

Discourses of intolerance in political life



This Policy Brief focuses on political discourses expressing intolerance towards religious and cultural diversity. It highlights findings from five qualitative case studies in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Spain.

On-going project

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INTRODUCTION

Anti-immigrant parties are gaining ground in Europe

Political discourse expressing intolerance towards religious and cultural diversity has been gaining ground in Europe. The surge in intolerant discourse has accompanied the rise of right-wing populist groups in EU Member States Europe over the past 30 years. As economic pressures grow and anti-immigrant parties gather strength, intolerant discourse is likely to increase, with negative implications for social cohesion.

The topic of migration plays a central role in the platform of all political parties that express intolerance towards religious and cultural diversity. Generally speaking, such parties have gained support in countries of immigration. But right-wing extremist movements have also flourished in parts of Eastern Europe that have not experienced large-scale immigration. In those cases, the countries in question are home to important cultural minorities such as Roma people.

While the radical right has certainly been the most vocal proponent of anti-immigration policies, it is not the only force to challenge definitions of tolerance. Mainstream political parties, the media, social organisations and minority representatives themselves have helped fuel debate on what should be tolerated or accepted with respect to resident foreigners and ethnic minorities.

The dynamics and parameters of the tolerance debate are illustrated in the public discourse accompanying incidents of ethnic and religious intolerance in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary and Spain. Case studies of these incidents reveal how rules of toleration are redefined in various national contexts. By comparing the findings from these studies, we can identify opportunities for constructive intervention.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

An indictment of multiculturalism from a 'mainstream' politician.**Germany: Thilo Sarrazin's book on immigration**

In August 2010, Thilo Sarrazin, a prominent Social Democrat and then board member of the Germany's central bank, presented his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany does away with itself). In the book he argues that Muslim immigrants in Germany have a lower general intelligence quotient. He then asserts that because immigrants have a proportionally higher birth rate, they are undermining Germany's stock of human capital and pose a threat to the country's economic prosperity.

The book became the focus of widespread public debate. Many defended the publication, saying it broke a taboo in German society that had been in place for far too long. Others attacked it as blatantly racist. The debate influenced greatly the discourse about integration, immigrants and Islam in the political life of the country. Importantly, the book set a new benchmark in openly questioning multiculturalism as a model.

Testing the boundaries of tolerance**Denmark: Public platforms for Islamic radicalism**

To what degree should a liberal European society accommodate articulation of intolerant minority views that conflict with majority norms and values? Especially when the minority in question is Muslim and the controversial views are voiced in public space? Two highly publicized meetings in Denmark involving 'radical' Muslims raised exactly these questions, and in doing so tested the limits of toleration.

The first controversial meeting, which took place in January 2011, was arranged by the Danish branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir under the title 'Afghanistan: Scandinavian Governments in the service of the US'. The invitation to the meeting was highly controversial in itself because it was perceived as indicating support for the killing of Danish soldiers in Afghanistan. But the public and symbolic nature of the venue, the Danish National Library, made it that much more contentious. Despite attempts to stop the meeting, it took place as scheduled.

The second controversial meeting was held in Copenhagen in April 2011. In this case the 'radical' Islamic preacher Bilal Philips was invited by a Muslim organization to give a public talk on 'Islamophobia: Is Islam a threat to the West?'. Public attention forced on the role of the Islamic Faith Community in inviting Philips to Copenhagen and on whether the opinions of the preacher were shared by the organisation. Unlike other states, Denmark did not deny Philips entry into the country. His arrival was extensively covered by the media, as was the lecture itself which was delivered

to an audience of 1,000.

Both episodes highlight the kind of norms, attitudes and values that Muslim actors are expected to subscribe to in order to be accepted as legitimate actors in public debates.

Racist violence in Greece

Greece: Accommodation of religious diversity and racist violence in Athens

Religious diversity and racist actions in public spaces in Athens have been the subject of intense controversy. Two events highlight the kind of debate taking place in the country.

On November 18th, 2010, (on the occasion of the major Muslim celebration of Eid al Adha) a public prayer protesting the lack of any official Mosque in Athens took place on the courtyard of the country's main university and other squares of central Athens. The peaceful protest was organized by the Muslim Association of Greece. The event was positively endorsed by authorities, political parties, the media and even the Greek Orthodox Church. They were signalling their toleration of religious diversity on that day in the city centre. But the anti-immigrant parties LAOS and Golden Dawn opposed the event. Members of Golden Dawn and other far right groups incited violent actions in Attiki Square in their attempt to disrupt the event.

Six months later, in May 2011, a series of violent and racist attacks against migrants took place in the centre of Athens. The attacks followed the killing of a 44 year-old man. The nationality of the perpetrators who killed the man was unknown. The anti-immigrant violence that followed the killing was led by ultra right-wing groups. In some cases, members of Golden Dawn filmed the violent assaults and broadcast them on the Internet. These attacks were tolerated by the police and many residents of the area. Two days after the killing, a 21 year-old man from Bangladesh died after being stabbed.

All parliamentary parties condemned both the murder and the racist violence that erupted in the city centre. The media coverage was similarly critical, but the editorial focus was on crime and insecurity, linked to the influx of migrants.

Local controversies in Catalonia

Spain: Local controversies about migration in Catalonia

Despite a proactive and comprehensive policy for dealing with migrants, Catalonia experienced several significant local controversies involving migration in the years 2010-2011. Here are three examples:

1. In January 2010, the city council of Vic voted to exclude unauthorized migrants from the city census (*padrón*). The ban meant the migrants would be unable to access public welfare. The exclusion from the census was later declared illegal, but it raised an

important debate about the role of municipalities in integration policies and about the rights of undocumented immigrants.

2. During municipal elections in May 2011, candidates of the Popular Party put anti-immigrant rhetoric at the centre of their campaign. This was particularly the case in the city of Badalona in which the candidate and mayor of the town based his campaign on targeting the Romanian Roma who had settled in the town. He alleged that they brought insecurity, crime and incivility.

3. In 2011, several towns in Catalonia approved proposals to ban the wearing of religious veils covering the face (e.g. the burqa and niqab) in public buildings. The first and most publicized case occurred in the provincial capital of Lleida, ruled by the socialist party. The debate focused on whether the proposed ban stigmatized migrants or, conversely, defended human rights values and strengthened security. That case attracted attention across the country.

Debates about Roma integration in Hungary

Hungary: The Roma integration issue

The contentious public debate concerning integration of Roma into Hungarian society is illustrated by two controversial murder cases in Hungary.

In 2006, a teacher was driving in a car with his two daughters through Olaszliszka (a small village in the North) when he accidentally hit a girl crossing the road. The injured girl's father and other villagers, all Roma, attacked the driver who had stopped to check on the girl. The driver died from injuries sustained in the assault. Within two days, police arrested the perpetrators.

The second case involved a series of murderous attacks against the Roma that began in 2008 in the city of Tatárszentgyörgy. The attacks were later revealed to be racially motivated. At first it was widely suggested that the murders stemmed from Roma criminal activity or family revenge, an interpretation supported by results from the initial police investigation. Only later, following the murder of a man and his five-year-old son, did the police consider possible racial motivations for the attacks. One year later, in August 2009, four men were arrested on suspicion of murder. The police found neo-Nazi symbols in the suspects' homes, providing evidence that the crimes had been racially motivated. Their trial is on-going.

Both murder cases fuelled the continuing debate about Roma integration. In the aftermath of the killings, a number of politicians, journalists and intellectuals stressed the need to abandon 'politically correct' discourse, as they viewed it as an impediment to engaging in a 'genuine' dialogue on these important issues. This in turn legitimated the further racialisation of the Roma question by the majority of parties to the debate.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The presence of the far-right and its influence on political debates

All countries under analysis have seen the radical right gaining ground in the political landscape. But the weight of these groups and their influence on political debate varies.

Representation in Parliaments

Far-right parties are represented in the national parliaments of Denmark, Greece and Hungary, attracting between 8% and 16% of votes in the last election. In Spain and Germany, however, such parties generally do not receive more than 2% of electoral support and are not represented in the respective national parliaments.



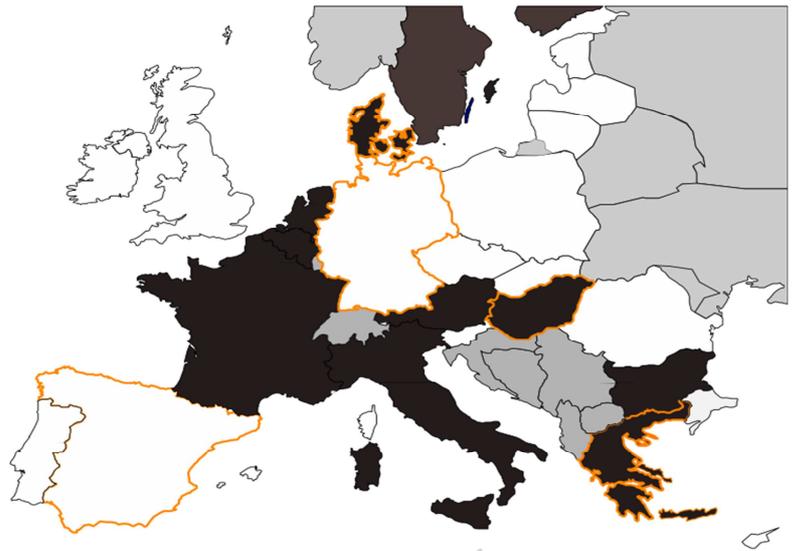
In Denmark and Hungary over 10% of parliamentary seats are held by far-right parties.

