



**Resolution 1889 (2012)<sup>1</sup>**

Final version

## The portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls that Europe has a long history of emigration and that, owing to its ageing population, the continent is now divided between the need to take in immigrants and the fear that they will gradually erode some of the 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 to 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 immigration, the fear of differences and concerns for cultural identity, the collapse of the employment market and a widespread feeling of insecurity.
6. These factors have thus become electoral issues for certain political parties. This works to not only increase manifestations of xenophobia but also facilitate the rise of xenophobic populist parties, which are increasingly feeding into a trend of more radical government anti-immigration policy.
7. The Assembly, referring to its [Resolution 1754 \(2010\)](#) and [Recommendation 1933 \(2010\)](#) on the fight against extremism: achievements, deficiencies and failures, condemns those groups and political leaders that, inspired by racist or xenophobic ideologies, promote or are prepared to condone violence. It calls for enhanced ethics in politics to help reduce racist tendencies in society. It reiterates that politicians have a special responsibility to eliminate negative stereotyping or stigmatisation of any minority or migrant group from the political discourse, including during election campaigns, and considers that the international election observation missions should pay attention to the issue of racist or xenophobic abuses during election campaigns and reflect any concerns in their reports.
8. 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.
9. It also notes that the Internet and social networks play an increasingly important role in spreading xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes.

---

1. Assembly debate on 27 June 2012 (23rd and 24th Sittings) (see [Doc. 12953](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Dumery; and [Doc. 12978](#), opinion of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Varvitsiotis). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 June 2012 (24th Sitting).



10. 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. This can be counterproductive, especially in terms of migrant and migration issues.

11. Consequently, the Assembly recommends that member and observer States, and particularly parliaments:

11.1. adopt measures aimed at:

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

11.1.2. 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;

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

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

11.1.5. implementing a policy to combat discrimination;

11.1.6. the removal of barriers to democratic participation by granting migrants voting rights, including the right to vote and the right to stand in local and regional elections after a legal residence period of five years or less;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11.9. urge all political parties to adhere to the principles contained in the Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society, signed by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and the President of the European Parliament in 2003, and to actively implement and promote these principles;

11.10. disseminate to the electoral authorities in member States, prior to election campaigns, the 2005 European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Declaration on the use of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse.

12. Furthermore, the Assembly invites the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), notably through its Council for Democratic Elections, to carry out a study on the portrayal of migrants and refugees during election campaigns, with a view to possibly amending the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters.