

Strategy 7: A pro- free movement counterfactual should be developed to refute anti-migrant rhetoric

Politicians who believe in the benefits of European integration must learn to present the benefits of free movement using similar tactics and terminology deployed by populist politicians.

Anti-migrant rhetoric is nothing new¹. However, the combination of enlargement of the EU, the ongoing financial crisis and disenchantment with mainstream politics has led to populist politicians making false claims about the free movement of persons in the EU and calling for withdrawal from the EU in order to re-assert control over migration policy². Regrettably, this vitriolic rhetoric has resonated with parts of the electorate in certain EU countries, as evidenced by the sizeable number of Eurosceptic politicians elected to the European Parliament³. The worrying result – at least in the UK – is that mainstream politicians have started to echo the anti-migration policies advocated by these populist politicians⁴.

In order to ensure this does not become an EU-wide trend, it is necessary for our politicians who believe in the benefits of European integration to be able to present the benefits of free movement using the same rhetorical tactics deployed by populist politicians. It is not good enough for our politicians to simply highlight the benefits which EU membership has had on the economy or jobs as a whole. It is also necessary for them to provide examples that resonate with people's daily experiences of European integration that citizens cherish, for example the freedom to go on holiday anywhere in the EU without a visa or the ease of buying goods in another EU country⁵.

In countering populist calls for Member States to limit free movement or leave the EU, politicians must therefore learn to respond with quips that simultaneously highlights the negative consequences of doing away with the free movement of persons.

We leave you with an example that we hope would be of use in the UK:

“Do you really want to leave the EU? Then forget your booze-cruise to Europe to stock up on cheap alcohol and cigarettes. Forget jumping on a low-cost flight for an hour and spending the week-end in a sunny location. Forget visa-free travel without queuing for hours at passport controls. That’s what an end to free movement in the EU would mean for you.”

These recommendations were formulated by the EU Rights Clinic’s Legal Supervisor, Anthony Valcke, at the occasion of the [2014 conference of the Fédération Internationale du Droit Européen](#) which focused on EU citizenship and the final conference of the [EUCROSS](#) project that examines the relationship between cross-border activities of EU residents and their collective identities.

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¹ [Has eastern European immigration fuelled a crime wave in Britain?](#), *The Guardian*, 25 June 2012.

² See for example [Europe's Anti-Immigrant Parties Cheer a Swiss Vote](#), *Bloomberg Business Week*, 12 February 2014;

³ [Anti-EU parties storm to the front in European elections](#), *CBC News*, 27 May 2014; [The Eurosceptic Union - The impact of the rise of anti-establishment parties, in Europe and abroad](#), *The Economist*, 31 May 2014.

⁴ [Nick Clegg to call for tighter controls on immigration from new EU states](#), *The Guardian*, 4 August 2014. The article notes that this latest “intervention means all the major parties will be competing to prove they would reduce immigration from [the] EU”.

⁵ *The EU Citizens’ Agenda: Europeans have their say* and *Flash Eurobarometer 365*, both cited above.