Philip Claeys, vice president of ITS and a member of the VB explained ITS's function to the *The Seattle Times* (9.2.07): 'Identity is the core issue in Europe today... Immigration used to be a taboo issue. But with large masses of people not willing to integrate, and with problems getting worse and worse in the cities, it is time to talk.'

## *Parliamentarians form cordon sanitaire*

One of the reasons for the extreme Right's determination to form a formal caucus is that it allows the group access to up to 1million Euro of EU funding and some positions within the European parliament, such as a vice-presidency of a parliamentary commission.

Martin Schulz, leader of the Socialist Group in the European parliament, wrote to the leaders of the other mainstream groups asking them to form a 'cordon sanitaire' around the extreme-Right so that the ITS would not be given any leadership positions. Under the EU legislature's allocation system the extreme Right was entitled to two vice chairmanships of two committees, but, following Schulz's intervention, its nominations for the positions as head of the assembly's transport and culture committees were voted down (in a secret ballot). The committees carry out the majority of legislative work and dictate the parliament's agenda. 'They got the cash, but lost any power', a parliamentary spokesman said.

The ITS had nominated Romanian MEP Viorica Moisuc as vice chair of the conservative committee. (Moisuc defines himself as a Christian nationalist who aims to modernise the Roma and Muslim mentality.) Italian far-Right MEP Luca Romagnoli (Fiamma Tricolore) had been nominated for the transport committee.

## *Ethnic minority representation in the European parliament*

There are 785 MEPs from twenty-seven member states in the European parliament. And yet it was revealed (by the *Guardian*) all but nine MEPs (1.1 per cent) are white. (There are also two Roma MEPs and several of Turkish/Kurdish descent, making a grand total of fifteen MEPs from a minority ethnic heritage.) Personnel and security staff are also overwhelmingly white. No one knows how many non-white parliamentary officials work at the European parliament as there is no committee examining ethnic discrimination. Ethnic monitoring of parliament's workforce has not been discussed, largely because of French opposition.

**Sources:** *Independent* (16.1.07), *Guardian* (8.10.07), *International Herald Tribune* (14.1.07), *Expatica News* (11.1.07) *The Seattle Times* (9.2.07) ENAR press release (8.1.07) *Scotsman* (2.2.07) *EUobserver.com* (2.2.07), <<http://euobserver.com/>>, *Associated Press* (30.1.07), *DR* (31.1.07)

**Key articles:** David Williams and Graeme Atkinson 'Far right forms new group in European parliament', (*Searchlight*, February 2007) Graeme Atkinson, 'Populism: a new and different right', (*Searchlight*, February 2007)

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## FINLAND

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### *At a glance*

- General election held in March 2007.
- The anti-immigration True Finns party made unexpected gains and now have five seats in the Finnish parliament.

### *March 2007 election results*

The Finnish general election saw a shift towards the Right, with massive gains for the National Coalition Party. But the anti-immigration True Finns party also polled well, with 4.1 per cent of the vote (up 2.5 per cent). It now has five seats in the Finnish parliament (total 200); it previously had three.

The True Finns are a nationalist party with a strong anti-immigrant, anti-refugee message. Their main election promises during the campaign related to tax, pensions and the EU where they called for public referendums on all EU-related matters. On asylum, the party said it would continue to advocate a very strict line.

The True Finns party put forward a record number of candidates (170 as opposed to 64 in 2003). In the 2003 general election the True Finns received 1.5 per cent of votes. In the presidential election in January 2005, its candidate Timo Soini won 3.4 per cent (103,000 votes), only 2,000 fewer than the Green party.

**Sources:** YLE (14.8.07), *Election Resources on the Internet* <<http://www.electionresources.org/>>.

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## GERMANY

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### *At a glance*

- Next general election 2008.
- In local elections in September 2006, neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) made a regional breakthrough in the eastern Baltic coastal state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.
- The extreme-Right as a whole was represented in four regional legislatures – Brandenburg and Bremen (German Peoples Union), Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (NPD).
- Federal Christian Democrat-led coalition government launched regularisation initiative, but the Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria refused to implement it. The CSU has also backed a campaign against Munich's mosque.

### *Results of September 2006 regional elections*

#### *Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania*

The neo-Nazi National Democratic Party (NPD) gained 7.3 per cent of the vote and now has six seats in the eastern Baltic coastal state (which borders Poland). This, reports *Searchlight*, was the second regional breakthrough for a now highly-professionalised NPD, which grabbed over 9 per cent of the vote and twelve seats in the Saxon regional assembly in September 2004.

The NPD targeted schools, sports clubs and even kindergartens. It infiltrated parents' associations and organised youth activities such as children's festivals and barbecues. In several Baltic villages, the NPD has become an integral part of civil society, providing social services, running business and organising discos. Its best results were in the areas near the Polish border.

#### *Berlin*

In the elections in Berlin, also in September 2006, the NPD got 2.3 per cent of the vote. Although it is not represented in the Berlin state parliament, it has eleven seats on four of the twelve borough councils in Berlin.

#### *NPD since the elections*

An inquiry into accounting irregularities involving fictitious members means that the NPD owes 870,000 Euro in state funds. Schleswig-Holstein interior minister, Ralf Stegner, said in a newspaper interview that he would seek a coordinated domestic intelligence inquiry into sources of the NPD's funding.

Klaus-Jürgen Menzel, a 66-year-old farmer and member of Saxony's NPD caucus caused a stir when he made two statements in praise of Adolf Hitler. (This was the first time in recent history that Hitler has been praised in a German legislative hall.) Having proved himself an embarrassment to the party, and been thrown out of the parliamentary group (ostensibly for financial irregularities) but not from the party as a whole, Menzel stepped up to the podium in Dresden with two shotgun cartridges in his coat pocket and declared his support for vigilante justice.

Controversial NPD national leadership council member, Jens Pühse, was acquitted of inciting hatred in March. Pühse is manager of the publishing house Deutsche Stimme Verlag which police raided in 2003. Pühse was accused of producing and distributing some 2,500 CDs which encouraged hatred and violence against foreigners and leftwingers. During the trial, Pühse said he regretted that a CD entitled '*Der Untermensch*' (The Subhuman) had been produced.

Since 2004, when twelve NPD representatives were voted into Saxony's state legislature, the fraction has lost one third of its membership. Three NPD members left the caucus in 2005 and Menzel's departure brings the number of NPD seats down to eight.

#### *Results of Bremen state elections – May 2007*

The far-Right German People's Union slipped past the post with 2.5 per cent in Bremen's sister city Bemerhaven due to a quirk of regional election law, meaning it will return to the legislature with either one or two deputies. The city-state of Bremen is the smallest of Germany's sixteen states, with only 490,000 voters.

#### *Bavaria opposes federal government's regularisation initiative for failed asylum seekers*

In November 2006, the federal government gave individual states the option of adopting a less restrictive approach to certain categories of failed asylum seekers. In future, asylum seekers, whose applications had been turned down, but who had not been deported for humanitarian reasons, could be granted a two-year res-



idence permit if they had lived in Germany for at least eight years (or six years if they had children), if they had found gainful employment and could support themselves. Despite this concession by a Conservative government, certain states are maintaining a rigid inflexibility. Bavarian interior minister Günther Beckstein, commenting on the relaxation said on public television (as cited in *Deutsche Welle* 16.11.06) 'We just won't accept tens of thousands of people more to strain the country's already overburdened social systems.' He pointed out that in Bavaria those who worked illegally would not be rewarded with a residence permit.

### **CDU state premier again opposes citizenship reforms**

In the late 1990s, the Social Democrats attempted to introduce citizenship reforms which would have allowed for dual nationality but its plans were thwarted when CDU state premier Roland Koch spearheaded a nationwide signature campaign against the proposal. In April 2007, Ralf Stegner, interior minister in the regional state of Schleswig-Holstein, urged Chancellor Angela Merkel to rethink her position on dual citizenship. But Koch once again tried to thwart any reform using the argument that 'the majority population must be sure that applicants integrate and accept German life'. Stegner, concerned that fewer Turkish nationals living in Germany are applying for citizenship, fears that Germany's largest immigrant community is gradually retreating from mainstream society.

### **Bavarian prime minister supports campaign against Munich mosque**

Bavaria's prime minister, Edmund Stoiber, speaking in a beer tent in April 2006, said that he supported a campaign to prevent the construction of a mosque in Munich, the heartland of German Catholicism. The CSU invalidated a preliminary permit issued by the Munich local authority, which is run by a coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Greens. Centre-Left Mayor Christian Ude accused the CSU of exploiting the issue of religious places of worship before elections in 2008. A vocal minority of residents have resisted the plans and filed a petition with the Bavarian parliament. 'Bavarian life', the petition states, 'is marked by the drinking of beer and the eating of pork. In Muslim faith, both are unclean and forbidden'.

