



# **Communicating with Confidence and Clarity:**

Liberal  
Responses  
to Populist  
Rhetoric

Edited by Peter Schröder

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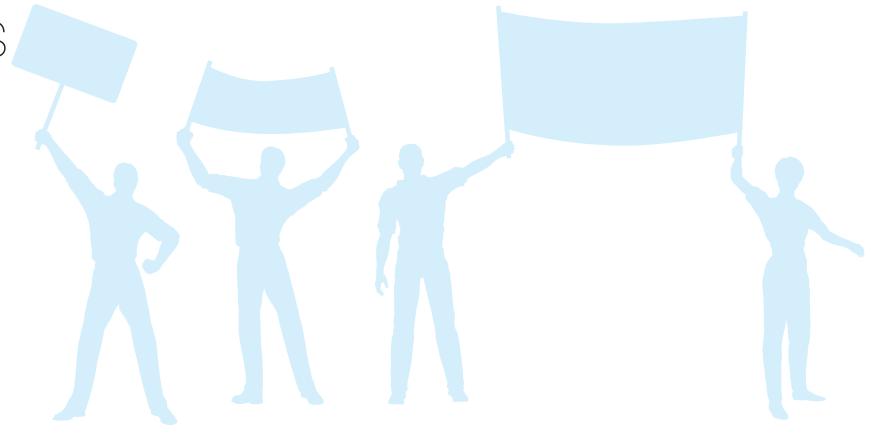
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# Communicating with Confidence and Clarity:

## Liberal Responses to Populist Rhetoric



<b>Preface</b> .....	5
Sir Graham Watson MEP, President, ALDE Party Felicita Medved, President, European Liberal Forum (ELF)	
<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
<b>Europe's Reluctant Radicals</b> .....	9
Marley Morris, Researcher, Counterpoint	
<b>Effective Communications in Response to Populism.</b> .....	21
Elizabeth Drury, EU Advocacy Trainer, EyetoEye Communications	
<b>Prose, Poetry and the Framing of the European Union</b> .....	29
Andor Admiraal, Political Consultant, Audience Oriented Messaging	
<b>If You Ignore Them They Grow</b> .....	39
Astrid Thors, OSCE High Commissioner on Minorities, Former ALDE Party Vice President	
<b>Clear liberal policy is the best antidote to the populists</b> .....	43
Annika Arras, Campaign Manager, Reform Party of Estonia	
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	49
Peter Schröder, Political Consultant	

# Preface

Europe is facing its toughest elections to date. In May 2014, voters will cast their ballots to decide the direction to be taken by the European Union in the coming five years. Populists of all shapes and sizes are running for local, regional, national and European elections. The European Liberal Democrats, the ALDE Party, stands as the clear Liberal, pro-European alternative to the forces of populism and we are therefore so pleased that our political foundation, the European Liberal Forum (ELF), has issued this publication assembling Liberal responses to populist rhetoric. We are facing an increasingly multifaceted spectrum of populist parties which stands poised to take a more prominent role in the European Parliament. What they all have in common is that their message is one of anti-Europeanism and closed-mindedness.

During the course of 2013, ELF ran a series of workshops dedicated to this very topic, engaging citizens, candidates and campaign volunteers on how to respond to populist rhetoric. These workshops brought together seasoned Liberal politicians and experienced communications trainers to provide participants with the tools to challenge populist claims. ELF decided to bring contributions by key speakers together in this easy-to-read handbook where you will learn how to use communication tools effectively, bringing your Liberal message across in public debate.

ELF and its member organisations the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (Germany), Stichting Internationaal Democratisch Initiatief (IDI) (Netherlands), the Centre for Liberal Studies (Czech Republic) and Svenska bildningsförbundet (Finland) have come together to realise this publication. We are especially pleased to see several European Liberal partners joining forces on this project, to ensure that the outcome has a truly European dimension. “How to combat nationalism and populism” has been a multi-annual focus area for ELF since 2011 and *Communicating with Confidence and Clarity* flows directly from this.

Liberals have a proud tradition of visionary leaders and impressive orators. We hope this publication will inspire you to follow in their path, engage yourself in the European debate and confront populism in all its forms, ensuring that the next elections will not be marred by anti-European sentiment. We encourage you to proceed in the spirit of our title, and to respond to populism with confidence in your Liberal views and clarity of message.

We wish you an inspiring read!

Felicita Medved  
ELF President

Sir Graham Watson MEP  
ALDE Party President

ative and emotive messages. Far too often, these messages are drowned out by the foul cry of populism. Politicians left are offering simplistic solutions to complex problems. The European Union. To help combat such sentiments, the Commission from its 2013 series of works has developed a range of communication strategies to help. One of the main aims of this publication is to encourage like-minded people to share views with confidence and clarity.



# Introduction

Populism thrives on easy, repetitive and emotive messages. Far too often, mainstream political messages are drowned out by the foul cry of populist rhetoric. The far right and far left are offering simplistic solutions which threaten the future of the European Union. To help combat such sentiments ELF has brought together key speakers from its 2013 series of workshops and seminars dedicated to developing communication strategies to target populist rhetoric. The leitmotiv of this publication is to encourage liberal-minded Europeans to voice their views with confidence and clarity.

Counterpoint researcher, **Marley Morris**, introduces us to the topic by showing us what makes some populists such terrific communicators. He uses practical examples to show how framing your message in a way that is easy to relate to is key to getting your ideas across. He explains that framing is not just about telling your story in a different way, but in connecting with the challenges faced by what he terms reluctant radicals, the populist swing-voters.

**Elizabeth Drury**, an experienced EU Advocacy Trainer with EyetoEye Communications, continues by looking at how we can effectively communicate our Liberal message. She emphasises that it is important to move beyond the pro- and anti- European debate, connecting with the voter using emotive as well as factual language. She explains the importance of using personal examples and humour in bringing your message across. As Elizabeth Drury points out, it is important that you connect with your own message and pronounce it with confidence, while still ensuring that it is not clouded in technocratic speech.

Communications expert **Andor Admiraal** reinforces this point by explaining how accepting populist discourse can be very damaging to the Liberal cause. He instead reiterates Marley Morris's support for thinking of your responses in terms of framing. Further he argues that there are five layers of political communication (motivation, themes, issues, priorities and policy), and that there is a definite danger of politicians failing to distinguish the third, fourth and fifth layers. Failing in this, he argues, can be detrimental to getting your ideas across. As Andor Admiraal emphasises, it is up to politicians to create a powerful narrative and story from our set of political beliefs.

Finally, **Astrid Thors**, former Finnish Minister of Migration and European Affairs and former Vice President of the ALDE Party and **Annika Arras**, Estonian Reform Party Campaign Manager, bring their vast experience to the table, giving us the story of how they themselves have successfully beaten populist forces, either in the course of an election or as a government minister. Astrid Thors tells a vivid story of the challenges from anti-migrant forces in Finnish society when she was a minister. Annika Arras, in turn, points out a very different political reality in Estonia, where she notes no outright populist parties, a story very different from Finland, where the Finns Party/True Finns have made political waves. Still, both authors

argue that the key to Liberal success is that we stick to our true Liberal message, listen to the concerns of the citizen and communicate in a clear manner.

Hopefully this will prove an inspiring and useful read for you as you prepare for the next elections. The Liberal message is desperately needed in Europe today, and the techniques outlined by our authors will hone your message and ensure it lands in the hearts of every voter.





# Europe's Reluctant Radicals

Marley Morris, Researcher, Counterpoint

Marley Morris is a researcher for Counterpoint on the Recapturing Europe's Reluctant Radicals project. He focuses on populist parties and movements, political narratives, and the social and cultural determinants of instability in Europe.

Marley Morris's reports include *Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: How to win back Europe's populist vote* and *Conflicted Politicians: the populist radical right in the European Parliament*. He is also currently managing the *Rival Political Narratives* project and is leading a series of populism 'self-defence' workshops on how to counter populist rhetoric in Europe.

Prior to his work at Counterpoint, Marley was at the Violence and Extremism programme at Demos, where he contributed to the report *The New Face of Digital Populism* and developed a well-being index for a study on ageing across Europe. Marley has a Masters degree in Mathematics and Philosophy from Oxford University.

Marley would like to thank the Open Society European Policy Institute for their ongoing support for Counterpoint's self-defence workshops on populism, which formed the basis for this contribution.

“Mr President, we have a single European asylum and migration policy, one and the same awful policy for the whole of the EU. The recent disastrous stream of migrants from North Africa and the trouble we have been having with the failing Schengen Treaty indicate that asylum and migration policy should be handed back to Member States. One Member State is not the same as another, it is as simple as that. That is why a single, common European policy will not work ...

Mr President, Member States are unfortunately no longer the masters in their own homes. Europe is the master.”<sup>1</sup>

May, 2011

The message from Daniël van der Stoep MEP rolled off the tongue: simple, confident, and spoken as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. The vast majority of his colleagues in the Parliament had no time for it. But it didn't matter. For certain voters, van der Stoep – at the time a member of the PVV, Geert Wilders' Eurosceptic anti-Islam party in the Netherlands – made perfect sense. It engaged them on an emotional level, stirring their outrage and indignation. Van der Stoep grounded his speech in a value his target audience shared – the right to self-determination. He activated this value through emotive language – the language of the 'home'.

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament debate on migration flows and asylum and their impact on Schengen, 10 May 2011, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20110510+ITEM-015+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Van der Stoep is a typical example of a relatively new kind of politician in Western Europe: hostile to European institutions, furious about mass immigration, ruthlessly critical of the political and cultural elite. Over the past few decades they have emerged across Western Europe in different forms. Take Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National in France, who has tried to shake off her party's historic ties with anti-Semitism and railed against immigration, the 'troika' and austerity; Geert Wilders, a Dutch controversialist who made his name attacking Islam and has now turned his ire to Europe; or the UK Independence Party (UKIP), headed by former commodities trader Nigel Farage, which began as a single-issue party campaigning to get Britain out of the EU.

Some are far more moderate than others: Timo Soini's Finns Party is relatively centrist when compared to the Front National in France or Vlaams Belang in Belgium. Some are more clearly identifiable as right-wing or left-wing. But all are in some way populist: they claim to defend a pure 'people' against a corrupt 'elite'. This glorification of the 'people' masquerades as an ardent defence of democracy. But it carries with it something problematic. Geert Wilders' infamous phrase 'Henk and Ingrid are paying for Mohammed and Fatima' sums it up. While often not explicit, the rhetoric, tone and policy proposals point to an exclusive understanding of the people, who are indifferent and at times hostile to the concerns of immigrants, Muslims and others who do not fit the mould.<sup>2</sup>

### **Don't panic!**

Often the mainstream response to populism is to sound the alarm. Speech after speech and article after article in recent months have warned about the 'rise of the far right', sparked by the economic crisis.<sup>3</sup>

This can often sound like scaremongering. There is no use in exaggerating the threat. Populists are not all on the rise – some parties (such as Vlaams Belang) have fallen in the polls amid competition from more mainstream forces. The Danish People's Party no longer supports a centre-right coalition. Even Geert Wilders' electoral history has been hit and miss, with a significant drop in support at the last election after bringing down the coalition government.

The economic crisis has not driven populist success. Long before the financial crash, populists such as Jean-Marie Le Pen in France or Jörg Haider in Austria did well. In some countries badly affected by the eurozone debt crisis, such as Spain and Portugal, no powerful populist movement has emerged.

But despite all this, a swell in eurosceptic opinion does suggest that populists are on course to rock the boat at next year's European Parliament elections. This needs to be taken seriously and certainly not dismissed.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: how to win back Europe's populist vote*, Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris and Lila Caballero, Counterpoint, 2012 for more details.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. 'The rise of far right parties across Europe is a chilling echo of the 1930s', John Palmer, *Guardian*, November 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/nov/15/far-right-threat-europe-integration>

So what do mainstream parties and political groups like ALDE need to do? Any effective response needs to be multifaceted, particularly given the broad nature of the challenge. But in this contribution I focus on one particular approach: Liberals need to respond with an emotional appeal that goes right to the heart of the concerns of those tempted by populist politicians. Like van der Stoep, Liberals need to ground their own arguments and ideas in genuinely held values. They need to portray issues from their own perspective rather than from their opponent's. And they need to bring out their values with rich, emotive, personal language.

This short contribution is split into two parts. First, it is vital to understand who the voters of these parties are and what motivates them. That is what I will do in Part 1. The next step is then to build an effective response to populism. In Part 2, I will look at how this can be done using emotion, values and narratives.

## **Part 1: The voters**

### **The reluctant radicals**

For the last two years at Counterpoint, we have carefully researched the springs of populism in Europe. Our research has focused on who we call the 'reluctant radicals'.

A 'reluctant radical' is someone who votes for a populist party but who does not feel close to that party (or who feels closer to another party). In other words, they are non-partisan voters, often more likely to vote differently over time and to make their voting decisions at the last minute. They are, as Drew Westen has put it, the 'voters with changeable minds'.<sup>4</sup>

Our analysis has shown that they make up approximately 50% of the support for populist parties in most countries in Western Europe. They are the individuals that mainstream parties need to understand if they want to win back the populist vote.

And there's no doubt that these voters matter for Liberal parties in particular. Take the Netherlands: according to our research in 2010, roughly 25% of the reluctant radicals who participated in the previous election voted for the Dutch Liberal Party VVD.<sup>5</sup> Or the UK, where UKIP notoriously almost took a previously safe Liberal Democrat seat at a 2013 by-election.<sup>6</sup> As the European Parliament elections approach, it is crucial for Liberals to take the reluctant radicals very seriously.

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<sup>4</sup> The Political Brain, Drew Westen, PublicAffairs, 2007, p.115

<sup>5</sup> Stichting Kiezersonderzoek Nederland – SKON; Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek – CBS; Henk van der Kolk – Universiteit Twente; Kees Aarts – Universiteit Twente; Jean Tillie – Universiteit van Amsterdam (21 June 2012, 2012-06-21), Nationaal Kiezersonderzoek, 2010 – NKO 2010; Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2010 – DPES 2010.

<sup>6</sup> 'Eastleigh by-election: Lib Dems hold on despite UKIP surge', BBC News, March 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21625726>

## Identifying the reluctant radical

So who are these voters? The stereotype is that they are somehow 'different' – irrational, inexperienced, foolish. Plastered next to each article on populism or the radical right is typically a picture of a young, angry looking man.

This is a caricature. Our research shows that the reluctant radicals tend to be remarkably similar to other voters. There is no significant gender gap. In many countries they are no younger than average. In fact, in some places the trend is in the other direction – reluctant voters of UKIP tend to be older than average, while reluctant supporters of the Finns Party tend to be middle-aged. In most cases, when other factors are controlled for, unemployment does not predict whether someone is a reluctant radical.

	Netherlands		Norway		Italy	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Reluctant radical	49	51	56	44	50	50
Committed radical	44	56	68	32	61	39
All	46	54	50	50	54	46

Source: European Social Survey, Round 5, and ITANES 2008

We did find an important education divide. Voters with a higher level of education tend to be less likely to be supporters of these parties (reluctant or otherwise). This is an important trend across the countries surveyed.

But that does not mean that highly-educated voters are somehow more 'rational' than others. Drew Westen argues that voters of all stripes are in part driven by emotion.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the reluctant radicals have a multitude of different concerns, and context is crucial. But there are some important trends across many of the countries in our study. In Western Europe, concern about immigration is one of the key drivers of populist success. On the other hand, it isn't just about immigration.

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<sup>7</sup> The Political Brain, Drew Westen, PublicAffairs, 2007

Low levels of trust in traditional political institutions are also fuelling populism. In the Netherlands, only 43% of reluctant radicals say they trust the government, compared to 64% in total. This translates into a frustration with the traditional 'polder model' of doing politics.

And in Finland, reluctant Finnish voters tended to say they used their vote to generate change and to upturn a cosy political consensus. We found a profound sense of alienation. When asked why he voted for the Finns Party, one reluctant radical said "Protest. The other parties have messed up in equal measure".<sup>8</sup>

### **The typical voter**

So who is the typical reluctant radical? There is no doubt that the picture varies from country to country. They could be someone like Matti: middle-aged and divorced, after leaving school he started a career in manufacturing. Matti now has a steady living but is worried that it won't last. He is irritated about immigration but directs his anger at the political class, who he thinks are all the same, united by their disinterest in people like him.

Or someone like Margot: in her 40s, living on the outskirts of the city, with three children, tired and frustrated after a long day's work, barely interested in politics and distrustful of others. She is worried about her future: about crime, immigration and her family's security.

The challenge for mainstream parties – including parties in ALDE – is to address these anxieties and to address them systematically. In past elections, parties like the Front National, the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) and the Sweden Democrats have engaged the reluctant radicals with a powerful emotional appeal. It is time for mainstream parties to do the same.

## **Part 2: The response**

### **Emotion and the brain**

Part 1 outlined who the reluctant radicals are and why they are such an important group of voters. So why do mainstream parties find it so hard to win over the reluctant radicals? The answer is that they often work with an outdated view of the mind: a belief that the mind is 'conscious, dispassionate, logical'.<sup>9</sup> But the way people really reason is grounded in emotion. People make decisions – on who to vote for, on whether they agree with a policy – via emotional responses: hope, pride, anger, anxiety and shame.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: how to win back Europe's populist vote, Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris and Lila Caballero, Counterpoint, 2012 for more details.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Rockridge era ends', The Rockridge Institute

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. The Political Brain, Drew Westen, PublicAffairs, 2007, The Political Mind, George Lakoff, Penguin, 2009, as well as Thinking, Fast and Slow, Daniel Kahneman, Penguin, 2012

m thrives on easy, repetitive and emotional political messages are drowned out. The far right and far left are offering the future of the European Union. To bring together key actors from seminars dedicated to developing concrete rhetoric. The leitmotif of this public Europeans to voice their views with confidence.



Mainstream European politicians often assume that voters come to a decision by simply weighing up the facts and choosing what will be best for their wellbeing. This is not the case – they are powerfully motivated by their own values. Politics is about morality; not just about who gets what.<sup>11</sup>

An experiment discussed in Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* illustrates the importance of emotion in political decision-making. Subjects were briefly shown faces of different political candidates and were asked to evaluate their competence on the basis of the picture alone. Candidates with smiling faces that projected confidence and trustworthiness were more likely to be perceived as competent. It then turned out that these judgments were good predictors of whether the candidate won the race. This has been tested in many different countries. Voters are influenced by far more than policy details. Emotion plays a crucial role.<sup>12</sup>

### **Why frames matter**

On top of all this is another important lesson from cognitive science: people think in terms of frames.

What are frames? As George Lakoff says, frames are 'mental structures'.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, they organise the way we think. Take the example of a restaurant frame. When we think of a restaurant, we think of certain roles – the waiter, the diner, the chef, the food, the table, the kitchen. We also think of the relationships between these different roles. We think of the chef cooking the food in the kitchen; we think of the waiter serving the food to the diner at the table. These are all part of the restaurant frame. When someone says the word 'restaurant', this activates the restaurant frame, bringing to mind the different roles and their relationships. Words activate certain frames in the mind. And these frames guide how people make decisions.<sup>14</sup>

In politics, this is crucial. Politicians frame issues in different ways. Populist politicians frame Europe as an anti-democratic 'monster'.<sup>15</sup> Liberals tend to frame it as a great democratic project. Language, metaphors and stories all influence how an issue is framed.

And how an issue is framed can influence how people think about it. An experiment carried out in Germany in 2004 with undergraduate students demonstrates the point. Participants were exposed to a news article containing either a 'risk' or 'opportunity' frame for EU enlargement. After reading the article, those who

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<sup>11</sup> Based on George Lakoff's talk at Counterpoint's event 'Is all politics moral?', London, October 2013

<sup>12</sup> *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman, Penguin, 2012, pp. 90-91

<sup>13</sup> *Don't think of an elephant!* George Lakoff, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004

<sup>14</sup> Based on George Lakoff's talk at Counterpoint's event 'Is all politics moral?', London, October 2013

<sup>15</sup> E.g. 'Europe's far right: This monster called Europe', *Economist*, November 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21589894-marine-le-pen-and-geert-wilders-form-eurosceptic-alliance-monster-called-europe>

saw the 'opportunity' frame were more likely to support EU enlargement than those who saw the 'risk' frame. Frames matter – and how an issue is framed can make all the difference.<sup>16</sup>

### **Don't think of a...**

Unfortunately, mainstream European politicians often forget the importance of framing. As a result, they accept the populist frame and work within it. Instead of framing issues their own way, they tend to negate the populist argument within the populist frame. But this just activates the ideas in the populist frame. As a result it reinforces the populist frame. It encourages people to think about the world as the populist sees it. And that just helps populist politicians.

The cognitive linguist George Lakoff gives a simple example: if someone tells you, 'Don't think of an elephant', you're bound to think of an elephant.<sup>17</sup> In a similar way, denying that Europe is a monster is counterproductive – associating Europe with the word 'monster' reinforces the populist frame. This helps populist politicians and undermines your message.

That's not to say that Liberal politicians should avoid issues capitalised on by populist parties. It would be a terrible mistake to cede important issues like immigration to populists – they matter to the reluctant radicals and need to be addressed. And negative attacks are not to be dismissed – they just work better when told your way, and not told using populist politicians' ideas, values and language.<sup>18</sup>

The approach I have outlined here puts emotion, values and frames at the forefront of policy and communications. I say 'policy' as well as 'communications' because they are intimately linked.<sup>19</sup> Framing is not just about finding new words to sell a policy – it is about rethinking the issues the reluctant radicals care about by putting your values first.

### **A strategy based on emotions, values and frames**

In this short contribution, I have gone on a whistlestop tour through our research at Counterpoint. I have argued that the 'reluctant radicals', the soft supporters of populist parties, need to be targeted at the next European Parliament elections. And I have proposed an approach to winning them back that emphasises emotions, values and frames. I end this contribution with a summary of the approach recommended here and an example of how it can be used in practice.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Between risk and opportunity: news framing and its effects on public support for EU enlargement', Andreas R. T. Schuck and Claes H. de Vreese, *European Journal of Political Communication*, 2006

<sup>17</sup> Don't think of an elephant! George Lakoff, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004

<sup>18</sup> *The Political Brain*, Drew Westen, PublicAffairs, 2007, Chapter 13

<sup>19</sup> See for instance the work carried out by Cognitive Policy Works, <http://www.cognitivepolicyworks.com/>



First, here is our easy-to-follow advice for Liberal parties who want to beat populism at the next European Parliament elections:

*Embrace emotion. Tell stories – both small ones about individuals and big ones about where society is going.*

*Speak from your values. Never assume that voters go with just their material interests. Politics is about morality.*

*‘Say things your way.’<sup>20</sup> Reject the populist frames. Using Liberal frames will activate Liberal values.*

*And remember the voters – the reluctant radicals. Find the things that they care about and find where they match what you care about.*

Finally, it is vital that parties **target their message**: populism has different roots in every country across Europe and the concerns of the reluctant radicals vary significantly.<sup>21</sup>

What does this mean in practice? To explain, I will return to our example of Mr van der Stoep’s speech in the European Parliament.

### **Deconstructing van der Stoep’s speech to the European Parliament**

Daniël van der Stoep had said that ‘Member States are unfortunately no longer the masters in their own homes’. By using the simple metaphor of ‘the nation is a home’, van der Stoep identified the concept of ‘home’ with the concept of ‘nation’ and framed the issue his way. The idea of not being the master of your home is uncomfortable and anxiety-inducing. Van der Stoep associated the EU’s migration policy with these feelings. He based his speech on the simple and appealing value of self-determination – the desire to decide the way you live.

One MEP had the courage to respond to his critique. Judith Sargentini, from the European Greens (and also from the Netherlands), asked the following:

“Mr President, I would like to ask Mr van der Stoep the following question: if border checks were to be reintroduced, what would Mr van der Stoep say to the Dutch holidaymakers returning from a fortnight’s holiday in France who want to cross the border between Antwerp and Hazeldonk and who, on their way home, end up in a mile-long tailback, the same tailback as the lorry drivers on their way to the Port of Rotterdam to unload their cargo?”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> George Lakoff’s talk at Counterpoint’s event ‘Is all politics moral?’, London, October 2013

<sup>21</sup> For more information on the different roots of populism, see our compilation of country pamphlets – Populist Fantasies: European revolts in context, ed. by Catherine Fieschi, Marley Morris and Lila Caballero, Counterpoint, 2013

<sup>22</sup> European Parliament debate on migration flows and asylum and their impact on Schengen, 10 May 2011, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20110510+ITEM-015+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

In effect, Judith Sargentini was appealing to the material interests of the Dutch. According to her, van der Stoep's recommendation was foolish because it wasn't in Dutch people's self-interest – it would make their lives more troublesome when travelling across Europe. But she forgot the importance of values. In politics, it is values that matter. What does a traffic jam count for when values are at stake?

Daniël van der Stoep retaliated:

"Mrs Sargentini knows very well that we are absolutely against new customs gates being set up... The Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) has always been clear on this: we do not want those gates back, but what we do want is merely the possibility of determining our own asylum and migration policy ourselves, and you are well aware of that."<sup>23</sup>

Daniël van der Stoep brushed off this remark with ease. He rejected Judith Sargentini's claim that it would not be in Dutch people's self-interest to follow his prescription. And in the final line he emphasised: "what we do want is merely the possibility of determining our own asylum and migration policy ourselves", again appealing to the value of self-determination. Because she had not challenged his speech from a values-based approach and because she had not engaged with emotion, Judith Sargentini's response fell flat.

So how could have she responded? Here is another possibility:

*Mr President, whenever this Parliament talks about immigration, I think of the people who have strived to make it here to this great continent. It must be the most terrifying thing to leave your home and not know where you will find a future. But these people have dared to want a better life for themselves and their families. This is a search for security that we all share.*

*But when we talk about immigration I also think of the people in the south of Europe who are currently alone in coping with the arrival of migrants from North Africa, who have taken on this tough responsibility. And this is one reason I think some people are so concerned about this issue – they don't think it is fair on them.*

*This is why, first and foremost, I will only support a free movement agreement that treats people in Europe fairly. When politicians change the rules and put up border controls to suit themselves, that is not what I call a fair policy.*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid

*So Mr van der Stoep, I ask you this.*

*Where is your concern for fairness; or do you want the Netherlands to be a free rider, to get the benefits of free movement with none of the responsibilities?*

*And where is your concern for the people travelling to the south of Europe? Because from what you say it sounds like you'll watch them drown on a boat to Lampedusa without blinking an eye.*

*And where is your concern for the principles of your own citizens? Because by my reckoning the Dutch have always stood up for what is fair and honourable and will do so again.*

This appeal returns to what the issue of immigration is all about: the movement of people. It aims to engage citizens' hopes and anxieties. And at its centre it places the value of fairness. It is just one potential example of what Liberal politicians could do before the next election.

It is this approach – an approach rooted in emotion, values and frames – that I recommend here.

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# Effective Communications in Response to Populism

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The rise of populism across Europe has at least done something positive for politics: it has pushed the issue of communication skills up the political agenda. While populists make direct appeal to people's emotions and get media attention by loudly criticising the political 'elite', mainstream politicians often struggle to be heard in the face of the eurosceptic, nationalist or xenophobic messages which are attracting public support in some countries.

The main response to populist rhetoric has, until recently, been to quietly ignore it in an attempt to starve them of attention and to rise above their level of debate. This silence has arguably contributed to a rise in public support for their message by allowing these claims to pass unchallenged. I have witnessed the marked increase in populist and nationalist rhetoric inside the European Parliament in recent years, which has only rarely been countered by robust responses from mainstream MEPs.

Now the rise in support for populist, nationalist and extreme-right parties in several EU countries means they will be treated as serious political opponents at the forthcoming European elections. Liberal party candidates and activists will need to address populist messages at a national level, both in their contact with voters and in facing challenges from populist politicians.

In this article I offer reflections on practical ways to communicate your message in the face of populist rhetoric which can be adapted for your national context. Preparation is necessary for effective communication. Populists are themselves well prepared and have taken communication training in some countries. I start by looking at what can be learned from populists' own communication techniques, and then offer some options for choosing your responses to populist arguments or attacks.

## 1. How do populists communicate? What can be learned from them?

Populists are often effective communicators. They attract media attention by their outspoken attacks on the political establishment, and use solid communication techniques to get their messages understood and supported by the public. Examining how they make their impact will identify what can be learned and usefully applied to your own communications.

### What do they say?

First, let's consider what the public are really hearing in populist messages. In general, the public frequently hears three main types of populist message, while the specifics differ according to national context. You will no doubt recognise these messages from your own experience:

- **Warnings about urgent social and economic problems:** these usually exaggerated warnings produce an undercurrent of anxiety and fear about the future and about 'others' in society. Populists justify this by saying they dare to 'tell it like it is', unlike other politicians. In practice, these fearful warnings are shaping society's attitudes and creating prejudice and uncertainty: 'Brussels' controls our lives; migrants and immigrants are a threat: 'they' are too many, they take 'our' jobs, abuse 'our' welfare systems, or are all criminals coming to prey on 'us'.
- **Blame and attack:** strong and sometimes insulting attacks are made on the so-called political 'elite' from all mainstream parties, who are portrayed as not caring about ordinary people's problems. For the eurosceptics, Europe is to blame for (all) our problems, including the alleged 'invasion' of migrants or immigrants, while 'foreigners' are blamed for crime and for social and economic problems.
- **Simplistic solutions:** The simplistic solutions offered to resolve these apparently urgent problems are easy to understand for a casual listener, unlike the mainstream political debate about options to solve complex issues. However, these solutions are usually impossible or unrealistic to implement in practice. Examples include: closing national borders and stopping all migration; send 'them' all back home; leave the EU; leave the euro; change Europe's laws on free movement.

People hearing these populist messages are encouraged to feel more anxious about their future, more distrustful and dissatisfied with mainstream politics and Europe, and to believe in an apparently simple, but unrealistic, way out.

## How do they say it?

These basic messages are delivered using strong communication techniques to increase their impact. The main techniques used can be summarised as follows:

- Short and simple 'soundbite' messages: *"massive and uncontrolled immigration"*
- Repetition of key phrases
- Certainty and strong conviction conveyed by language and voice tone: *"you know you are losing"*
- Exaggeration, often citing specific numbers to give a factual impression: *"7 million migrants to arrive"; "900 000 illegal immigrants enter the EU every year";*
- Emotive language and use of strong imagery: *"boatloads of fortune-seeking migrants" "slavish adherence to European rules will 'bleed' the people"*.
- Rudeness to and mockery of the political establishment, which attracts media attention and demonstrates they speak like 'ordinary' people, not the political elite: *"shame on you"*

What impact do these techniques have on the audience? These are some reflections:

Rhetorical technique	Impact on audience
Simplistic, short messages, 'soundbites'	Easy to understand and remember
Repetition	Makes them easier to remember
Certainty	Provides a sense of security
Exaggeration	Increases urgency for action
Emotive language and use of imagery	Connects with emotions
Mockery and rudeness	Reinforces image of rebels, or 'heroes'

With this awareness of what voters are really hearing from populists and how their messages influence them, you can consider how best to present your own political message. Some of these rhetorical techniques are helpful to ensure your own message is heard clearly by voters.

## 2. Ensuring your OWN message is heard!

As campaigners your aim is to ensure that people hear and believe in your Liberal vision for Europe's future, and your position within the policy debate on the EU. It would be a mistake, for example, to focus on attacking eurosceptics at the expense of discussing real policies. Only the eurosceptics would benefit from a debate limited to pro- or anti-Europe.

On the other hand, responses to the populist agenda are also needed. It is not convincing to ignore populist warnings about, for example, too many migrants and instead focus on Europe's free trade policy. Liberals and others need to tackle the sensitive issues raised by populists, such as immigration and migration, the financial crisis, or the EU's powers and present their own policy responses.

So whether you are presenting your priorities for Europe, or your political response to the problems presented by populists, some key lessons drawn from the populists' communications can still be applied to help increase the impact of your own message. Four areas are outlined below:

- **Clear messages**, which are easy to relate to people's lives
- **Repetition of key messages**
- **Using certainty and personal conviction** to ensure others believe in your message
- **Including the human factor** and connecting with emotions.

### **Clear messages**

First and seemingly so obvious: messages need to be clear, easy to understand and relevant to the listener. Yet political messages about the EU often mistakenly focus on detailed explanation of policies, using 'euro-jargon', which can seem complicated and irrelevant to the general voter. It is certainly challenging to simplify complex issues, however the truth is that short and clear messages in accessible language are an essential communication tool in today's soundbite culture. You can think of it as a translation service from dry EU policy detail to the real-life questions which connect with people's daily lives. Other chapters deal in detail with the framing of messages in terms of values which appeal to people's emotions.<sup>24</sup>

### **Repeating key messages**

Repetition of key messages is a well-known technique blatantly used by populists and distinctly underused by mainstream politicians. Repetition does not always need to sound like a sales technique if you use it carefully! Repeating one or two phrases which sum up the key message just helps your audience remember, and ideally repeat it to others. Martin Luther King's famous speech on race equality in the US is remembered as the "I have a dream" speech, because he repeated this key, evocative phrase eight times. However, some forms of repetition can be counterproductive, such as repetitive name-calling of opponents.

An important principle is to ensure you repeat your own message and not the populist language, as this simply reinforces their message with the audience. Consider using different language to refer to their proposals – one example used in the European Parliament is to replace the negative label 'illegal immigrants' with the neutral 'undocumented migrants'.