Table 1
Case Study Country Data on Parliamentary Representation of Far-Right Parties'

Countries <i>Main far-right parties</i>	Last national election (year)	Seats in national parliament (n)	Share of votes (%)
Denmark <i>Danish People's Party</i>	2011	22 seats	12.3%
Germany <i>National Democratic Party</i>	2009	0 seat	1.5%
Greece <i>LAOS</i>	2012	0 seat	1.58%
<i>Golden Dawn</i>	2012	18 seats	6.92%
Hungary <i>Jobbik</i>	2010	47 seats	16%
Catalonia <i>Plataforma per Catalunya</i>	2012 (Catalonia)	0 seat	2.4% (Cat.)
	2011 (National)	0 seat	0.24% (Spain)

The far-right in national parliaments of European countries (2012)

There is a tendency toward mainstreaming intolerance in political debates.



Mainstream politics and far-right versatility.

Far-right parties are actually quite diverse in terms of structures and alliances. Jobbik and Golden Dawn have clear contacts with extra-parliamentary and paramilitary groups, while the Danish People's Party has more the profile of a 'classical' political party in representative democracy.

In all countries, there is a relationship between the extreme-right's overtly anti-immigrant discourse and mainstream politics. This relationship is twofold. On the one hand, far right parties are directly influencing political debates and the policy-making process. On the other hand, mainstream political parties themselves are increasingly assuming intolerant discourses toward migrants and minorities.

The mainstreaming of intolerant discourses explains why - even in countries where the far right is weak - tolerance boundaries are being redefined and the limits of intolerance progressively stretched out.

The media play a vital role.

The legitimizing process

In all case studies outlined above, the trivialization of racism and the tacit acceptance of intolerant expressions are cause for concern in political debates about immigration and minorities.

This suggests that mainstream political actors and the media play a crucial role in transforming isolated expressions of intolerance into a major public debate capable of changing the limits of tolerance in society.

The mainstream media play a major role in shaping public debate about migration and migrants. They reflect and construct the process by which anti-immigrant statements or debates about the toleration of migrants' practices and values have been mainstreamed. As in the political arena, positions and opinions

Three 'master frames' of intolerant discourse.

expressed in the media are controversial. But they offer a public space for contentious discourses which contributes in any case to present tolerance toward cultural diversity as a leading issue. This was especially the case during the Hungarian, Danish and German events.

Framing intolerance in political discourses

Three types of intolerant discourse ('master frames' of intolerance) can be identified in the case studies:

1. Law-and-order discourses in which lawbreakers and infringements of the law or administrative rules are not to be tolerated.
2. Identity/culture discourses for which values and practices that are contrary to the 'leading culture' are not to be tolerated.
3. Welfare chauvinism discourses in which nationals are to have priority over foreigners and minorities in accessing social provisions or employment.

Different national contexts produce different discourses of intolerance.

National discussions of tolerance boundaries

In Denmark, drawing the boundaries of intolerance is a deliberative process linked to the country's deep tradition of liberalism. **Liberal intolerance**, which refers to the way interventions and limitations to tolerance are based on arguments for the need to create a 'liberal state for liberal people only', is the main expression of intolerance in the country.

Intolerant expressions in Catalonia tend to question **patterns of citizenship**. Discourses questioning the 'civility' of immigrants and whether they can be accommodated reveal the traditional 'territorial' conception of citizenship in this region.

The Greek context highlights the importance of a **new nationalist intolerance**. The differences between the 'in' group and the 'out' group are naturalized by political discourses. Intolerant discourses serve to justify the preservation of the in-group members. It relies on 'principled national intolerance', subscribing to the idea that the world is naturally divided into nations that need to preserve their autonomy and assure their cultural and ethnic cohesion.

In Hungary a major intolerant frame is found in the '**biologisation**' and 'essentialisation' of difference. Through the concept of 'Gypsy crime', Roma are presented as having an innate inclination to crime. This explicit racism has been taken up by mainstream politics and conservative media.

There is a tendency to de-politicize intolerance

In Germany, criticism of Thilo Sarrazin's discourse often addressed the way in which he presented his ideas rather than the validity of the content. Part of the public debate revolved around the need to '**break taboos**' about immigration, dispense with political correctness and talk about 'real problems'. This process was accompanied by a re-focusing of attention on the majority 'in' group

and its interests, while the needs, rights and interests of the minority were often marginalized. This is also a strong component of the Hungarian and Greek public debates.