### **Hessen: Christian Democrats focus on integration policy**

The prime minister of Hessen, Roland Koch (CDU,) says that he wants Hessen to function as a role model for integration and has formally launched a new integration policy. But Hessen's integration policy spokesperson for the SPD, Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel, has warned that if Koch wants to gain credibility within migrant communities, he must distance himself from his 1999 campaign against Hessen's foreign citizens (see above). He also points out that the CDU has drastically cut all funds for migrant support and withdrawn vital support for a number of social projects aimed at migrants.

### **Anti-discrimination legislation falls victim to electoral politics**

According to legal expert Marcus Lieppe, writing in *Statewatch*, the failure of the Upper House to pass the German Anti-Discrimination Act, was due to the stalling tactics of the CDU/CSU and the FDP in the run up to the elections. 'The failure of the law, which would have instituted EU anti-discrimination directives into German legislation, and the polemical discussion accompanying it demonstrate that, in the field of anti-discrimination politics, Germany is still a developing country.'

**Sources:** German Press Agency (12.11.06), *Deutsche Welle* (16.11.06, 24.4.07) *Spiegel* (17.11.06), *New York Times* (8.12.06), *International Herald Tribune* (7.3.07), *Frankfurter Rundschau* (12.4.07)

**Key articles:** Michael Klein, 'Germany: new nazi election breakthrough' *Searchlight* (October 2006).

Marcus Lieppe, 'Reports from a developing country: On the failure of the anti-discrimination law and the perspectives thereafter', (*Statewatch*, Vol 16, no. 3/4, May-July 2006)

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## **HUNGARY**

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### **At a glance**

- Last general election held April 2006.
- Concerns that anti-government demonstrations, organised by Fidesz (Conservative party), are becoming a lightning-rod for nationalism.
- Jewish community feels threatened.

### **Conservative anti-government protests open gates to extreme right**

In September and October 2006, there were street demonstrations and protests outside parliament touched off by the leaking of a tape in which the Socialist prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány admitted that the party had made election pledges that it knowingly could not fulfil in the April 2006 general election. The demonstrations were called by the main opposition party, Fidesz, but the protests rapidly turned violent, attracting elements of the far-Right. According to Jean-Yves Camus, writing in *Searchlight*, 'While not the prime motivator, the extreme right has gained from the clashes with the government, not least in terms of visibility, and has become more acceptable because Fidesz has been slow and weak in rejecting fascist involvement in the riots.'

Hungary's most successful extreme-Right group, the openly anti-Semitic Justice and Life Party (MIEP) lost its parliamentary representation in 2002, when it only managed to obtain 2.2 per cent of the vote. There are concerns now that MIEP, which has formed an alliance with Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary) might enjoy a renaissance. The Jewish community is feeling particularly vulnerable. Before the 15 March commemorations of the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian revolution, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary had to issue a warning to its members advising them to stay at home for fear of anti-Jewish attacks by anti-Gyurcsány protestors.

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**Sources:** *Ynet News* (3.3.07), *Searchlight* (December 2006)

**Key article:** Jean-Yves Camus, 'Hungary: Conservative protests open the gates to extreme right', (*Searchlight*, May 2007)

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## IRELAND

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### **At a glance**

- General election held May 2007.
- The Immigration Control Platform scored just 0.06 per cent of the vote.

### **How themes of immigration and integration were discussed during the election**

In the May 2007 general election Fianna Fáil emerged as the largest single party. Immigration policy, it would seem, was not such a hotly-contested election issue as in many other European countries. There was, however, criticism, of the terminology used by centre-left Fine Gael party leader Enda Kenny when discussing immigration. And there was disappointment, when the outgoing coalition government led by Fianna Fáil chose to publish its Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill a matter of days before the May general election. This, according to the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL), served no legislative purpose whatsoever and was a 'political stunt'.

#### *Centre-left wants national immigration debate*

Fine Gael (Tribe of the Irish) leader Enda Kenny, speaking at a parliamentary party meeting in Dublin in January 2007, called for a 'genuine national debate on immigration', adding that the recent dramatic growth in the rate of immigration into Ireland was resulting in what was arguably the greatest economic and social transformation in the country since independence. He was criticised for using the phrase 'a Celtic and Christian people' to describe the Irish population. He made three major points: that immigrants had responsibilities as well as rights; that immigration had to be managed 'in a way that keeps Ireland safe' and that immigration had to be a force for 'improving, not threatening' living standards. He did not want to see a situation developing where immigrant populations led separate lives, and that Irish jobs and the rights of those who came to work in Ireland must be protected.

#### *Criticism of Fine Gael leader's terminology*

The speech came as parliament debated the new Immigration Residence and Protection Bill. Labour party leader Pat Rabbitte said that Kenny's comments on immigration needed to be taken seriously but admitted that he wouldn't have used certain terminology availed by his potential coalition partner.

#### *New integration unit formed*

Another important factor behind the debate was the formation of a new Integration Unit. On 1 February the Tanaiste, speaking at conference on integration policy, said that integration was a two-way process and that

'diversity should be respected and that society is all the richer for such respect'. In mid-May, as election day approached, Enda Kenny announced that he would appoint a minister for integration affairs to deal with the 'influx' of immigrants into the state's schools and put in place a system to 'rigorously screen' those coming from outside the EU for criminal records.

#### *Party positions on immigration*

The *Irish Independent* submitted a series of questions on immigration to all the political parties – all, save Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), responded. It found that Sinn Féin and the Green Party had the most positive attitudes to immigration, describing them as having 'huge potential to change our national dynamic for the better' and a 'welcome part of modern Irish society'. Fine Gael and Progressive Democrats (pro-free-market breakaway faction of Fianna Fáil) were more keen to emphasise the responsibilities of immigrants to uphold the law and to accept the values of a democratic republic. Labour was somewhere in-between.

#### **Other election issues**

##### *No candidates with immigrant background selected to stand*

The Irish Independent questionnaire ascertained that none of the political parties had selected any candidates with an immigrant background to run in the general election. All parties said that they had immigrant members, with the Labour Party estimating that it could be as high as ten per cent in its Dublin branches.

##### *Immigrant groups fear scapegoating*

The National Consultative Committee on Racism circulated an anti-racism protocol in advance of the election, which all the parties signed. Many ethnic minority groups, such as the Association of Nigerians in Galway, feared that they would be turned into political scapegoats during the campaign.

**Sources:** *Irish Examiner* (27.1, 27.4.07), *RTE News* (23.1.07), *Irish Times* (1.2.07)

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## ITALY

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### **At a glance**

- Last general election held 2006.
- Centre-left administration attempts modest immigration and asylum reforms.
- In the run-up to the June local elections, the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and the Northern League were active in local campaigns opposing mosques and have launched initiatives against Muslim schools and girls wearing the veil.

### **New immigration and asylum reforms proposed**

The centre-left government, which proposed a broad overhaul of the country's immigration legislation as part of its manifesto for the 2006 general election, is to introduce immigration reforms which would probably double the duration of a residency contract for those in

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work, from two to four years. It also proposes to have a single asylum law and a points-based entry system to encourage managed migration. There have also been the announcement of a plan to reform the Centres for Temporary Stay – which will henceforth be divided into those for the ‘socially dangerous’ and those to serve as ‘proper welcome centres’.

### **Northern League attempts to make capital out of ‘illegal immigration’**

Northern League (NL) parliamentary deputies attempted to make political capital out of the arrest two young Romanian prostitutes accused of fatally stabbing an Italian woman during a brawl. According to Piergiorgio Stiffoni, the Northern League had warned the government even before Romania joined the EU that immigrants from eastern Europe were committing crimes in Italy, therefore the government was responsible for the tragedy. ‘For the past 20 years, these people from Eastern Europe, who have a reputation for being violent drunks, murderers and exploiters of women and children, have been coming to our country and committing crimes’ said Stiffoni.

### **NL mayor rewards police officers for capturing ‘illegals’**

The NL mayor of Adro, Brescia, introduced special performance bonuses of 500 Euro for municipal police officers who captured illegal immigrants.

### **Local politics: AN and NL join anti-mosque campaigns**

#### *Milan*

Romano La Russa, MEP for the Alleanza Nazionale (AN), who is also a local councillor, opposed the construction of a mosque in Sesto San Giovanni, on the outskirts of Milan, on the grounds that ‘hiding among those who frequent mosques, taking advantage of the crowds of worshippers, are every type of character, illegals, criminals ... even terrorist, often with the collusion of friendly imams’.

#### *Tuscany*

The late Oriana Fallaci had called for the mosque in Colle Val d’Elsa, a town of 14,000 inhabitants near Siena in Tuscany, to be blown up. There were ugly demonstrations and in one incident the severed head of a pig was thrown at the entrance to the building site. NL MEP Mario Borghezio’s visited the building site dangling pork sausages.

#### *Other campaigns*

Protests against mosques have already occurred in Genova, Goidi and Padova, supported by the Northern League, the AN and Forza Italia. The far-Right group Forza Nuova issued leaflets linking all mosques and Muslims with terrorism, saying ‘There is no such thing as moderate Islam, no mosques to be allowed in our land’.

### **AN politician demands ban on veil**

During a television broadcast in December 2006 AN MP Daniela Santanche (who is the author of a book critical of the condition of Muslim women) clashed with Abu Shwaima, the imam of a Milan mosque on the subject of

wearing the veil. Santanche, who described the veil as a symbol of women’s oppression, has since been under police protection, convinced that the imam’s statement that she was ignorant and didn’t have the knowledge to comment on Islam amounted to a fatwa against her. In an interview with the *Corriere della Sera* on 11 January Santanche announced that she would submit a bill aimed at prohibiting minors from wearing ‘any kind of veil’. ‘11- or 12-year-olds are not able to decide on their own’. She told the newspaper that she ‘really’ believed ‘our culture is superior to the Islamic (culture) which lapidates women and allows polygamy’.

### **Milan: NL oppose Islamic school**

Members of the NL have been active in a dispute which led to the Egyptian-Italian Naguib Mahfouz elementary and middle school in Milan being closed for a month amid a controversy about wearing the headscarf and allegations of health and safety risks on the school site.

### **‘New Italians – Immigrants Party’ launched**

The ‘New Italians – Immigrants Party’ has been formed by non-EU citizens of different nationalities. Its launch came after the government approved a draft law earlier this year aimed at giving voting rights to immigrants who have lived in Italy for at least four years.

**Sources:** *il manifesto* (11, 28.9, 17, 25.10.06), *People’s Daily Online China* (8.2.07), *Guardian* (21.11.07), *Searchlight* (February 2007), *Sunday Times* (17.12.06), *Migration News Sheet* (February, June 2007), *The Post Chronicle* (1.5.07), *Adnkronos International* (22.5.07)

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## **LATVIA**

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### **At a glance**

- Last general election held October 2006.
- Gains for nationalist and extreme-Right parties.
- Mounting calls for resignation of Janis Smits (Latvia First Party) as head of parliamentary human rights committee.

### **Results of October general election**

In the October 2006 general election the Conservative People’s Power emerged with the largest share of the vote (19.49 percent.) But the nationalist forces also entered the 100-seat parliament. Their results were: Latvia’s First Party and the Latvia’s Way Alliance (8.59 per cent); For the Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement (6.95 per cent).

### **Extreme-Right MP appointed head of parliamentary human rights committee**

There was disbelief when Latvia First Party MP Janis Smits was elected head of the parliamentary human rights committee. Smits has campaigned against the introduction of legislation to protect people from discrimination on the grounds of their sexual orientation. He describes such measures as the ‘legalisation of sexual perversion’ and believes homosexuality is a sin and that homosexuals are degenerate.

Members of the European parliament’s gay and les-

bian rights group criticised Latvian MPs for blatantly disregarding of the candidate's prior history of incitement to hatred and violence and local human rights group describe his appointment as 'appalling'.

**Sources:** *UNHCR Baltic & Nordic News Headlines* (9.10.06), *BBC News* (21.11.06)

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## NORWAY

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### *At a glance*

- Some polls suggest that the anti-immigration Progress Party (FrP) could win the 2009 general election
- The government has been accused of appeasing the FrP through immigration and asylum legislation.
- Progress Party adopting a new approach to immigrant access to welfare state in run up to Autumn local elections.

### ***Progress Party seek to exploit immigration issue for electoral gain***

The September 2006 general election put the FrP in a strong position (22.1 per cent of the vote, its best showing ever). As some opinion polls suggest that it could win the next general election, the party has announced that it will make immigration and integration the key issue in local elections. The Labour Party (the lead party in the coalition government) states that it intends to expose the double-talk of the FrP and highlight the fact that immigration is good for Norway. There are some indications that the government has been wounded by UNHCR criticisms of its asylum policy. In January, the government said that the forthcoming Aliens Act would include provisions that would ensure that Norway complied with UNHCR guidelines for the return of refugees. The minister of labour and social inclusion Bjarne Hakon Hanssen agreed that the cases of a group of Afghani asylum seekers who went on hunger strike last summer would be reviewed.

### ***Progress Party proposes excluding some immigrants from welfare state***

In the run-up to the Autumn 2007 local elections, there is concern that the FrP is moulding a new approach to the welfare state, based on the exclusion of immigrants. In November 2006, Siv Jensen, chair of FrP said that a large part of the social security budget was going to meet the welfare needs of non-western immigrants. 'Half of the cake goes to immigrants that arrived in Norway after 1995, which is a clear indication of the failure of the government's integration policy.' Siv Jensen wants to exclude immigrant women from social security benefits if they are not willing to learn Norwegian. She says that as immigrant women are an enormous resource for society they should be forced out of their homes to become part of society outside.

### *Learn the language, or forfeit benefits*

At the FrP annual conference, the Oslo branch proposed that all immigrants be forced to learn Norwegian or forfeit benefits. Now the former FrP leader Carl I Hagen is to push the party's parliamentary group for the measure

to become national policy.

And Hagen has now gone further in proposing a loss of child benefit payment and other social aids if immigrants cannot document efforts to learn the language. He said that a dramatic reduction must be made in the number of children starting school without being able to speak Norwegian. He proposed that all immigrant parents with children aged two should be informed, in their own language, of the conditions needed to receive social support. 'We will no longer accept the development of ghettos and that children are born in Norway and cannot speak Norwegian. It is a parental responsibility', Hagen said. If the withholding of benefits on such conditions was not legal, then the law could simply be changed, he suggested.

### *Childcare cash benefits for immigrants attacked*

A working group within the FrP has proposed that cash support for children's daycare should only be given to parents with Norwegian citizenship. It cited research showing that Norwegian families prefer to receive credits towards supporting their children in kindergartens while immigrants prefer cash support.

### *Proposal to halt immigration to Oslo*

The Oslo FrP also approved a policy of halting immigration to the capital in order, it says, to facilitate the integration of the existing immigrant population. In Oslo, Norway's capital and biggest city, one in five residents is born abroad.

### ***FrP wants HIV and mental health tests on asylum seekers***

FrP MP Harald Tom Nesvik, who is head of the Health Committee in the Norwegian Parliament, wants to introduce compulsory HIV and mental health tests for asylum seekers.

### ***Defining Somalia safe shows influence of FrP***

In August 2006, labour and social inclusion minister Bjarne Håkon Hanssen was accused of flirting with the FrP after the government said that it was safe to return asylum seekers to Somalia. After sharp criticism from UNHCR, the government tempered its position in October by promising to abide by UNHCR guidelines in future.

### ***Oslo: Conservative politicians call for halt to immigration***

Frank Aerebrot, Professor of Comparative Politics, has described two Conservative politicians' pronouncements on immigration and integration as a 'stunt' to influence a local election campaign.

Oslo City Council leader Erling Lae and mayoral candidate Fabian Stang have called for a halt to immigration until integration is improved. Lae told *Aftenposten* that family reunification requests were causing increased unemployment and strain in Oslo. The main reason for differences in living standard differences in the capital was the number of isolated immigrant women, he said.

### ***Political parties clash on integration measures***

The issue of forced marriages has dominated the integration debate in Norway for some time and has led to



specific measures targeted at immigrants such as the introduction of a minimum age for marriages with foreigners. But the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party are now out of step with the views of the mainstream parties. Both now support immigrant organisations which argue that forced marriages should be prevented by means other than immigration controls.

The Labour Party MP Saera Khan – who is Norway's sole ethnic minority parliamentarian – says that the government should prioritise integration issues instead of combating racism. A good integration policy would make immigrants merge into society at all levels and racist attitudes would disappear as a result.

### **Conservative academic stigmatises immigrants in welfare debate**

Ethnic minority groups have strongly criticised academic Hanne Nabintu Herland for a book claiming that the Norwegian social welfare system is to blame for the high percentage of unemployment among immigrants and that Norwegians 'automatically feel sorry for people with dark skin. We put them on welfare, instead of putting them to work'. Many immigrants feel bitter towards the Norwegian system because it's kept them out of the job market by being 'too kind' with welfare.

Herland, who grew up in Africa, is said to have a masters degree in cultural studies, to have worked with ethnic minorities in Norway for many years, and is described as a specialist in religious history. But her book, *My sjanse* (New Chance) is published through Norway's Conservative Party.

In an interview with the newspaper VG, Herland claimed that Norwegian society had developed into a 'rock-hard segregated society, where people are evaluated in terms of ethnicity, not competence'. Herland accused earlier generations of social workers of 'waiting at the airport and doling out social services available for asylum seekers and immigrants' instead of immediately sending them to Norwegian classes and instilling in them a sense of opportunity for those who work for it. 'Lots of people have interpreted this as an invitation not to work'. 'Many have viewed Norway as a country where the state pays your monthly salary and where housing is provided.'

**Sources:** *Dagsavisen* (18,19,21,22, 24.8.06, 7.2.07), *Aftenposten* English version (20.8, 7.11.06, 6.2, 14.5.07), *NRK* 3.10.06, 5.2.07), *Nettavisen* (9.1.07), *NRK* (5.2.07), *Verdens Gang* (5.2.07).

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## **POLAND**

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### **At a glance**

■ Last parliamentary elections held in September 2005, but the Law and Justice Party (PiS, lead party in the coalition government) faces increasing isolation abroad due to homophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Roma prejudice, particularly within its junior coalition partners.

### **November 2006 local elections – losses for LPR**

The populist Conservative ruling coalition, which includes the nationalist parties, the League of Polish

Families (LPR) and the Self-Defence Party, suffered losses in the November 2006 local elections. The LPR did not break through the 5 per cent threshold (getting 4.5 per cent of vote). The LPR mayoral candidate for Warsaw Wojciech Wierzejski polled just 0.3 per cent of the vote. There have been fresh allegations that the LPR's youth wing, the All-Polish Youth (MW), is linked to the neo-Nazi scene.

### **Background to loss of government support**

Poland is governed by the populist-conservative Law PiS in coalition with the LPR and Self-Defence Party which are linked to nationalism, anti-Semitism and anti-Roma prejudice. The government faced crises in December after a sex scandal in one part of its coalition and neo-Nazi revelations in another. Andrzej Lepper of the Self-Defence Party is alleged to have offered party jobs for sexual favours. A Polish newspaper published pictures of a meeting of the LPR where swastikas were displayed and Sieg Heil salutes made. The PiS came to power promising a 'moral revolution' based on family values.

### **Controversy over deputy prime minister's academic appointment**

The American Anti-Defamation League issued a statement criticising the (then) Polish deputy prime minister Andrzej Lepper (also minister of agriculture) for accepting an appointment as professor at an 'institution which promotes anti-Semitism'.

Andrzej Lepper, leader of the Self-Defence Party was made professor at the private university, the International Academy of Personnel Management (MAUP) in Kiev. The small Ukrainian university was widely seen as responsible for publishing the majority of anti-Semitic newspapers and journals available in Ukraine. In January, Lepper delivered a lecture at MAUP, accompanied by the deputy leader of Self Defence, Janusz Maksymiuk, who was also awarded an honorary degree.

### **More on MAUP**

The US Holocaust denier David Duke also teaches at MAUP. MAUP claims to be anti-Zionist, but among other things, in its weekly newspaper *Personnel Plus* it published an open letter in April 2005 to President Yushchenko, calling for a parliamentary investigation into the 'criminal activities of organised Jewry in Ukraine'. MAUP's funding by Muslim and Arab states, such as Libya and Iran, has also been criticised by Jewish groups.

### **Lepper's response**

In the early 2000s, Lepper caused outrage after expressing admiration for Hitler's policies and achievements. Two years ago Lepper received an honorary doctorate from the same university. His response to his critics was, 'I do not interfere with the league of American Jews, so I advise them to not interfere my party and my activities.'

### **Deputy prime minister pits sexual freedom against Muslim expansionism**

On 1 March 2007, Poland's deputy prime minister, Roman Giertych, who also holds the education portfolio, said that the rights of homosexuals and the practice of



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abortion had to be curtailed or Europe 'will be a continent settled by representatives of the Islamic world who care for the family'. A government spokesman said that his statement did not reflect the government's official views.

#### *More on Giertych's views*

The LPR is ultra-Catholic and Giertych's suitability for the education portfolio, due to his intolerant views, had already been questioned. A professor of biology, Giertych is a Christian fundamentalist who called for Darwin's theory of evolution to be removed from school-books. His introduction of a bill to ban the discussion of homosexuality in schools and sack teachers promoting such 'culture' has been condemned by Human Rights Watch.

#### *Teachers protest*

In May, more than 10,000 teachers marched through Warsaw against the government's education policies and to demand pay rises. They also called for the resignation of the education minister.

#### **European parliament embarrassed by Polish MEP's anti-Semitic tract**

European Parliament president Hans-Gert Poettering has said that no EU money was used to print an anti-Semitic booklet by Polish MEP Maciej Giertych (LPR), adding that he was 'profoundly' troubled by the text and that racism was 'against fundamental European values'. The controversy erupted after Giertych sent the booklet to fellow MPs and distributed it via his website. The European parliament's bureau (a regulatory body responsible for the parliament's budget and administration) then moved to sanction him for publishing the tract – a move Giertych opposed.

#### *What the book says*

Giertych, a former head of the LPR and father of the deputy prime minister, is author of a 32-page booklet, 'Civilisations at War in Europe', which says Jews like to settle 'among the rich' and 'create their own ghettos'. It also speaks of Jewish 'biological separation' leading to differences in facial features. Giertych, who is a botanist, says that Jews are 'biologically different' from 'gentiles' and 'prefer to voluntarily live separately from the communities which surround them'. 'It is a great misunderstanding to consider anti-Semitism as racism.' The text appeared with a European parliament logo and controversy has emerged about whether it received European parliament funding.

No stranger to controversy, last year Giertych praised Franco. The European Jewish Congress said that the book contained 'the same pre-war theories that led to the Holocaust' and called for Giertych to lose his parliamentary immunity.

**Sources:** *Searchlight* (January 2007), *Guardian* (9.12.06), *European Jewish Press* (12.1.07) <<http://www.ejpress.org/>>, *ADL* (1.2.07), *EUobserver.com* (15.2.07), <<http://euobserver.com/>>, *Migration News Sheet* (April 2007), *Spiegel* (19.3.07), *BBC News* (19.3.07).

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## PORTUGAL

#### *At a glance*

■ Last general election held January 2006, extreme-Right party attempted to polarise immigration debate.

#### **Extreme Right launches anti-immigrant drive**

The extreme-Right National Renewal Party (PNR), which held an international rally in Lisbon in April, has been attempting to up the ante on immigration. In April, it placed a huge billboard in a square in downtown Lisbon with a photo of its leader Pinto Coelho and the slogan 'No more Immigration; Nationalism is the solution; Portugal for the Portuguese'. There was also an image of an aeroplane taking off and the slogan 'Have a Good Trip'. National newspapers carried editorials condemning the PNR.

#### **Government launches new integration approach**

Integration could become a hotly debated issue after the government circulated, in December 2006, a policy document to the Consultative Council for Immigration Affairs (COCAI) aimed at encouraging fuller integration of legally resident immigrants. The Platform of Representative Structures of Immigrant Communities in Portugal (PERCIP) said that although the document had positive elements, it did not take into account the problems of 200,000 undocumented immigrants who urgently needed to be regularised.

The document defined 123 integration targets involving thirteen ministries and offered itself as a 'reference programme for civil society'. It recommended that various associations participate in the open discussion of the document. Its positive point was that it dealt with a number of bureaucratic hurdles to integration, such as lack of recognition of degrees or technical qualification which means that highly educated immigrants end up working as waiters, bricklayers or carpenters. It also suggested mechanisms to deal with unscrupulous employers of illegal immigrants and reception centres for the victims of trafficking, who are, for the most part, poor Brazilian women. A new law on the acquisition of Portuguese citizenship by migrants has also been passed. An inter-ministerial commission is to be formed and will report on a six-monthly basis to COCAI.

#### *Background*

There are a total of 650,000 immigrants, 450,000 of whom have papers, in a country of 10.2 million. The largest group are Brazilians (120,000) the second and third largest groups of immigrants are from Cape Verde and Ukraine.

**Sources:** Inter Press Service (19.12.06, 6.4.07)

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## ROMANIA

#### *At a glance*

■ Next general election Winter 2009. Concerns that politicians will mobilise anti-Roma racism to gain votes.

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## Romanian president embroiled in racism row

Romania's National Council against Discrimination has investigated President Traian Basescu for racist comments to the journalist Andreea Pana following an altercation. In May 2007, the journalist had attempted to interview Basescu, as he was shopping with his wife about a referendum which was to decide on the President's impeachment on corruption charges. As Pana attempted to record footage of Basescu on her mobile phone, an angry Basescu responded by snatching the phone and allegedly describing the journalist as very aggressive and a 'stinking gypsy'. The telephone was later returned to the journalist but the offensive words had been recorded on it. After audio portions of the footage was broadcast on Romanian TV, the President issued an apology, saying the remarks were caused by stress.

**Sources:** *EUX.TV* (21.5.07), Dženo Association, (23.4.07), <[http://www.dzeno.cz/?c\\_id=14393](http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=14393)>.

**Key article:** European Roma Grassroots Organisation, 'Chronicle of a disaster in the making', <<http://www.ergonetwork.org/>>

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## SLOVAKIA

### At a glance

- Last general election held June 2006.
- Restrictive new citizenship law expected to become law by July 2007.

### Citizenship laws: mainstream parties play to prejudice and fear

Ján Slota, leader of the Slovak National Party (SNS, partner in governing coalition) indulged in a bout of xenophobia after criticisms of a government amendment to the State Citizenship Act which will make it more difficult for foreigners to gain citizenship. According to Ján Slota, 'We don't want to end up like in Kosovo and allow Slovakia to be turned into the Albanian Republic where we will all be running around with turbans on our heads in 20 or 50 years'. The leader of the opposition Christian Democrats, Vladimír Palko (KDH), also made references to Muslim countries when welcoming the citizenship reforms. Slovakia should be able to differentiate between citizenship applicants by country of origin, he said. 'We should have the right to say that we prefer Ukrainians or Russians over people from Muslim countries who come from completely different cultures'.

The legal amendments mean that in future foreigners will have to live in Slovakia on permanent residence permits for eight years before being eligible to apply for Slovak citizenship, rather than the current five years. The amendment will also introduce a Slovak language test and will tighten the 'moral suitability' criteria for citizenship.

**Source:** *Slovak Spectator* (12.3.07)

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## SPAIN

### At a glance

- Local and regional elections held in May 2007.
- Anti-immigration and extreme-Right parties double their representation compared with 2003.
- Centre-Right Popular Party (PP) vowed to make immigration a central issue in the next general election. In Catalonia, concern mounted that the PP's views on immigration resembled those of the extreme Right.

### Local and regional elections – May 2007

The May 2007 local and regional elections – regarded as a dress rehearsal for the March 2008 general election – was seen as a particularly bitter contest with the relationship between the ruling Socialists and the PP at its lowest ebb (largely due to the acrimonious debate over the Basque group ETA). In the event, the PP gained 35.64 per cent of the vote, just ahead of the ruling Socialists, who polled 34.94 per cent. But anti-immigration parties also made significant gains, doubling their representation as compared to 2003. According to *El País*, at 'least 50 councillors elected in various towns and cities in Spain belong to parties whose manifestos mention prominently the fight against immigration'. For instance:

- The Platform for Catalonia (PxC) which links immigration with crime and calls for 'the immediate expulsion of all illegal immigrants' went from six to seventeen councillors in fourteen places in Catalonia.
- España 2000 exploiting xenophobia and an extreme form of Spanish nationalism captured several seats in places around Valencia such as Silla (Valencia) and Onda (Castellón). (In similar elections in 2003 it failed to gain any representation at all.) Led by José Luís Roberto, a lawyer with the association of adult clubs, the party claims to be not 'extremist' but 'preferentialist'. Claiming only to put the Spanish first, it made illegal immigration central to its electoral strategy.
- Democracia Nacional (DN) campaigned on the slogan 'Immigration, strikes, terrorism: don't let them destroy Spain'. Formed in 1994, it won two of the seven seats in Herradon de Pinares (Avila), the same number as the PP and one in Tardajos (Burgos). Party literature states 'Spain, the world's collector of immigrants' (this was a reference to the Spanish government's humanitarian operation to rescue on the high seas twenty six immigrants rejected by Malta).
- Partido de Accion Democrata Española (PADE), which described itself as Christian-humanist, liberal-reformist and moderate, also exploited anti-immigrant messages. To the right of the PP, the PADE gained 20 councillors – twelve in Madrid. Its party manifesto states 'It does not make sense that Spaniards in situations that are sometimes worse than those of the immigrants should not receive the assistance in health, housing or culture that they [immigrants] receive'.
- Movimiento Falangista de España (MFE) now has one councillor in Santoña (Cantabria).
- The list Iniciativa Habitada (IH, Inhabitable Initiative) stood in the province of Cáceres and gained 27.5 per cent of the vote. IH was set up barely a year ago but now has five councillors, the same as the PP and PSOE in Talayuela (Cáceres).

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### ***Big gains for Platform for Catalonia due to anti-immigration message***

The PxC gained seventeen councillors in the May local and regional elections by exploiting an anti-immigration message which could prove decisive in areas such as Vic (Barcelona) and El Vendrell (Tarragiba) where it now holds the balance of power. It obtained 12,400 votes in Catalonia as a whole, doubling its achievements of four years ago. Its electoral success was gained at the expense of the PP.

#### *Vic: Josep Anglada runs for mayor*

The PxC was founded in 2002 by Josep Anglada, who was the mayoral candidate for the city of Vic where he received 2,400 votes (18.5 per cent of total votes cast) in the elections on 27 May. Anglada is well-known in the city for his pro-Franco past and his militancy in the far-Right party Fuerza Nueva. With four seats on the local council, the PxC is now the second most important political force in the city. With fears growing that Anglada will seek to further exploit anti-immigration feeling, the Socialist Party and the Convergència I Union have ruled out any political pact with the Platform at a local level.

Vic is a city of 39,000 inhabitants, six kilometres from Manlleu, where 22 per cent of the population are immigrants. It is a city with a strong religious tradition, and was the home of Bishop Torres I Bages, who summed up Pujolist nationalism with the words 'Catalonia will be Christian or it will be nothing at all'. Anglada has been a city councillor there for four years and has created a base in its working-class districts. The president of a neighbourhood association who prefers to remain anonymous said that 'He came here with an avenging plan – designed to create problems – between those who were indigenous and those who weren't'. Anglada's role, the association member explained, had been one of defending in the city council any resident who felt aggrieved by immigrants – shopkeepers who claimed unfair competition in Moroccan shops kept open all hours, those calling for the closure of Muslim chapels or the opening of Protestant churches. Such people found a champion in Anglada as urban legends about preferential treatment for immigrants grew. Despite the fact that no Muslim in the city wears the burka, Anglada proposed that it should be banned.'

### ***Talayuela: complaints made about racism in IH election campaign***

Days before the local elections, the Association of Human Rights (Adhex), Cáceres Acoge and the Extremadura Regional Federation of Mothers and Fathers of Pupils from State Schools (Freapa-CP) asked the State public prosecutor to open an investigation into the IH's use of 'racist and xenophobic prejudices with a large dose of fanaticism' during its election campaign. In response, IH leader Jorge Gómez threatened to take legal action against anyone who branded the IH racist or xenophobic.

Talayuela is a small town with a population of around 10,000 of which some 35 per cent are immigrants. There are a total of twenty-three nationalities living here, the majority from Morocco, others coming from Senegal, Ecuador, Poland, Romania, Mauritania and Jordan. According to Abdellah, the secretary of the

Annour Association, the IH 'is a sham, a party that emerged from a group of residents who demonstrated against the building of a mosque in 2006. The IH makes a big play about the insecurity that immigrants bring, the threat to public resources and the fact that immigrants are a risk to public health. According to Abdellah, one should 'ask the farmers to say what they think of us: we work from morning to night and we have never received any social housing'.

### ***PP racialise crime***

In the run-up to the elections, NGOs expressed concern at the way in which politicians, particularly from the PP, racialised the issue of crime. In mid-May a spokeswoman for SOS Racism, Begoña Sánchez, warned of the danger posed by political speeches which linked immigration with crime and loss of identity. SOS Racism's concern about increasing xenophobia was shared by the trade union UGT which issued a statement expressing concern at the xenophobic and racist tone of comments made by some Canary Island politicians following the recent arrival of large numbers of boat people. It described as inappropriate a statement made by the President of the Canary Islands People's Party, Jose Manuel Soria, in which he said the greatest threat to the Canaries was posed by the problem of Africa and immigration.

In the provincial city of Vic, the Plataforma par Catalunya ran on an openly anti-immigrant electoral platform. (Its leader Josep Anglada is a former member of the fascist organisation Fuerza Nueva.)

### ***Badalona PP branch condemned for use of extreme-Right DVD in mayoral contest***

In May 2007, there was a wave of criticism across the political spectrum against the Badalona PP for its production of a 'xenophobic' DVD for use in a local election. The use of the DVD put the PP on the same level as the extreme Right said other political parties which have called on the Electoral Commission to intervene to prohibit its further distribution. Carles Sagués, mayoral candidate for the Green Initiative believes that the PP is using Badalona 'as a test bed to discover how its xenophobic discourse goes down with voters'.

#### *Citizens fears exploited*

In the DVD, made to promote the candidacy of the controversial PP politician Xavier Garcia Albiol, residents of the Badalona region, spurred on by a presenter, deplore the problems arising from immigration and the break down of law and order and speak against the building of a mosque in the district of Montigala. There have been criticisms about the way in which the DVD was made, with allegations that some of those who appeared did not know that their words were to be used in political propaganda.

Xavier Garcia Albiol is the PP's administrative secretary in Catalonia and a frequent spokesperson on issues of immigration. In response to criticisms, Albiol defended its context and said that far from withdrawing the DVD he was thinking of pressing more copies.

### ***General election: Centre-Right prioritise immigration issue***

The next general election is under one year away. And the PP believes that one of the key issues on which it

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can gain votes is that of immigration. In an interview on a TVE programme, in mid-April, PP leader Mariano Rajoy, said that the economy, immigration and crime would be his top priorities in campaigning for the 2008 general election.

The PP has proposed 100 measures on immigration, including the prohibition of mass regularisation (a reference to the fact that in February 2005, the centre-Left government initiated an amnesty for unregularised workers). In an interview with the EFE news agency, Rajoy said that it was important to be very 'tough on illegal immigration' and called for backing for 'intelligent integration policies' since the government in his opinion 'has handled things shockingly badly' and was not controlling the border to prevent people entering illegally. He said that he was in favour of immigration as long as it was legal. Anyone who came from abroad had the same rights and responsibilities. 'They have to share the values and principles that are rooted in our history and reflected in our constitution', he said.

### ***Political parties clash on immigration***

A parliamentary debate about the outcome of the European Council meeting in Brussels on 16 December 2006 degenerated into a clash about immigration policy between Socialist prime minister José Zapatero and leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy. Rajoy, dismissed the summit as a complete waste of time and said that Spain had lost all its influence in Europe because of the government decision to introduce mass legalisation of illegal immigrants. Zapatero said that his government had inherited 700,000 illegal immigrants from the previous Conservative administration. He also stressed his government's success in repatriating 5,000 Senegalese nationals that year alone, while the PP governments had left more than 20,000 illegal immigrants from Senegal in Spain.

### ***The PP exploits Marine 1 boat incident***

At the PP Immigration Conference in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, in February, General secretary Ángel Acebes said the government had allowed the problem of immigration 'to grow into an absolute tidal wave'.

Acebes cited as proof the incident of the *Marine 1*, the ship carrying nearly four hundred immigrants which was held for ten days off the coast of Mauritania while it was on its way to the Canary Isles. He accused the government of totally mishandling the situation, saying that the conflict over *Marine 1* also showed that Zapatero's policy was disastrous for Spain. The government was faced with boats full of immigrants arriving in the Canary Islands but 'in a couple of months we have gone from seeing pictures of immigrants crammed onto a ship to pictures of policemen sleeping on cardboard boxes'. (A reference to the working conditions faced by members of the Spanish National Police Force who went to Mauritania to watch over the occupants of *Marine 1*.) Rajoy said that the pictures of the police were 'pictures which every Spanish citizen is ashamed of'. In a final swipe, he said that the Mauritanian authorities' delay in allowing the immigrants back on Mauritanian territory was proof of the government's 'erratic foreign policy' and that foreign minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos 'doesn't have the respect of even the least developed countries in Africa'.

### ***Again, regularisation campaign attacked***

Acebes accused the government of taking forward 'a world-wide policy of legalisation for all immigrants' and said that the only thing that concerned the prime minister was keeping 'De Juana Chaos happy' (a reference to a convicted ETA terrorist who had recently been on hunger strike). According to PP shadow minister for social policy, Ana Pastor, the conference had helped the party to define a range of policies which offered an alternative to the current policy on immigration.

### ***PP attacks government's integration policies***

The PP's spokesperson Ana Pastor attacked the government's Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration saying that the problems of integration had worsened because of the government's immigration policies, in particular its regularisation programme. Whereas the former PP government allocated seven million Euro for integration, from 2007-2010, more than 2,000 million Euro would go to social services' support for the integration of immigrants. Almost half of this amount would go into education, particularly for measures 'to adapt the education system to pupil diversity'.

### ***Reform of integration approach***

Deputy prime minister Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega has outlined new integration measures on reception, education, jobs, homes, social services, health, infancy and childhood, women, equal treatment, participation, raising awareness and co-development. The main objectives are to guarantee the full exercise of immigrants' civil, social, economic, cultural and political rights and adjust public policies to meet the needs that come with immigration. The initiative has been organised through a consensus of regional authorities, councils, immigrants and NGOs.

### ***Immigration benefits must be evenly shared***

The same plan seeks to make sure that public services do not deteriorate, either for immigrants or for native Spaniards, since the latter should not have to suffer because of workers coming in from other countries. The plan points out that 'in some cases the arrival of immigrants has only served to highlight shortages... in our welfare state, as occurs in health, education, housing or in social services'. It continues 'furthermore, the benefits and costs of immigration appear to be unequally distributed among different social groups, because, even though immigration is positive for the whole of Spanish society, some social groups benefit more from it, while others share the problems and shortages in running public services with the same immigrant population'.

### ***PSOE admits Socialist Arab section***

A new federal Socialist Arab grouping has been created within the Socialist Party (PSOE). According to the Secretary for Social Movements and Relations with Voluntary Organisations, Pedro Zerolo, the new group will also fight against racism and for equality. Zerolo says that every day speeches are made that link immigration with violence, crime, lack of public safety and disease, and that people of goodwill need to speak up against speeches of this sort. The president of ATIME, Kamal Rhamouni, welcomed the initiative which he believes will make visible the Arab and Moroccan presence in the party.



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**Sources:** EFE – *Las Palmas, Gran Canaria* (17.2.07), *Madridpress.com* (28.10.06), <<http://Madridpress.com/>>, *Expatica News* (19.2, 20.4.07), *El Vanguardia* (19.11.06), *El País* (20.4, 10,19, 29.5, 1, 3.6.07), *Canariasahora* (14.5.07)

**Key articles:** Vanessa Pi, 'Extremist and anti-immigration parties get a taste of power', (*El País* 3.6.07).

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## SWEDEN

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### *At a glance*

■ Since the September 2006 general election, the centre-Right coalition government led by the Moderate Party has launched an extraordinary attack on multiculturalism, scrapped the parliamentary integration committee and stopped the funding to many minority ethnic groups.

■ Minister of Integration, Nyamko Sabuni (from the Liberal People's Party) has been accused of Islamophobia.

■ Neo-Nazi Swedish Democrats made an unexpected breakthrough in southern Sweden in the September 2006 county councils and municipal councils elections.

### *General, county and municipal elections – September 2006*

#### *General election results*

The Social Democrats suffered their worst electoral result since the 1920s. Sweden is now governed by a centre-Right alliance of four parties – Moderate Party, Centre Party, Liberal People's Party and Christian Democrats. The extreme-Right Sweden Democrats (SD) are not represented in parliament, although they made a significant electoral breakthrough in the county council and municipal council elections held at the same time.

#### *County and municipal elections – electoral gains for extreme-Right*

The SD made an unexpected electoral breakthrough in the September 2006 county and municipal elections in southern Sweden. The 'Swedes First' campaign of the SD proved popular, and it has quadrupled its number of representatives on local councils from fifty in 2002 to approximately 200 today. The increase was particularly strong in Scania and Blekinge, where the SD is represented on all but one of the region's councils and is now regarded as the 'kingmaker' in local politics. The party's biggest gains came in the port city of Landskrona, where the SD polled over 22 per cent of the vote, increasing its councillors from four to twelve.

The scale of the SD's success comes as a shock. Once an overtly neo-Nazi party, it sought to transform itself into a Swedish version of the Danish People's Party. The comparison with the Islamophobic and xenophobic DPP is not inapt. Scania and Blekinge are geographically close to Denmark, and the SD's local leader Sten Andersson has stressed the role the DPP has played in teaching the SD how to become a major party without being accused of racism or labelled 'Nazi'. And the xenophobia of the Danish debate over immigration has struck

a chord in Scania – where Malmö and Landskrona rank behind Stockholm as the cities with large immigrant communities. According to *Searchlight's* Graeme Atkinson, southern Sweden 'is rural, very conservative and rather God-fearing'. Though it has been a popular fishing-ground for anti-immigration politics, the scale of the far Right's electoral breakthrough was unprecedented.

### *Centre-Right announces new approach to immigrants' integration*

Following the September 2006 general election, prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt (Moderate Party), presented his new plan for government. He said that Sweden's integration policy had failed to meet its targets as social and economical divisions in society grow, as does segregation in housing. The new government would listen to 'everyone in Sweden' and examine amongst other things the connection between language skills and citizenship, he said.

#### *Parliamentary integration policy committee scrapped*

In November, the government announced that it was scrapping the parliamentary integration policy committee that was tasked with reviewing the goals, implementation and organisation of Swedish integration policy. The committee's independent chair Leif Magnusson and secretary Mahmood Sabuni have attacked the new integration minister, Nyamko Sabuni, for ignoring the work of the committee and say that the only possible explanation for the decision is that Sabuni and the new government want to signal that everything done by the old government pertaining to integration was a failure.

#### *New 'integration' approach launched*

The new government has commissioned a report into integration policy. Sweden's ministers for integration (Nyamko Sabuni), migration (Tobias Billström) and education (Lars Leijonborg) have announced new guidelines for the introduction of new immigrants into Swedish society. In order to speed up the introduction of immigrants into the labour market, new arrivals will be encouraged to move to 'those municipalities where the jobs are'. Local councils that can offer jobs to newly arrived immigrants will be rewarded by state funds. Municipalities in need of labour will be asked to sign special agreements regarding the reception of immigrants. In addition, any immigrant found not to be learning Swedish or putting sufficient effort into seeking employment may have his or her benefits reduced or completely withdrawn. And asylum seekers will no longer be allowed to decide where they want to live.

#### *Funding for anti-racist centre ended*

The new government has decided to stop funding the Centrum mot racism (CMR centre against racism). Sabuni believes that the CMR has failed in its mission to guide opinions about racism and xenophobia. Its manager, who also happens to be Sabuni's uncle, says it will be hard to keep the centre going without government funding.

### *Controversial integration minister launches assimilation policy*

The appointment as minister for integration and gender equality of Nyamko Sabuni (Liberal People's Party),



known for her bold attacks on cultural diversity, has been criticised not only by ethnic minority organisations, but also within her own party. Liberal People's Party member Mikael Trolin said that Sabuni had turned against immigrants and emphasised the prejudices already existing in society. He felt Sabuni had lost contact with the people she was to represent as minister for integration. Christian Democrat Juan Fonseca saw the appointment as a start of an assimilation policy directed towards the concerns of the majority population instead of improving the situation for immigrants.

#### *Who is Sabuni*

Sabuni, 37, is the daughter of a Congolese politician who was frequently jailed in his home country (then Zaire) before fleeing to Sweden where he was given refugee status. She arrived in Sweden aged 12, with her parents and five siblings, learned Swedish, and her educational achievements and political progress is viewed as an American style success story. Her father is Christian and mother Muslim, although she grew up non-religious.

#### *What Sabuni says*

In a feature in the *Sunday Times* on 22 October, Sabuni claimed that she was not divisive, but merely wanted to start a coherent dialogue. However, she defined herself as an assimilationist. According to Sabuni, many politicians have shied away from talking about the need for assimilation over and above multiculturalism.

#### *Self-segregation*

Sabuni argues that Muslims marginalise themselves by conveying an impression of intolerance and aversion to change. 'Practising Muslims who live by the word of the Koran and the Koranic books – of course they limit their opportunities'. 'We have a whole underclass of people who don't have jobs, who don't speak the language and who are living on the fringes of society'.

As an opposition politician, Sabuni proposed banning the veil for girls under 18 and compulsory gynaecological examinations for all schoolgirls in order to identify cases of genital mutilation. She has also proposed an age limit for wearing a veil. She denounced what she called the 'honour culture' of some immigrant groups, proposed outlawing arranged marriages and called for an end to state financing of religious groups.

#### *The veil as symbol of female oppression*

Sabuni has said that she wants a total ban on the veil for girls under 15. 'I would like to know what is happening in our society that makes families want to put a veil', on our children, she said. 'Maybe we don't need a law. Maybe we need something else so that people don't feel so insecure that they need to manifest their religion by using their children.' 'Nowhere in the Koran does it state that a child should wear a veil: it stops them being children. By putting a veil on a girl you are immediately saying to the outside world that she is sexually mature and has to be covered. It's wrong', she said.

#### *Muslim organisations respond*

Muslim groups in Sweden have started a petition calling for Sabuni to be removed from office. Muslim organisations say she is unfairly singling them out while ignor-

ing pressing issues like unemployment. Helena Benaouda, chair of the Muslim Council of Sweden, says that she seems to have 'lost the connection to the immigrant communities'. 'Maybe she has thought too much about herself and her political career, and she should remember that she's not representing just herself.'

#### ***The Sweden Democrats' influence on local politics***

One area where the SD seems to have got a foothold is Skane. Here, where two Liberal party politicians are proposing a ban on foreign languages (see below) there is concern about the impact this neo-Nazi group will have on the local political culture.

As of January 2007, the SD has twenty-one seats (out of a total 312) in the regional migration court in the province of Skåne. The fact that the party will now participate in cases involving refugees and asylum seekers has caused alarm. Party Secretary Björn Söder says the party will not use its lay-men seats to influence refugee policy, but adds that different people interpret the law in different ways.

Malmo city council Sweden Democrats have put forward a proposal to amend the council's budget to make it possible for immigrants to be paid to leave Sweden (although, they add, they would not be forced to do so). According to Sten Andersson, leader on Malmo Council, 'This would only apply to asylum seekers, not for instance to Danes who have been here for thirty years.' The SD are the fourth largest party on the council and they also want funding to immigrant groups to be stopped. The party has proposed a range of policies to clamp down on immigrants in the Skane region, including a total ban on immigration and a stop to publicly funded integration programmes.

#### ***The language issue in local politics***

##### *Malmo: Liberal MPs want ban on foreign languages*

In the run-up to the general election, two Liberal Party politicians, Eva Bertz and Allan Widman, in Malmo – Sweden's third largest city – proposed a ban on the use of languages other than Swedish in school classrooms, arguing that the ban was necessary to counter segregation.

While Malmo Liberal party politicians supported the proposal as a necessary solution to a local problem, the national Liberal Party leaders refused to comment. According to Widman, some schools in Malmo had as few as five per cent ethnic Swedes. However, the proposal has proved very controversial and, under fire, Widman has been forced to point out that the ban would only be in place during lessons, as banning foreign languages on school premises would infringe pupils' civil liberties.

The fate of the proposal has not been reported.

##### *Landskrona: school language ban rescinded*

In January 2007, following much controversy, the head at Gustav Adolf School in the southern town of Landskrona, where half the pupils come from an immigrant background, rescinded a complete ban on the use of languages other than Swedish in school, saying that it would be a 'main rule' instead. In future, pupils would be allowed to use their native languages during breaks,

provided staff and other pupils were not excluded from discussions.

The ban had been introduced following a number of incidents in which staff and pupils felt they have been insulted in languages they did not understand. Six pupils were expelled and twenty-two others suspended. Left-over fireworks from a new years celebration had exploded inside the school, leading to the school's immediate closure on health and safety grounds. The school has also decided that pupils would have to pass two security guards before entering the school.

The Swedish Children's Ombudsman, Lena Nyberg, had criticised the measures and even integration minister Sabuni said that a ban during break-time was not appropriate. Nyberg said 'There is a large dose of discrimination against children who speak a different native language. The first thing that strikes me is that there are many newly arrived of refugees in Landskrona who have not yet had time to learn Swedish. Are they supposed to avoid saying anything at all during the school day.'

### **Sweden Democrats' double-standards on welfare exposed**

The Sweden Democrats frequently attack immigrants for living on welfare benefits. But according to an investigation made by Aftonbladet, one in three SD politicians claims welfare benefits. SD literature states that twice as many immigrants are in state-funded early retirement schemes than native Swedes.

**Sources:** *Dagens Nyheter* (6.9, 19.10, 2.11.06, 21.1.07), *SR* (6.10.06), *New York Times* (13.1.07), *Sunday Telegraph* (22.10.06), *Observer* (4.2.07), *The Local* (23.11.06, 2, 20, 25.1, 6.4, 17.5.07), *SVT* (14.11.06), *Sydsvenskan* (14.11.06), *Svenska Dagbladet* (21.1.07)

**Key articles:** Sarah Lyall, 'Swedish politicians advice to immigrants? Try to fit in', (*International Herald Tribune*, 12.1.07).

Liz Fekete, 'Europe's extremists make electoral gains', *IRR News Service* (27.9.06), <<http://www.irr.org.uk/2006/sep-tember/ha000015.html>>.

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## **SWITZERLAND**

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### **At a glance**

- Next general election October 2007.
- Some Swiss People's Party members are calling for a ban on the construction of minarets.
- There is concern that crime is increasingly being racialised in the run-up to parliamentary elections.

### **Referendum on minarets denounced as electoral ploy**

A campaign by rightwingers to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland is widely regarded as part of electioneering in the run up to the October parliamentary elections. Swiss People's Party MP Ulrich Schliuer, who is spearheading the campaign for a national referendum on the construction of minarets in Switzerland, is co-chair of the campaign committee. He says that

although the campaign is not yet fully endorsed by his party, he is sure that it will be at the general assembly at the end of June.

### **Opposition**

Three members of the seven-strong cabinet, foreign minister Micheline Calmy-Rey, defence minister Samuel Schmid (a member of the Swiss People's Party) and interior minister Pascal Couchepin, fearful of damage to Switzerland's reputation among Muslim countries, have condemned the proposal. Adel Mërji of the League of Swiss Muslims pointed out that the construction of minarets was not a priority even for Swiss Muslims. Now, widespread discrimination against Muslims is being aggravated by the minaret affair. 'Through dialogue we can find solutions but the aggressive – or dare I say "Islamophobic" – way in which this [minarets] is being treated could have unforeseen consequences.'

Protestant and Catholic churches are opposing the referendum proposal pointing out that under the Swiss constitution, which upholds the right to religious freedom, the building of minarets must be allowed. But while they dismiss the move as a publicity stunt, they say there is a need for public dialogue to allay fears of Islam.

### **Local campaigns launched**

In cantons Solothurn and Bern local communities are already opposing plans to build minarets. According to Ulrich Schliuer, 'The minaret has nothing to do with religion: it is not mentioned in the Koran or other important Islamic texts. It just symbolises a place where Islamic law is established.'

### **Right links crime and immigration and calls for more expulsions**

Right-wing and centre-Right parties, including the Swiss People's Party have been accused of linking crime to immigration in a way that plays well with voters' concerns. According to an opinion poll commissioned by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation and carried out by the gfs.bern research institute, the integration of foreigners has become the most pressing issue on people's minds. Calls for tougher sentences for young criminals are supported by much of the public, particularly in the German-speaking part of the country where there is 74 per cent support for the withdrawal of Swiss nationality from youngsters of foreign origin who have committed a crime.

### **Local People's Party branches seek referendum on expulsions**

At an assembly meeting in Lugano on 17 March, the Tessin branch proposed that the party seek a referendum on the systematic expulsion of foreigners, including minors, who break Swiss laws. The referendum would call for parents to be expelled too if they had neglected their responsibilities towards their children. Other proposals were for the withdrawal of Swiss citizenship from 'naturalised criminals' and for a 'naturalisation on probation'. Foreigners wanting to adopt Swiss citizenship would be obliged to make a declaration of loyalty to the Federal Republic, have to take an integration course and learn to speak at least one of the national languages correctly.

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### **Bern denies foreigners voting rights**

Bern's cantonal parliament rejected a motion to grant authority to each commune in the canton to give foreigners voting rights. The political Right opposed the measure saying that foreigners should first integrate, get Swiss citizenship and then receive the right to vote.

Political rights of foreigners – who make up 20 per cent of the Swiss population – vary from canton to canton. The majority of cantons do not give voting rights to non-Swiss inhabitants. Foreigners' voting rights has been a controversial issue in the German-speaking part of the country. Currently, only nine of the 26 cantons accord foreigners certain civil rights, with the French-speaking cantons leading the way. Canton Neuchâtel in French-speaking Switzerland is the most progressive. Geneva, Wald in Appenzell Outer Rhodes (German) and Graubünden, Basel City and Vaud also have some measures in place. Bern is the second largest Swiss canton in terms of number of residents.

**Sources:** *Swissinfo* (21, 23.1, 3, 17.5.07), *Migration News Sheet* (April 2007).

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## **UK**

### **At a glance**

- The British National Party (BNP) failed to make significant inroads in the May 2007 local elections despite fielding a record number of candidates.
- First candidate from a Chinese background elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

### **Results of local and regional elections – May 2007**

The BNP fielded over 800 candidates in the May local elections in England and elections for the Scottish parliament and Welsh assembly. But despite its promise of significant electoral gains, the BNP gained just one additional council seat overall and its leader Nick Griffin failed to secure a seat on the Welsh Assembly. Though the BNP had predicted it would raise its number of local councillors from 49 to 100, it actually won only nine new seats but lost eight it was defending. Its biggest gains were in Leicestershire where two BNP councillors were elected and in Stoke-on-Trent where three BNP councillors were elected.

The anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* which helped to coordinate the anti-BNP Hope not Hate campaign (supported by the *Daily Mirror* and trades unions) found that its message paid off in Sandwell, Dudley, Burnley, Bradford, Kirklees, Blackburn, Calderdale Epping Forest, Bishop Stortford and Thurrock where the BNP had expected to win seats. However, what is worrying is that the BNP averaged 14.6 per cent of the vote in 742 borough and district wards and has, according to the magazine, the potential to become Britain's fourth political party.

### **Basildon Conservative accused of echoing BNP views**

The BNP had unsuccessfully targeted 11 of 14 seats up for election in Basildon, Essex. There Conservative party's candidate Luke Mackenzie was accused of mirror-

ing BNP views in campaign literature in which he suggested that people who wanted to stop asylum seekers being given council houses should vote Conservative. The leaflet, headed 'Conservatives: We're on your side' refers to being on the 'front line' in a 'battle', and talked about local people 'getting organised' and 'fighting back'.

### **Elections for Northern Ireland Assembly**

In elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly, Anna Lo became the first person from a Chinese background to be elected in Northern Ireland where she will represent South Belfast. Lo's candidacy was marred by the persistent racist abuse against her and death threats that led her to carry a personal panic alarm with her at all times. (A far-right website, which has published pornographic images of Chinese women, was linked to abuse remarks about Lo.)

Lo, a British citizen born in Hong Kong has lived in Belfast for 32 years. She is a former chair of the Northern Ireland Chinese Welfare Association. She says there are 10,000 Cantonese speakers in Northern Ireland, most of whom have never exercised their right to vote before.

### **Labour politician in BNP target area criticised for racialising housing allocation**

In May 2006 the BNP had scored particularly well in the outer London borough of Barking and Dagenham where it had eleven seats and was the largest opposition party. This year, following the May 2007 local elections, industry minister, Labour MP for Barking Margaret Hodge, triggered a political storm when, in an article in the *Observer*, she called for the needs of 'indigenous families' in social housing policy to be prioritised over those of recent arrivals; social housing, she wrote, should be rebalanced to give more weight to length of residence, citizenship, and national insurance contributions. Such a rebalance, she said, would help tackle alarm in Britain's 'poorest white communities', where people felt angry and neglected. 'A recently arrived family with four or five children living in a damp and overcrowded privately-rented flat with the children suffering from asthma will usually get priority over a family with less housing need who have lived in the area for three generations and are stuck at home with the grandparents', Hodge wrote, calling for the 'legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family' to override 'the legitimate need demonstrated by the new migrants'.

### **Criticisms mount**

Jon Cruddas, MP for Hodge's neighbouring seat of Dagenham (also targeted by the BNP), and a candidate for deputy leadership of the Labour party, said: 'We're in danger of racialising arguments over housing allocation rather than concentrating on the need for greater social housing provision.' Nancy Kelly, of the Refugee Council pointed out that asylum seekers were not entitled to council housing and arrivals from new EU states had restricted access to benefits. In response to criticism, Hodge said that she had been misinterpreted, as she both backed an increase in social housing and wanted refugees excluded from any restrictions.

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**BNP investigated by electoral commission**

The electoral commission has launched an investigation after the Guardian reported that senior figures in the BNP had set up a front organisation called Civil Liberty in an attempt to raise money from sympathisers in the US. It is illegal for a political party to accept donations of more than £200 from overseas.

**Sources:** *Observer* (11.2.07), *Times* (9.4.07), *Guardian* (8.3, 9,12.4, 25.5.07). *Searchlight* (June 2007)

**Conservative security spokesman dismissed over racist comments**

In March 2007, David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party dismissed Patrick Mercer from his position as spokesman on homeland security after he said in an interview with *Times* Online that being called a 'black bastard' was part-and-parcel of life in the armed forces. Mercer, MP for Newark and Retford also said that some 'idle and useless' ethnic minority soldiers were using 'racism as a cover for their misdemeanours'. Cameron said his comments were 'totally unacceptable'.

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