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<sup>24</sup> See the contributions of Marley Morris and Andoor Admiraal



### **Certainty and personal conviction**

Using the language of certainty and expressing strong conviction on issues is persuasive. It is, of course, easier for populists focussed on just a handful of policies to portray the world as black or white, whereas mainstream politicians struggle with complex solutions to problems. As a result they seldom speak with the same certainty as populists, and may inspire less public confidence as a result. You may like to consider how to use the language of certainty where possible, and how to express your personal conviction in your message. Speaking from strong personal conviction tells your audience what you believe in and reassures them that you are confident about actions needed.

A good example of the language of certainty are the 20 words spoken by Mario Draghi, President of the European Central Bank, in July 2012 to convince the financial markets that the ECB would intervene to support the euro:

*“The ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro.  
And believe me, it will be enough.”*

This language is clear; the phrases are short and emphatic; and he expresses a personal conviction in the action “believe me, it will be enough”. And indeed it has been enough to prevent any further attacks on the euro since then.

### **The human factor**

Finally there is what I call the ‘human factor’ in political communications, on which the populists focus in various ways, saying they speak for ‘ordinary people’. Expressing emotions in your communications, such as a passion for Europe, concern to help others, or outrage at false claims, helps people to connect with you and your message. Basing your position on clear moral values and telling stories about people, rather than simply presenting facts, are further ways to appeal to people’s hearts and minds. Kinga Goencz MEP started a speech about Roma children with the words: *“allow me to begin by recounting a story”* and used her story to illustrate how two Roma children missed school because of their living circumstances, and not due to an unwillingness to learn.

Speaking from direct personal experience provides a real-life connection which increases your personal credibility with others. Kinga Goencz’s story showed she had personal knowledge of the Roma family’s situation. You may be able to speak from personal experience of a visit to the European Parliament, or of contacts with migrant community leaders in your area. Be aware that your communications will be naturally stronger where you have direct personal experience of and/or a strong personal belief in the issue.

### 3. Choosing direct responses to populism

More direct responses to challenge or dismiss populist rhetoric are overdue, since without any challenge the media and public hear these messages repeated unopposed. Such challenges do not replace the need to communicate your own political messages, but rather sit alongside them. Some advance preparation on a selection of different responses can help you respond more confidently and effectively when meeting populism on the campaign.

There is a choice of direct response styles, and I consider here three broad categories, which can be adapted to specific situations and used in combination with each other. Your personal preference for style and the populist messages in your national context will guide your choice of response.

- Neutral response to state disagreement
- Counterattack and challenge to confront
- Humour or ridicule to dismiss.

#### Neutral responses

The neutral response is probably the most accessible for everyone. It is effective simply to state clear and firm disagreement since this sends a signal to the audience that there is opposition to the populist statement. This can be calmly delivered, without being confrontational, and once the disagreement is stated, you can move into communicating your own message. It is surprisingly rarely used, in my experience.

Examples of neutral disagreement phrases are: “I completely disagree with ...” or “I find that an unacceptable view of society...” Avoid repeating the wording and claims of populists, however, as this reinforces their message. For example, refer to ‘these exaggerated claims’, but not to the actual exaggerated figure of ‘x’ million migrants; and do not deny by saying “of course we will not be invaded by hordes of foreigners”, rather say “this kind of hysterical claim is just another example of gross exaggeration designed to scare people”.

Using accurate facts, where available, to rebut populists’ exaggerated statements is another neutral response which can support a stated disagreement. However, in the emotive debate raised by populism, presenting real facts will never be sufficient by itself to combat fears and prejudice; facts can be useful only as one part of the response. A Polish MEP who opposed the Dutch ‘Freedom’ Party’s exhortation for citizens to report ‘crimes’ committed by migrants, challenged with well researched facts: “...do you know the contribution of the migrant community to your [Netherlands] GDP? 0.3%. Do you know how much they pay in taxes? €1.1 billion, much more than they take from your social coffers. Do you know the unemployment rate among migrant workers? 1%”

## **Counterattack and challenge**

The approach of counterattack or direct challenge is a stronger response which is often needed to meet the intensity of criticism and attack levelled by populists themselves.

The counterattack can be a direct negative comment on the populist rhetoric, for example: it is 'hysteria'; it is an 'insult to democracy'; or an exposure of the negative impact: *"you want to generate tensions and make political capital out of existing problems, such as unemployment and ...poverty", "he is inciting hatred .. between the peoples of Europe"*.

Expressing strong feelings and using emotive language in a challenge make it both more confrontational and more striking to the audience: for example this challenge to a populist MEP: *"I would like to put a question to the preacher of hatred, Mr Farage. He spoke here of Gauleiter. As a German, I object to the democratic country of Germany being equated with National Socialism. ... He is inciting hatred in the European Parliament, hatred between the peoples of Europe."*

EU Commissioner László Andor combined different response styles in his recent challenge to the UK Prime Minister's planned restrictions on free movement of migrants. He warned against *"hysteria"* and described the announcement as *"an unfortunate overreaction"*, supporting this with the factual reference that *"two-thirds of migrants to the UK are from non-EU countries, we need a more accurate impression of the EU picture."* He then added a reassuring comment about appropriate EU action: *"If there are real problems we need to act proportionately and not in such a way."* However, it was his emotive language which made the headline: *"UK is a nasty country, says Andor"* and this shows the importance of considering which emotive language to use.

Revealing evidence of poor records of political action, or of inappropriate behaviour by populist politicians is another tactic to mount a challenge and raise questions about their suitability for office. The ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt, confronted a UK populist MEP, Nigel Farage, about his non-attendance at the Parliamentary Committee he is paid to attend, aiming to discredit his working record and drew wide applause from other MEPs for the challenge:

*"...what I think is the biggest waste of money in the European Union today is the salary we are all paying to Mr Farage – that is the biggest waste of money!"*

*Mr Farage, let us be honest about it. You are a member of the Committee on Fisheries, for example, and you are never there, never! In 2011, no attendance. In 2012, no attendance. You come here saying that the salaries that are paid are a scandal, and you pay yourself a salary without doing any work in your own committee"*

Specific questions which address exaggerated claims you know to be untrue or unproven, such as “tens of thousands of migrants” or “ever-increasing Islamisation”, can put others in a position of trying to defend or explain the exaggeration. You can ask questions such as: *‘what evidence do you have for this exaggerated figure quoted? Who has calculated this?’*; or *‘What exactly do you mean by the statement about Islam...’* These questions can be put directly to populists in a personal debate, or can be raised with the media and voters to sow doubt in their minds.

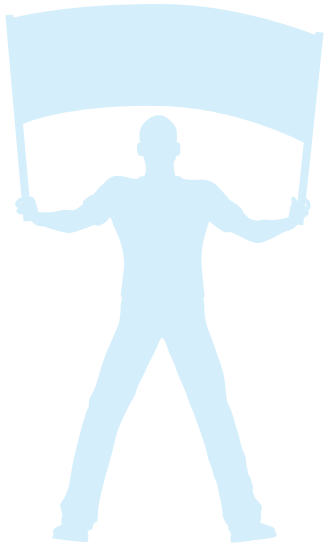
Analysis of populist messages can also provide material for awkward questions; for example, eurosceptics often present two simultaneous claims that migrants come to take ‘our’ jobs AND our welfare money. However, they cannot be both workers in jobs and paying taxes, as well as unemployed claiming welfare benefits – so the question here is: which one do you choose?

### **Humour or ridicule**

The third style of response using humour or ridicule to dismiss populist claims is a lighter approach to enliven debate and move away from the typical serious political style. Humour and ridicule can be effective weapons to dismiss opponents, and some charismatic populist leaders already use mockery to make fun of political leaders. The purpose of using ridicule to make light of the populists’ outrageous comments is to diminish their importance in the eyes of the public and is also likely to attract media attention. Humour needs to be used with care, however, and adapted for the specific cultural context, so it can be challenging to carry off well. Nevertheless, even simple phrases such as *“there they go again with the same old stories”* or *“they have made these same ridiculous exaggerations for years”* can help to dismiss or undermine the populists’ exaggerated claims, and open the way for presenting your party’s view of the real situation.

### **A final word**

Decisive and confident leadership is needed to present a convincing vision in the face of the skilfully presented populist messages which are well suited to our soundbite culture. Preparation of realistic policies and the most effective ways of presenting them will help Liberal candidates and activists feel more confident in speaking out and respond to populism in their national context at the coming European elections. I have focussed here on the use of effective communications to ensure your own message is heard and believed, as well as a choice of styles to rebut or challenge populists. The next steps in terms of preparation in your national context are up to you. Good luck!



# Prose, Poetry and the Framing of the European Union

## Four recommendations for Pro-European politicians to win back public opinion

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The current unpopularity of the European Union is largely the result of failed communications by pro-European politicians. This article outlines four recommendations designed to turn the tide:

### **Pro-Europeans should:**

- 1 Stop being defensive*
- 2 Become more conscientious about their language*
- 3 Establish a new poetic narrative for Europe, and*
- 4 Force anti-Europeans to explain the prosaic consequences of their ideas.*

In the very year that the EU won the Nobel Peace Prize, it found its popularity at an all-time low. More Europeans now regard the EU as a negative force rather than a force for good. Pro-European politicians struggle to connect their world of large and small policy successes to the mine-filled wasteland that is the current public perception of their project. They are quick to blame smooth-talking populists, who speak without the burden of responsibility and “play to emotions”. To a marketer, this sounds like a soda maker blaming diminishing turnover on the effective marketing campaign of a competitor. Even if it were true, it would be irrelevant: the actions of competitors are outside the realm of control.<sup>25</sup>

This article directly addresses those politicians seeking to defend the European Union and who face an increasingly uphill battle with four recommendations to strengthen their case. First, some remarks on political communication in general are in order.

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<sup>25</sup> Unless you resort to anticompetitive practices. On a political level, this translates to silencing dissenting voices by banning parties, name calling, or disqualification of the messenger. This runs counter to everything the EU stands for and would feed right into the narrative of the European Union as an antidemocratic, power hungry bureaucracy.

Populism thrives on easy, repetitive  
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rhetoric. The far right and far left a  
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ELF has brought together key speak  
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minded Europeans to voice their view



## The five layers of political communication

At *Audience Oriented Messaging* we identify five layers of political communication.

**Layer 1** essentially defines who you are; not just as a politician, but as a person. This is the *layer of values*. It typically contains elements of an ideological nature (say, freedom or solidarity), but also general traits such as honesty, responsibility, or respect for authority. Layer 1 explains why you are in politics in the first place.

**Layer 2** is the level of *themes*: environment, economy, or European integration. A politician might see herself as a green politician or expert on civil liberties.

**Layer 3** is all about *issues*; this is the layer that typically enjoys most coverage in the news media: tax increases, a ban on the burka, and labeling of GMOs are all issues.

**Layer 4** is the *layer of priorities*: these are essentially issues, but with factual or symbolic significance to you as a politician, directly relating to your values.

**The fifth layer** is the *layer of policy*: do we raise gas prices by 0.5% or 0.7% in order to combat CO<sub>2</sub> emissions? Do we cap the number of EU Commissioners at 8, or 15?

If you ask a voter to explain her preference for a certain politician, she will typically cite one or two priorities (“I would like to see class sizes in schools reduced”), or perhaps a topic (“The environment is very near to my heart”). But are these indeed the drivers of persuasion, or are they mere rationalizations? We know that while decisions can be influenced by rational considerations, emotional aspects play a far bigger role<sup>26</sup>. It is hard to change the way you feel, but relatively easy to rationalize your emotional decisions. Layers 2 and 4 have the advantage of being easily put into words. However, layer 1 is far and away the most important, as it works directly on a visceral level. The problem with layer 1 is that it is hard to discuss semantically. “I think education is important” sounds much more reasonable and well-informed than “I feel this politician cares about me”. Yet the latter is a much more important driver of persuasion. Advisors, analysts and pollsters often ignore layer 1, since it is hard to talk about, let alone measure. But there is a world of difference between the persuasive power of “being a fair person” (level 1) and “limiting the energy tax for middle class incomes to 0.3%” (level 5). All layers other than layer 1 are important mostly to the extent they illustrate or provide evidence for a politician’s values. Of these, layer 4 has the most direct link to layer 1; it is in essence the “evidence” of what you stand for. This is why any compromise on a layer 4 priority is a deadly sin for a politician: you are not who you said you were. If low taxes is the

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<sup>26</sup> Many excellent works exist reflecting on the decision making process in general, such as *The Decisive Moment* by Jonah Lehrer and *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman. Two books about the decision making process from a political perspective which I would especially recommend are *The Political Brain* by Drew Westen and *The Political Mind* by George Lakoff, although both are firmly US-oriented.

essence of what you stand for, it is very hard to recover electorally from passing a tax increase. A prominent eurosceptic cannot be a credible European Commissioner. The history of politics is scattered with the bodies of politicians who failed to distinguish between layers 3, 4 and 5 and compromised on the wrong thing.

Unfortunately, many politicians spent most of their time communicating on layer 3 and 5, because these tend to dominate the media agenda. An issue may be in the news and thereby provide a ticket to TV fame. But little is gained by having your face on TV if it does not contribute to the narrative of who you are and what you stand for. The art of persuasion requires you to bend any topic back to layers 1 and 4.

Layer 2 is particularly deceptive, as the organization of the political work is often divided in clusters, so thinking in themes comes very naturally to politicians and they start to believe that “environment”, “education”, or “health care” actually mean something by themselves. Voters, and especially pollsters, will cite layer 2, because they provide an easy heuristic to the underlying issues and values (“Voters find health care more important than development aid”). But someone who votes “for the environment” essentially means she likes her politicians to be caring and responsible. Layer 2 is at best a remote proxy of a value, but it is never the essence and usually a distraction.

### **Framing means solidly structuring your arguments**

Note that ‘explaining how Europe works’ does not fit with any of the layers of persuasive communication. This is because this is not a task for a politician. When confronted with misunderstandings about the EU, you may feel the need to set the record straight. However, this would mean wasting valuable attention on something that contains no persuasive power at all<sup>27</sup>. Many European politicians are technocrats before leaders, and they see themselves as a special kind of civil servant whose primary role is the adjustment of formal policy. They identify with the government first, instead of being the link between the government and the public that should provide direction and mobilize support for it.

The power of mere facts in persuasion can hardly be underestimated. I like to think of facts (including policy achievements) as bricks: instead of dumping a pile of bricks on the voter and let her sort it out, it is the task of politician to construct a structure, a narrative in which the voter can feel safe. EU money for a local bridge, a generous subsidy for cancer research or the reduction of corruption by 80% may all be excellent policies, but they will not turn any anti-European into a pro-European, unless they are part of a carefully packaged framework cemented together by values. Even the shoddiest shed built with low-quality materials is a better place to live than an unstructured pile of bricks, however high their individual quality. The Liberal response to populists should therefore not be a critique of their individual building blocks, but a new construct that is simply more durable and compelling.

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<sup>27</sup> Whenever a politician uses the term “explaining”, all alarm bells should go off. This typically means she finds herself between a rock and hard place and believes that facts will set her free. They will not.



### **Polling and the ambiguity of Europe**

Any debate related to the EU suffers from a number of unique problems. The first is that the very definition of Europe is still under debate. Is it a federation, a community of shared values, or simply a technocratic market delivering goodies for the people? Many politicians barely dare to make a move on this, either because they are confused themselves, or because they are afraid to lose public support. They insist that Europe is “just a market”, even though it is blindingly obvious that this is not (or at least no longer) the case. Since any alternative construct can quickly be perceived as a ‘super state’, many politicians cling to this strategy of ‘euroskepticism light’, even if they lose their credibility in the process. Voters are extremely sensitive to any disconnect between what a politician says, believes and does. Unable to construct a house of their own, these politicians end up doing nothing but providing building materials for the anti-European edifice.

A second problem is posed by the use of polling data. We all know that the EU is not very popular. At the same time, a solid majority of Europeans wants to remain in the EU. There is a dissonance in public opinion, a glitch in the Matrix, if you will. Typically, this means there is room for a framing shift. Until a new frame is established, most debates about Europe keep turning in the same circles and the discussion becomes tedious. This is exactly what you see happening with the current debate on the EU. People eventually will want to leave, abolish or change the EU, or they will have to change their perception of it. Polling is incredibly useful for any professional politician, but polls have one major limitation: they measure what is, not what could be. In a debate in need of a new narrative (frame shift), polling may do more harm than good: it constrains the level of thinking to the current framing, while the only solutions are found outside of the status quo.

Anti-Europeans may have constructed a house built on quicksand, but at least they provide housing. Many pro-Europeans just stand beside their pile of bricks, paralyzed or confused by a critical public opinion. Only politicians with strong convictions, sharp intuition and ample courage are able to break this vicious circle. Unfortunately, most politicians’ intuition on Europe is severely off because of interaction effects, or differences in European experience, which are part of the very fabric of the EU.

### **Interaction effects**

A crucial understanding of framing theory is that words, metaphors and facts mean different things to different people. Almost inevitably, the people of Europe and their representatives do not speak the same language. After all, the ‘European experience’ is very different for someone who travels, speaks foreign languages and has friends and colleagues in different countries, than it is for the vast majority of citizens who live, work and think local. Even if you happen to work in a factory whose turnover completely depends on European exports, your European experience is nothing like that of an MEP. It is the perfect storm: the interaction effect of being a politician in Europe is what all but guarantees your experience (and thereby your intuition) will be out of sync with the public at large.

So with this understanding, what can Liberals do to overcome the challenge of an EU-hostile public perception, which is driving nationalists and other anti-Europeans to the fore of political debate?

## **The four recommendations**

### ***Recommendation 1 – Play offense, not defense.***

Many people typecast pro-European politicians as defenders of the EU, or as someone who will “explain” Europe. This is not your duty; it is your role to make people understand the direction in which you as a politician want to take Europe. Once Liberals are framed as defenders of the EU (or even as ‘groupies’ or ‘europhiles’), it is very hard to make a credible case that you can reform the Union and that you take people’s legitimate concerns seriously. Forget about the exact policies and voting records that may prove your credentials as a reformer: you remain a defender of this construct, with its bureaucracy and democratic deficit.

Not standing up and defending Europe is hard for those who have a strong connection to the “no more war” narrative; defending Europe is an honorable thing to do. That may be so, the problem is that this is just not very persuasive. While you defend Europe’s past and present, you may just leave its future up to the anti-Europeans. Simply refuse to explain why Europe is good for people, or why we should have the EU in the first place. This is a ridiculous discussion and you should help put it to rest instead of sustaining it. There will never be a point when everyone will understand, so do not even wait for that. Europe is a continent, the EU is a reality. Defending the EU is about as useless as defending the existence of Denmark. It is the wrong debate. Any Europe yes/no discussion should be avoided. Instead, talk about why it is better to live in a strong and prosperous Europe than in a weak and divided continent. These narratives are close, but not the same.

If you find it hard not to get defensive, simply turn each issue on its head and remember that in politics, a warning is more credible than a promise. Do not argue that completion of the single market will make us a lot of money. Instead, calculate how much it would cost if we do not complete the single market and use this to attack your opponent.

### ***Recommendation 2 – Change the language***

Your words help determine what ‘Europe’ means to the audience and defining the issue goes a long way to determining the outcome of the debate. This is what anti-Europeans do so well: they succeeded in making identity and self-determination the issue and set themselves up for a win.

They are often helped by the language of pro-Europeans, who will actually use phrases like the following: “We need to transfer more powers to Europe in order to effectively fight cross-border crime”. Consider what you are actually saying here, beyond the manifest meaning. First, there is a “we” and a “Europe”, and these are two distinct entities. “We” currently possess a power that we can “transfer” somewhere. There is no other conclusion possible: we have something that you want to give it away. Pro-Europeans should consistently speak of *sharing* powers rather than *transferring* them. We know that people are not so much conservative as they are loss-averse. By framing Europe in terms of loss, pro-European politicians strengthen their opponents’ case.

The European debate is riddled with small framing nuggets like the above. You may notice that I consistently speak of “anti-Europeans” and perhaps you were annoyed by this. As a politically correct Liberal you know that anti-Europeans prefer the term ‘eurosceptics’. But ask yourself this: what, on a visceral level, is the opposite of a eurosceptic? That would be a ‘europhile’. Which of these would have the most reasonable, thought-out position? Europhiles are in love; their thinking is impaired by their naïve emotions. Eurosceptics, on the other hand, are critical and hence smart and rational. The terms are stacked in favor of an anti-European agenda. However, the terms ‘pro-European’ and ‘anti-European’ work in favour of a Liberal agenda. Pro-Europeans want to build something, whereas the anti-Europeans are destructive and self-loathing. That anti-Europeans object to the term is precisely why pro-Europeans should insist on using it.<sup>28</sup> Using the term ‘eurosceptic’ gives undue credence to an often populist stance.

Even by simply using technical language, pro-European politicians can weaken their position. Your average MEP will without blinking say something like “Drug policy is a competency of Member States”, or “Citizens should have a say in this matter”. But when even MEPs meet each other, they never ask: “Which Member State are you from?” or “How many citizens voted for you?”. They would ask simply: “Which country are you from?”, and “How many people voted for you?”. Real people do not live in a ‘member state’, they live in a ‘country’. The trouble with technical phrases like these is not that they are hard to rationally understand; they are not. The problem is that it makes politicians hard to relate to on an emotional level. This reflects on you and the issues for which you stand.

### ***Recommendation 3 – Develop a new poetic pro-European narrative***

Until not too long ago, the dominant narrative of the EU was what I call the *poetic pro-European narrative*: a story of cooperation and hope, the replacement of war with peace. This made the EU an uncontroversial project, as people tend to choose peace over war. This narrative is also called the *friendship narrative*, or what I like to call the *Kumbaya-narrative*: we are stronger together, splendid in diversity, and so on and so forth. This narrative has been so compelling for so long, that pro-Europeans neglected to update it with changing times. The main opposing narrative was the *prosaic anti-European narrative*, which sees the EU as an inefficient, unaccountable bureaucracy. This is a strong picture, but because a prosaic narrative is typically much less visceral than a poetic one, the pro-European narrative was dominant and public support for the EU was ensured. The anti-European argument “A lot of money is wasted in Brussels” was squashed with the reply “But we have no more war in Europe”. When both narratives are credible, the poetic will typically trump the prosaic.

Times have changed. The poetic pro-European narrative lost its credibility over time, as the image of war in Europe became alien to most. The narrative has been used and misused so often to silence critical

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<sup>28</sup> Note that you can use the term ‘anti-European’ for your opponent, even if you would never call yourself ‘pro-European’.

voices, that it became suspect. Meanwhile, the anti-Europeans have re-framed the *Kumbaya-narrative* in their favor. “Of course these europhiles mean well, but they are so naïve”. Every time the poetic case for Europe is made, it strengthens the frame of naiveté and helps the anti-Europeans.

But most importantly, the anti-Europeans have crafted a strong poetic narrative of their own and repeated it so often that it became a reality in the eyes of most people. This is the *identity-narrative*, in which Brussels is seen as an ever-expanding bureaucracy from which we need to protect our right to self-determination. For this narrative to work, it is crucial that “Europe” is seen as something other than “us”. In the UK, arguably the most eurosceptic country of the continent, it would be completely normal to say “I am going to Europe”, even if you just move from London to Madrid. Now, imagine this. If the public accepts that “anti-European” means “pro-Sweden” (or whichever country the particular anti-European is from), the opposite will also be true: “pro-European” means “anti-Sweden”. This narrative is currently widely accepted throughout Europe and it is crucial to break it by framing Europe as something we are part of, rather than something separate from us. Hence, my recommendation is not to defend Europe, but to take the existence of the EU for granted in your language and accept it as a reality.

The main response to the poetic anti-European narrative is the *prosaic pro-European narrative*: Europe is a market that makes us money and provides practical benefits such as joint research projects, scholarships and easier travel. The problem with this narrative is that it is unconvincing by nature. People vote their values, not their interests. As said, a good poetic narrative will trump any good prosaic one. It did so in the past, when the shortcomings of the EU were swept under the carpet by the poetic pro-European narrative. You complain about the EU? You must be a warmonger then! Now the story is: You defend the EU? You must be a naïve idealist.

Pro-Europeans have to build a new poetic narrative. There are many building blocks that can be used. First, people feel most European when looking from the outside in. Compared to the Chinese or the Americans, we all of a sudden feel we have much more in common. This change of perspective is vastly underutilized. Also, a reversal of the anti-European position can be a poetic one. Nick Clegg of the British Liberal Democrats found a great narrative when he framed his “patriotic case for Europe”, in which he argued that leaving the EU would damage the prospects of the UK and would therefore be tantamount to “betrayal of the people”. This is essentially the prosaic case for Europe with a strong layer of poetry (patriotism and betrayal) on top. This turns a technical argument into a compelling visceral one. Why leave patriotism to the nationalists? After all, they are the ones who will hurt your country. Voters should not just understand that, they need to *feel* it.

#### ***Recommendation 4 – Bring the anti-Europeans down to earth***

Anti-Europeans get away with establishing a visceral vision in which the EU and all its problems are no more. While they indulge in this fantasy, pro-Europeans are left to “explain” Europe’s acronym soup and arcane procedures, as they are stuck in a more mundane reality. The poetic anti-Europeans offer

sovereignty and self-determination, the prosaic pro-Europeans respond with better consumer protection and cheaper phone calls. This is no fair fight - but we can make it one. Just as we can make the pro-European narrative more poetic, we can force the anti-Europeans to get more prosaic. They will resist every step of the way, but it is possible.