While each country has its own way of debating tolerance and drawing boundaries around it, there appears to be a general tendency in all countries to de-politicize it. Diverse strategies of de-politicisation have been identified, including securitisation, 'new realism' discourses and legalism. De-politicisation is a common strategy among government leaders and persons in charge to resist efforts by the opposition to challenge their power. But in all countries de-politicisation has allowed certain actors to test and expand the limits of intolerance.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Political Parties:

Refrain from legitimizing intolerant discourses

One of the main findings of these studies is a link between mainstream politics and the far-right in spreading intolerant discourses. Hence, mainstream parties must take a clear stance against racism and intolerance. They have to refrain from appropriating anti-immigrant discourses. They should also recognize that 'Laissez faire' attitudes, silence and indifference can be construed as collusion. By not taking a clear stance, mainstream parties facilitate the spread of intolerance and the rise of anti-immigrant parties.

We recommend that political parties:

- Sign a formal commitment to reject instrumental use of migration and form a 'cordon sanitaire' around political groups and leaders who promote racism and intolerance.
- Clearly and collectively condemn acts of racism and overt intolerance.
- Integrate clearly into internal rules and procedures sanctions against party members who use racist and intolerant speech.

The media:

Adopt a code of ethics rejecting racism and stereotypes regarding immigrants and native-minorities.

The media not only reflect current debates, they also contribute to constructing an understanding of current events and to organizing public debate. In some countries, the media have helped spread intolerance by reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices against immigrants and native minorities.

We recommend that:

- National media authorities ensure fair and balanced news coverage and penalize those who spread racist views and stereotypes.

- Media corporations and journalist associations adopt a formal code of ethics applying to all their activities and design ways of gathering feedback on their practises.
- Media support campaigns against racism and intolerance.

Legal authorities:

Strengthen and enforce codes against hate speech and racist offences.

In several countries, the legal means to sanction racism and hate speech are clearly insufficient or ineffective.

We recommend that countries:

- Create specialized institutions to fight racism, xenophobia and intolerance (appoint special prosecutors, ombudsman and labour inspectors)
- Raise awareness about the legal means to fight racism and hate speech.
- Create training and awareness campaigns for judges, law enforcement officials and prosecutors.
- Create independent authorities to monitor and sanction discriminatory attitudes, racial profiling, violence and racist speech of law enforcement officials.

National policymakers:

Immediately interdict racist violence by far-right paramilitary groups, especially in Greece and Hungary.

- Disband political organisations and groups whose members are repeatedly involved in racially motivated violence.
- Establish means to ensure that racist violence and hate speech are reported and prosecuted.
- Introduce procedures to file complaints and ensure the protection of victims.
- Support civil society organizations in their attempt to legally fight racism and support victims of discrimination.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

ACCEPT PLURALISM studies on Political Life and Cultural Diversity Challenges

Accept-Pluralism is a research project funded by the European Union under the Seventh Framework Programme. It has studied how cultural and religious diversity in political life has been discussed in national public debates and in politics in 15 different countries in Europe (Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, the UK, and Turkey).

This policy brief is based on qualitative case studies of national controversies and events in the period from 2000 to 2011. The research is empirically grounded and aims at challenging concepts of tolerance. All studies are based on discourse analysis techniques (critical frame analysis, text coding, critical discourse analysis).

In **Greece**, desk research and fieldwork have been done. Desk research: newspapers, policy documents and scholarly literature. Fieldwork: 19 qualitative interviews with actors actively engaged in the events under question (representatives of political parties, civil society and migrant organisations, police official and journalists).

In **Germany**, the research is based on a discourse analysis of two major national newspapers, one conservative and one left-liberal. Interviews have been carried out with experts, members of the Muslim community and professionals.

In **Hungary**, three media organs have been analysed: one radical right-wing newspaper and two different mainstream papers (central-left and conservative). The research focused mainly on discursive strategies in opinion articles.

In **Denmark**, analysis focused on press coverage of the two case study episodes as well as interviews with central stakeholders in the debates. The collected newspaper articles have been coded using Nvivo 9. Semi-structured interviews have been carried out with 7 central actors.

In **Spain**, desk research has been carried out with academic literature, policy documents, transcripts of public debates and newspapers. 14 semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted with party representatives, civil society representatives and central actors in the three controversies analysed.

Further Reading

The country reports on which this Policy Brief is based are available at the ACCEPT PLURALISM project web site: www.accept-pluralism.eu

BURCHIANTI, Flora; ZAPATA-BARRERO, Ricard (coord.) (2012), *Challenges to Tolerance in Political Life: A comparative overview of 15 European countries*, ACCEPT-PLURALISM; 2012/29; 4.National Case Studies - Political Life; Synthesis and Highlights.

PROJECT IDENTITY

Acronym

ACCEPT PLURALISM

Title

Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe

Short Description

ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and

recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.

Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.

In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.

The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.

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Consortium	17 partners (15 countries)
Coordinator	European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies),
Person responsible	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
EC officer	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou