Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 12953
08 June 2012

The portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns

Report[1]
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons
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Summary

Recent events have shown that migrants and refugees have become electoral issues for certain political parties, thus helping to intensify manifestations of xenophobia.

These negative reactions, which are linked up to a number of factors such as the feeling of losing control of migration, the fear of differences and the economic crisis, are also picked up by the media, the Internet and social networks, in the way they portray migrants and their descendants.

This report recommends, *inter alia*, establishing a policy of communicating on the reality of migration flows, promoting open and responsible political debates, encouraging the media to use more balanced and fair formulations, and developing and reinforcing the role of electoral commissions so that they can sanction political leaders if they behave inappropriately before or during elections.

1. Reference to committee: Doc 12373, Reference 3719 of 8 October 2010.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that Europe has a long history of emigration, and that, owing to its ageing population, the continent is divided between the need to take in immigrants and the fear that these immigrants will gradually erode cultural traditions and practices in European societies.

2. The Assembly considers that the rise of xenophobia is challenging democratic principles and respect for human dignity.

3. Although the member States of the Council of Europe already have legal remedies for countering xenophobia and racist speech, the Assembly feels that a real strategy is needed for combating xenophobia, especially during election campaigns.

4. During election campaigns, some candidates and political parties habitually present migrants and refugees as a threat and a burden on society, which increases negative reactions among the public to immigration and immigrants.

5. These negative reactions are linked to factors such as the feeling of losing control of migration, the fear of differences, the collapse of the employment market and a widespread feeling of insecurity.

6. These factors have thus become electoral issues for certain political parties, which not only help intensify manifestations of xenophobia but also promote the rise of xenophobic populist parties, which are increasingly feeding into a trend which is radicalising government anti-migration policy.

7. The Assembly notes that the media have a vital role to play here, and bear a major responsibility in shaping the image of migrants and their descendants.

8. It also notes that Internet and the social networks play an increasingly important role in spreading xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes.

9. The Assembly would also like to draw attention to the biased nature of some opinion polls, whose results and complex questions do not always reflect public opinion in its entirety, which can be counterproductive, especially in terms of migrant and migration issues.

10. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that member and observer States, and particular parliaments:

10.1. adopt measures aimed at:

10.1.1. establishing a communication policy on the reality of migration flows based on the values of human rights, the rule of law and democracy;

10.1.2. ensuring that migrants can fully integrate into the host society by helping them, among other things, to learn the local language, the customs and the laws of the host country;

10.1.3. clamping down on irregular entry and helping irregular migrants to return to their countries, or regularising those who cannot and will not be expelled;

10.1.4. implementing measures to prevent employers from undermining pay and working conditions;

10.1.5. implementing a policy to fight against discrimination;

10.2. promote, where appropriate, open and balanced political debates on the migration issue in order to provide optimum replies to the questions and concerns of the general public and to combat all xenophobic ideologies;

10.3. encourage political leaders to assume their responsibilities during debates on migration issues and to combat xenophobic rhetoric and ideology;

10.4. encourage the media to use factually correct, balanced and fair formulations by providing them with the appropriate data and statistics;

10.5. draw up guidelines for opinion polls and all direct democracy exercises, in order to prevent any bias;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 1 June 2012.

10.6. develop and reinforce the role of electoral commissions so that they can sanction political leaders if they behave inappropriately before or during elections;

10.7. encourage local and regional authorities to work more closely with migrant communities in order to improve mutual understanding;

10.8. carry out an objective analysis of the impact of political strategies of radical xenophobic populist parties.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Dumery, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. In many countries, it has become commonplace for certain political parties to focus on migrants and refugees during election campaigns, claiming that they constitute a threat to the values, way of life and identity of the indigenous population. In this way, these political parties are part of a trend which is radicalising government anti-migration policy and thereby fostering a resurgence of xenophobia and racism in European politics.

2. Xenophobia is usually defined as “a pathological fear of foreigners or foreign countries”. It is a kind of aversion to people one does not know or who come from a foreign country. Xenophobia is a sentiment or a perception of things based on stereotypes that are shaped by society rather than on rational fact.

3. Foreigners, and migrants in particular, are portrayed as a burden on society and are subjected to many forms of violence and prejudice.

4. A number of factors have helped to encourage manifestations of xenophobia and campaigns against immigrants or, quite simply, against foreigners. One major factor is the economic and financial crisis and the collapse of the job market. In addition, and as a result of various terrorist attacks, there is also a feeling of insecurity and fear of the future, and a link is perceived between migrants and crime, despite police findings and statistics which show this generalisation to be ill-founded.

5. It hardly needs saying that Europe has a long history of emigration but has only become a continent of immigration over the course of the last few decades. Europe’s ageing populations are divided between the need to accept immigrants and so preserve their level of welfare, and the fear that a huge influx of immigrants may destroy the cultural identity of European societies. This state of affairs has fostered the emergence of what is commonly called the “threatened majority” as a principal political force in the European arena.

6. Concerns about migration have therefore become an excuse behind which the population hides the fears and uncertainties created by the problems outlined above.

7. Election campaigns have come to be a platform from which extremist political parties and movements can promote racist, xenophobic and anti-immigrant thinking. The xenophobic parties that have emerged or markedly strengthened their position in recent elections, gaining seats in national parliaments and the European Parliament, have exploited these various factors and advocated extremely harsh policies relating to migrants and refugees.

8. In some European countries, the recent electoral breakthrough of xenophobic parties has drastically affected the political landscape, in that the other parties have not been able to secure a stable majority and have consequently had to form coalitions or agree to co-operate. All these instances of closer ties have lent legitimacy to the position and role of the extremists. Because opposition to immigration is a core tenet of all these parties, the leaders of mainstream parties and governments who co-operate with them or who campaign using xenophobic populist ideas that are likely to be vote winners have been encouraged to toughen their policy and statements on migration and migrants, thereby helping in turn to spread xenophobic and racist attitudes. Indeed, in some countries, the population’s resistance to racism and xenophobia has weakened significantly in recent years.

2. Terminology

9. The rapporteur wishes to point out that the term “radical populism” describes the underlying ideology of the new racist and xenophobic parties which are emerging in Europe. The parties in question are usually to the right, or far right, of the political spectrum and it is true that in some respects they have connections with the “traditional” neo-Nazi or neo-fascist movements of post-Second World War Europe. The term “populism” is often used very vaguely, to contrast “the people” with “the elite”, in calls for changes in the social order or for political mobilisation. The terms “xenophobic populism” and “xenophobic populist parties” will therefore be used in order to clearly distinguish these parties from what is traditionally understood by “populism”.

10. In an effort to gather as much information as possible and to analyse underlying developments and trends as effectively as possible, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons held a hearing in Corfu (Greece) on 2 June 2011. The rapporteur also went to Copenhagen and Stockholm to talk to members of parliament and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media and

gather information on factors which are adding to the rise in the number of statements which are xenophobic or hostile to migrants, and on mechanisms and legal provisions in force in Council of Europe member States to combat extremism, racial discrimination and hate speech, particularly during election campaigns.

11. This report seeks to offer recommendations which may help members of the Parliamentary Assembly and policy makers to achieve a politically more positive and more realistic portrayal of migrants and asylum seekers.

3. Factors contributing to growing anti-immigrant feelings

3.1. Fear of the future

12. A number of factors help foster increasing manifestations of xenophobia and campaigns against immigrants or, quite simply, against "foreigners". One major factor is the fear engendered by numerous European policies. The effects of the economic crisis, profound social and demographic changes, the growth of migration and, more specifically, the inexorable pace of change which causes people to lose control over their lives and the way in which the very identity of communities is being transformed are all factors that inflame anti-migrant feelings. The general public has lost faith in the ability of governments to cope with these changes and manage them effectively, concluding that neither States nor political parties of whatever persuasion have the faintest idea of what the future of Europe should look like. Consequently, fear of immigration has become a determining factor not only in member States but also in the policies of the European Union.

3.2. Sense of losing control

13. The sense of a loss of control, created initially by globalisation and made worse by the collapse of national economies and job markets, is reflected in some cases by a desire for clearly demarcated frontiers and restrictions on access – something the politicians should not underestimate. In a situation where millions of workers are unemployed, a disproportionately large share of them immigrants, the pressures brought to bear by xenophobic populists give rise to ideologies which seek a scapegoat.

3.3. Terrorist attacks

14. In the aftermath of the 9/11 bombings in the United States and the subsequent terrorist acts in Europe, Islamophobia has become a factor that unites far-right members of parliament and xenophobic populists who are currently enjoying greater electoral success in Europe than the anti-Semitic parties. These parties' political influence and propaganda have caused many mainstream parties and ruling coalitions to follow a similar path. Discrimination against Muslims is now part of the political climate, and asylum seekers and migrants are trapped in the general atmosphere of intolerance and rejection of those who are "different", those who are "foreign".

3.4. Xenophobic populist parties

15. In north and west European States, the rise of xenophobic populist parties has coincided with the decline of the powerful social-democratic parties, and with it their egalitarian and rights-based ideologies. Recent initiatives to "modernise" these parties' appeal to their electorates have created a foothold for new and exclusionist approaches which seek a more restrictive "managed" immigration and a common rejection of multiculturalism. This divides communities rather than bringing individuals together.

16. Finally, the new public relations strategy of giving xenophobic populist parties an "image makeover" has won them a degree of respect, allowing them to gain power and influence. These groups have also learned to use democratic procedures for their own ends. Through ambitious demonstrations and campaigns focusing on freedom of speech, the far right increasingly portrays itself as a keen champion of democracy, playing on the fears of European citizens in order to promote their "cause" by offering simple answers to social challenges that are complex. By placing the emphasis on family issues and family activities, they have been successful with voters, in particular an increasing number of women.

17. The tragic events of 22 July 2011 in Norway put the spotlight on the activities of militant extremists. Another strain of far-right activists born of "street politics" and the skinhead culture is often responsible for violent (including physical) attacks on individuals, mosques, synagogues and cemeteries, as well as property

and businesses owned by minority groups and migrants. Such street politics are based on campaigning using stereotypes and the inaccurate depiction of migrants and asylum seekers as “Islamic terrorists” or “foreign criminals”.

18. Other examples are provided by the Russian skinhead movement which, according to the Sova Centre, had approximately 70 000 members in 2009 (71 people were murdered and 333 injured in racist attacks in that year). Hungary’s Jobbik movement has had considerable success in the space of just a few years. In the parliamentary elections in 2010, the party obtained 16.6% of the votes, giving them 47 seats. The party even has a paramilitary wing, the Hungarian Guard, which is strongly reminiscent of the Arrow Cross Party of the 1940s. Jobbik has also initiated co-operation amongst several of the xenophobic parties in Europe. In October 2009, a far-right alliance, the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM), was formed.

19. Some parties build their ideology on ethnic or “nativist” nationalism and regionalism, seeking to redefine citizenship and residence rights and to restrict such rights to real or imagined indigenous core populations. The common denominator of all these parties is that their campaigning stresses the “cultural pressure” which migrants and asylum seekers place on their host countries. The programmes and policies of these parties and their representatives stress the need for tight curbs on immigration. In their view, the welfare State cannot survive in the countries of immigration, and their electioneering accuses migrants and asylum seekers of unfairly taking up social benefits and entitlements to housing and health care which should be available only to “true citizens”.

4. Mechanisms and legal provisions in force in Council of Europe member States and at Council of Europe level

20. This rise in xenophobia is currently affecting and eroding democratic principles and undermining respect for individuals and their human dignity. Both internationally and in the Council of Europe member States there are numerous legal instruments which, if used well, should enable the values which our Organisation espouses to reassert themselves, with the establishment, as a result, of a real strategy for combating xenophobia, especially during election campaigns, a period that is very often sensitive and when the strongest arguments are brought to bear in order to persuade the public.

4.1. Nationally

21. Member States already have legal remedies for countering racist election campaigns and laws against incitement to racial hatred, Holocaust denial or blatant anti-religious attacks. Recent experience shows that there is scope for legislative bodies to review and strengthen existing legislation, its operation, and the sanctions against politicians who flout these legal principles. There are also electoral commissions, electoral courts, or regulatory bodies which can punish politicians if they behave inappropriately before or during elections.

22. Member States are bound by a number of international treaties. For example, Article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Article 20 of the United Nation’s International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) require States to ensure that national legislation makes incitement to racial discrimination or the spread of ideas stigmatising a group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin a criminal offence punishable by law.

23. The democratic political parties of Europe gave a formal commitment to uphold the principle of non-discrimination and to combat racist political discourse when, in February 1988, they signed the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society. In this they undertook, amongst other things, to uphold basic human rights (rejection of racist violence, incitement to racial hatred and persecution or any other form of racial discrimination), not to publish views or positions that might foster racist or other prejudice, to deal responsibly and fairly with sensitive topics, and to refrain from co-operating with political parties that incite racial hatred.

4.2. At European level

24. The Council of Europe has also adopted a number of texts on the issue of hate speech, and the need to make such speech a criminal offence. According to Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. (97) 20 on “hate speech”, the expression covers “all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of migrant origin”.

25. In 2008, the Council of Europe launched its 2008-10 anti-discrimination campaign and published a manual on hate speech which reviews the relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights. This manual places a number of constraints on freedom of expression, a concept which may vary depending on the context in which statements are made, the position of the persons making them (politicians, journalists or civil servants), the instruments used (press, television) and the potential impact of these statements. It must not be forgotten that political extremism and hate speech very often try to manipulate the right to freedom of expression for their own ends. But freedom of expression, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), is not an absolute right. As stipulated in the Assembly's Resolution 1345 (2003) on racist, xenophobic and intolerant discourse in politics, this right to freedom of expression "may be limited by competing public interests, amongst which are the prevention of disorder, the protection of morals and the protection of the rights of others. In particular, this allows for limitation of these rights and freedoms when they are exercised in such a way as to cause, incite, promote, advocate, encourage or justify racism, xenophobia or intolerance".

26. More recently, on 1 July 2009, the Committee of Ministers adopted a Declaration on Human Rights in Culturally Diverse Societies, in which it emphasises that the preservation and promotion of a democratic society based on respect for diversity requires resolute action against all forms of discrimination. The declaration also calls on political leaders to speak and act in such a way as to foster dialogue and respect human rights.

27. In addition, in 2005, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) published a Declaration on the Use of Racist, Anti-Semitic and Xenophobic Elements in Political Discourse, in which it clearly stated that such discourse was increasingly "infecting" mainstream political parties, and appeared especially in debates on immigration and asylum, as well as in statements which gave a distorted picture of Islam designed to present that religion as a threat or to encourage anti-Semitic feeling.

28. In 2011, the Council of Europe commissioned a group of Eminent Persons to prepare a report on the subject of "living together". This group also considered the issues covered in this report.

29. The Eminent Persons' report stated that these new political parties "have a much broader base, stretching into virtually all strata of society, regardless of education level, gender or status. They can appeal to almost anyone who feels that his or her livelihood and way of life is threatened by the economic crisis, and by immigration. In fact, some of them combine these xenophobic attitudes with an appeal to social liberalism, defence of the welfare State and seemingly left-wing economic policies... In western Europe, hostility to immigration is their common theme. In many central and eastern European countries, similar anxieties are directed against the Roma, and sometimes other national minorities, including Jews."

30. As is apparent from the above, member States of the Council of Europe, particularly governments, have not remained passive in the face of this phenomenon. Even so, and despite existing legislation, one major factor remains, namely the attitude of the public, which has evolved over many years, and also the attitudes of governments themselves.

31. One example is that of Austria, where the FPÖ's inclusion in the centre-right coalition government of 1999 led to the temporary suspension of Austria from EU programmes and member State discussions. But things have moved on, and nowadays Europe has become used to having racist parties as part of the parliamentary system. In Denmark, the minority coalition government has, over the last ten years, included the xenophobic Danish People's Party (DPP). The Netherlands followed this same path, and the entry of former neo-fascists into the Italian Government go largely unnoticed.

4.3. Strategies for fighting extremism and xenophobia

32. There is no easy answer to the question of how far one should go in interacting politically with radical xenophobic populist parties. European experience ranges from ignoring them or deliberately excluding them from political affairs (as in Sweden), erecting a *cordon sanitaire* (as in Belgium or France), partial co-operation (as in Denmark and the Netherlands), right up to full co-operation (as with the FPÖ in Austria, which is part of the government, or the radical right-wing parties that have been integrated into government). Unfortunately, it is too soon to analyse what impact these strategies have had on the position of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees or what the public perception of these groups may be. Consequently, I believe that there is a pressing need for an objective analysis of this impact.

33. On the other hand, the strategy of discrediting extremist parties by giving them political responsibility has led to concessions being made to these parties and the ideologies they espouse. In Denmark, for example, the role of the anti-Muslim and anti-European Danish People's Party has been pivotal, forcing through dozens of new laws to curb immigration.

34. The strategy of more centrist players, aimed at controlling the xenophobic populist parties' agenda by promoting a similar agenda themselves (described by political scientists as "triangulation"), especially on issues such as tighter curbs on immigration and the criminalisation of irregular migration, has not paid off either. This strategy has been clearly apparent in recent political and governmental statements, especially in the run-up to an election, which reject the idea of multiculturalism and diversity.

35. The political exclusion or *cordon sanitaire* approach has been effective only in a few instances, where the parties concerned were small. The moment they become significant in size, these parties have to be allowed a say in the political process, and democratic parties are obliged to work with xenophobic ones. This form of co-operation could have the effect of minimising the xenophobic or racist pronouncements which these parties are likely to disseminate.

36. In other European countries, exemplary measures have been taken to inform the public about the hate-filled agenda of the racist parties. In Sweden, for example, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2010, all the mainstream parties pledged not to seek support from the Sweden Democrats. The two main political blocs regarded the Democrats as xenophobes who preached ideas incompatible with the commonly held view that people are equal regardless of their national origin, ethnicity or religion. During the election campaign, the parties already represented in the Swedish Parliament, along with the Swedish television networks, excluded Sweden Democrats from the televised political debates. This did not stop them from gaining 20 seats in the parliament (5.7% of the votes). Nonetheless, they have been marginalised and have no say in policy making. After the elections, both the coalition and opposition parties signed an agreement that they would pursue an even more open and migrant-friendly policy on immigration.

37. Against this background one factor is more decisive than others, namely the role played by the media. This role is crucial during election campaigns because the image of migrants and asylum seekers which the public and the electorate are given will depend very much on the way they are depicted in the media.

5. Role of the media, opinion polls and referendums in shaping the image of migrants and asylum seekers

5.1. Media, Internet and social networks

38. The media has a crucial responsibility in shaping the image of migrants and their descendants. The press, television, and now the Internet all provide wider coverage of politicians' messages at election time. The latter often quote media messages and present them as established popular opinions, downplaying the fact that the media has its own agendas through the influence of proprietors or support for particular political parties.

39. Obviously, not only representatives of democratic parties make use of the fact that the media strongly influences public opinion and political debate. Extreme-right players have emerged as real media professionals in many countries. Some scholars argue that right-wing rhetoric conveys more passion and emotion, and is therefore more readily picked up by the media which is always eager for drama and conflict, whereas moderate politicians are often content to react to their opponents' messages rather than proactively deliver their own. The media can strongly affect political trends, especially in countries where individual politicians have influence with the press and television stations, such as Italy and Bulgaria.

40. Even senior mainstream politicians often use stereotypes and the language of "common sense" racism in the media at election time, thus creating a climate of fear and coarsening the debate. In some ways, however, the media function as an independent social player and not simply as a transmitter of our present-day concerns, and they must be considered as such. The media set and drive the agenda on immigration issues, but they also provide a reflection of public and political debate. They often see fit to demonise immigrants and other minorities, not only echoing anxieties and myths about such groups that are prevalent in the general public, but actively intensifying them by highlighting real or alleged "scandals" about crime and benefit fraud, at the same time accusing the authorities of covering these up and of allowing too many foreigners into the country.

41. Some European States have set restrictions on the language and messages the media can use, in order to protect minorities and migrants. Most have regulators or complaints procedures, but unfortunately these have often proved ineffective in defending the rights of migrants and asylum seekers and they clearly need reviewing.

42. The new media, particularly the Internet and social networks, play an increasingly important role in spreading xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes. A wide range of highly professional far-rightist media has developed to this end. Without regulation, its presence and activities are difficult to contain or prevent. For instance, a strongly anti-Muslim video clip was released by the Sweden Democrats before the 2010 elections. It was rejected by the mainstream television companies but received a record number of hits on YouTube. On the other hand, greater use could be made of the Internet and the social networks as "counter-platforms" or more effective forums for exchanging and communicating in combating racism.

43. It is worth remembering in this context that, on 22 February 2012, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe asked the Dutch Government to clarify its position on a website that had broadly been judged xenophobic, because it invited and disseminated negative information about citizens of central and eastern European countries working in the Netherlands. In his letter to the government, the Secretary General emphasised the right to freedom of expression but expressed doubts about the subject matter of this site and voiced his concern at the fact that it was hosted by a political party with links to the ruling coalition.

5.2. Opinion polls

44. Politicians across Europe, when challenged during election campaigns about the way they deal with issues of migration and asylum, point to opinion polls as evidence of voter attitudes and argue that they are simply reflecting rather than creating intolerance at election time. The rapporteur would point out, however, that the results of opinion polls often vary depending on the sample surveyed and the age and educational and social status of those questioned.

45. The political influence of racist discourse and rhetoric about migrants and minorities is perhaps most apparent when used by xenophobic populist parties in their campaigning for referendums, plebiscites, citizens' initiatives and petitions, ostensibly as another official way of enabling the *vox populi* to be heard. Research by the Irish Parliament, which is required by the constitution to hold referendums, has shown that campaigning ahead of referendums has more of an impact on results than election campaigns.

46. In Switzerland in 2009, the national consultation on minarets was said to have reflected the true "voice of the people". The facts show that in Switzerland, far-right parties and groups which sponsor federal and local referendums have for many years kept the issue of *Überfremdung* ("too many foreigners") alive in their political discourse. Referendums were the main means for far-right groups to develop their organisation and propaganda methods. Here, Switzerland is a perfect case study, demonstrating how xenophobic populist parties construct and politicise a so-called "immigration problem" as a way of increasing their power and exerting decisive influence on migration, citizenship and integration policy. The Swiss example suggests that the work of politicians who seek, through election and referendum campaigning, to create a political climate hostile to immigration often makes more of an impression than the actual presence of migrants in a country or the true popular perception of immigration and migrants.

47. Recent plebiscites and referendums raise important issues regarding the use and misuse of direct democracy. In the 27 European Union countries, the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) Regulation came into force on 1 April 2012 as "the first transnational instrument of participatory democracy in world history". The ECI is designed to encourage European citizens to submit requests on policies affecting them. Recent experience highlights the danger that politicians and political parties in member countries will continue to allow or encourage "direct democracy" decision making which contravenes national treaty obligations and breaches the fundamental human rights of migrants and minorities. The implementation of the ECI will be accompanied by clear guidelines which will prevent its misuse.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

48. Negative public reactions to immigration and immigrants are on the rise almost everywhere in Europe, along with a lack of faith in governments' ability to manage population flows properly and the impact which immigrants have on jobs, public services and civic space. Many Europeans want governments to organise more stable, predictable and usually smaller flows of regular migrants, and they want a significant clamp-down

on illegal entry. They also want to see unscrupulous employers stopped from undermining pay and working conditions, and to ensure that immigrants learn the local language, obey the law, pay taxes and respect the civic culture and institutions of their host country.

49. So the first challenge for politicians and policy makers is to remedy the lack of public trust and reassure people that their concerns are being heard and dealt with. All too often those who lead mainstream political parties deem it easier, especially around election time, to duck these issues which they perceive to be difficult or contentious rather than tackle them head on. But backing away from contentious issues only feeds popular discontent and drives people into the arms of populist and xenophobic parties which promise, through deceptively simplistic and emotional slogans, to find answers to their concerns.

50. Democratic political leaders in Europe should be more willing to assume their political responsibilities, spearheading the debate on migration issues and fighting xenophobic, populist and far-right rhetoric and ideologies. It is their job to make it clear that discrimination and racism have no place in Europe's societies of diversity and that the public expression of xenophobic ideas must be punished in accordance with the law.

51. Political leaders competing for office are public bodies and they and their representatives should be subject to the same legal constraints as civil society organisations. They should also be penalised if they discriminate on grounds of ethnicity or religion in terms of the membership and constitution of their parties or if, through their activities and election campaigns, they promote racial hatred and harassment of minorities and migrants.

52. As shown above, leadership is crucial in delivering a strong message on immigration that is likely to win public support. The rapporteur believes that the most effective response is to face up to people's fear of change, instead of simply quoting facts and figures at them.

53. Political leaders need to prove to their public that they are in control of both the composition and scale of immigration. They need to strike the right balance between local anxieties, caused by unemployment and the economic crisis, and long-term national interests and priorities: they should, for example, promote the employment of immigrants while at the same time taking care to preserve economic competitiveness. Against this background, I would also like to recall that the Transatlantic Council on Migration, at its plenary meeting in May 2009 in Bellagio (Italy), said that citizenship must be accessible to immigrants, that States must be encouraged to foster greater integration and that right from the start of the process, immigrants must be considered as potential citizens.

54. The actual words used when talking about immigration and the integration of immigrants really matter: the right words shape public opinion, foster support for policy initiatives and stave off criticism; whereas the wrong words can inflame and polarise public opinion, exacerbate existing anxieties and mobilise opposition. The language used should thus be honest, unambiguous and should emphasise not only the negatives but also the positives. Euphemisms backfire, as they are seen as disingenuous and give the public the impression of being manipulated.

55. The rapporteur believes that what is lacking most in public discourse and the portrayal of migrants, especially in the context of elections, is a positive message based on values that explains why Europe's societies need immigrants and why we benefit considerably from their presence. If a proper balance can be found between values and pragmatism this should dissipate many of the social tensions and smooth the path to integration in both directions.

56. In view of the above, and by virtue of its remit, the Council of Europe has a greater role than ever to play in combating extremism and xenophobia. I welcome the fact that the Assembly has recently and on several occasions voiced alarm at the rise of extremist movements and parties which spread ideologies incompatible with democracy and human rights and threaten the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. The recent Recommendation 1975 (2011) on living together in 21st-century Europe: follow-up to the report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe emphasises in particular that the strengthening of common European values and identity should be promoted in a way which does not eliminate the different cultures of specific groups, but preserves and incorporates their individualities in the common European framework. The recommendation further warns that this process can be endangered by growing populist, xenophobic and anti-immigration politics, and calls on member States to develop policies to prevent such negative practices.