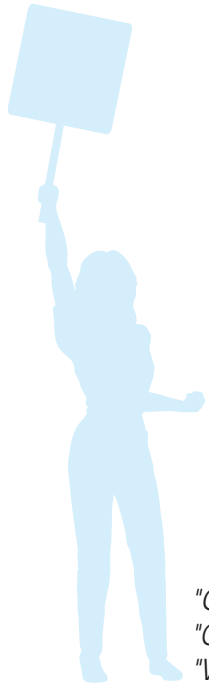
“Do you plan to pay for your exit from the EU by cutting social security?” “Of course not, an exit will only bring *more* prosperity!” “It has been calculated that it will cost at least 10% of our national income. It is your right to make that choice, if you really feel cooperation with other countries is such a burden. But you should be honest about the cost. As long as you refuse to say how you will pay for it, I can only assume you will place the bill with the elderly”.

Ask technical questions. This is counter-intuitive as it may not win you any points with the audience directly, but if you can force anti-Europeans into a prosaic discourse, their fantasy will quickly lose its shine. “So you think we can join the EEA instead? Can you explain how as an EEA member we would influence trade negotiations? How many staff would this require, and would you take these on from existing EU institutions?” And so on, and so forth. Most alternatives that anti-Europeans offer will have the same problems the EU faces, the main difference is that they are not visible yet. Make concrete what this ‘new version of the EU’ means, in all its unspectacular triviality.

It may be difficult to force anti-Europeans to become more prosaic, but it can be done. A more poetic pro-European narrative is certainly possible. At the very least, pro-Europeans can rid their language of anything that frames Europe as something of “them” rather than “us”. Any good politician should know how to move from defense to offense. And while there are quite some battles ahead, if they lose their complacency or fear of moving too far from current public opinion, pro-Europeans have the tools to stand a good fighting chance.

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## If You Ignore Them They Grow

Astrid Thors, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,  
former Finnish Minister of Migration and European Affairs,  
Former Vice President of the ALDE Party

Astrid Thors is the current OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. She began her three-year mandate on 20 August 2013. She was a Member of the Finnish Parliament 2004-2013. She also served as Minister of Migration and European Affairs and was a Member of the European Parliament. Astrid Thors was Vice-President of the ALDE Party from 2011 to 2013.

*"Good morning, Eeyore," said Pooh.*

*"Good morning, Pooh Bear," said Eeyore gloomily. "If it is a good morning," he said. "Which I doubt," said he.*

*"Why, what's the matter?"*

*"Nothing, Pooh Bear, nothing. We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it."*

*"Can't all what?" said Pooh, rubbing his nose.*

*"Gaiety. Song-and-dance. Here we go round the mulberry bush."*

Alan Alexander Milne Winnie-the-Pooh, 1926

The kind bear Pooh is able to teach us many things, the quote above illustrates the simple truth that life is so much richer when we can utilize the gifts of all. In Finland, we have much to learn still. Finland has a very low rate of foreigners living in the country and yet the societal debate tends to suggest something different. I would not dare to suggest that this debate is connected to my own public service, but some things did change, as I became a government minister.

Finland got its first, and so far, only, Minister of Migration and European Affairs as I took up the office in April 2007. The idea was to recognize the need to lift the issues of migration, immigration and integration to a ministerial level, and consolidate them under one government minister. All projections showed, and still show, Finland needs more immigration, as the country has the most challenging demographic profile in the EU.

Soon after this, the economic downturn began, which among other things meant that people who otherwise might have stayed further south in Europe came to Finland, some as asylum seekers. Even if Finland had, and still has, relatively low numbers of asylum seekers, the increase caused debate, a debate that also targeted me as the responsible minister. I was seen as the face of immigration, which started to change the societal debate. All of a sudden I bore the brunt of an unprecedented hatred. Anonymous Internet forums, and anonymous comment sections in online publications became a virtual sewer of hatred and foul language.

In this business, a certain amount of ridiculous feedback is common, and one grows a very thick skin, as is commonplace in most political systems. For Finland, the level of hatred was not very common, and a new trend was set in motion.

At that time a political party concentrating much of its rhetoric on the 2.9% of foreigners making up the Finnish population and the roughly 5% Swedish-speaking Finns, was gaining traction as well. The (True) Finns Party is a movement, as its name suggests, which plays on nationalistic feelings. A combination of economic downturn, revelations of corruption in the political system - which created distrust in traditional parties, and the debate around immigration led to a landslide victory for the True Finns at the next parliamentary elections. Finland had got its own populist right-wing movement.

Wise men have concluded that the beginning of wisdom is to acknowledge facts. In that spirit it is important for all to do this.

### **1. The global movement of people has always taken place, and will not stop.**

We will not see a homogenous society anywhere, and the notion of monocultural societies is vastly outdated. The basic notion that right-wing populists often claim is one of utter fantasy. When you look at the part of the world that I come from, the issue of migration has been very real. Well over 200,000 Finns decided to leave Finland to emigrate to the US in the 1900s. With the population of Finland was a little over 2 million in 1900, this number is significant. In the 1960s, emigration from Finland to Sweden when well-paid jobs were available was also very significant.

### **2. One of the founding principles of the EU is the free movement of people.**

Today we are also moving, but more significant is the movement of people to us. It should not matter where you are born, what matters is that you are here. This notion of liberty, of freedom to move around as one wants to is a basic right in today's Europe. We need to make sure it stays that way.

### **3. Many EU countries are in desperate need of a healthier population profile.**

In order to maintain the welfare state we want we need to make sure there are more people working and contributing to it, and supporting the older population. In Finland this is one of the great challenges of tomorrow. We desperately need more people. The situation is similar in many other countries within the EU, and as there are not enough children being born, we need to achieve parity in other ways. Good immigration policies are crucial in addressing this problem. We need to make sure our societies work beyond the current generation.

### **4. There will be a growing number of people coming into the EU from outside the Union.**

This trend will not change anytime soon. People have the right to seek security and freedom. People have the right to work for prosperity and happiness. With the political situation being the way it is in many parts of the world, we have to realize that people will look to the stable economies of Europe for that security,



I do believe that populists are like problems generally; if you ignore them they grow bigger. To pretend they don't exist or to shut them out of the debate seldom leads to their demise, often the opposite is true. As populists are often led by a charismatic, well-spoken leader, there are obviously risks involved in confronting the solutions they provide, and even engaging them on their own terms. As often facts are not the best friends of populists, it is important to make sure we know the facts.

So often the populists set the agenda for the debate. The media, with its understandable need to sell papers, fill air-time and keep people interested, is an easy target for the twisted messages coming from the populists. As long as they set the agenda themselves, they are usually winning the news cycle. Therefore, we should not be provoked to playing the game they are trying to lure us into. We should not always accept the premise of the questions given to us; by answering certain questions, we run the risk of legitimizing their arguments. Don't be afraid to set the agenda yourself. Don't be afraid to answer the question the journalist should have asked. And don't be afraid of facts.

Our Liberal ideology should also guide us as we approach these matters. The absolute right of the individual to exist, and to pursue happiness should never be questioned. Solutions that look to the individual, and see every human being of equal worth are always better than a one-size-fits-all solution. We should never give up on our ideology. The temptation may be there as we approach elections, but we need to realize that right-wing extremists will not vote for us anyway.

The challenge of big waves of immigration is best met by stability and sustainable economic growth. This is true both in the EU, as well as in other parts of the world. We need to see the opportunity that immigrants provide, and not focus only on the challenges that immigration naturally brings with it. Most people want to contribute to the well-being and positive development of the societies they live in. This should be seen as a great possibility for engaging people in building something good.

Sometimes populists give the high-minded sounding solution that people should be helped in their native countries. This is of course an important part of good foreign policy, but very seldom do populists argue for a greater focus and more financing towards foreign aid. In fact, quite often the opposite is true. Populists tend to be more than willing to cut foreign aid in the first wave of cuts when national economies demand structural reforms. But would not the logical conclusion of populists be that foreign aid should be drastically increased if the idea is to build nations in other parts of the world so that no one wants to come here? The truth is of course that we do need to increase our focus on smart foreign aid, where resources are spent in ways that foster freedom and innovation, and not dependence. This is a Liberal principle, and one that we should champion.

We have not seen the end of right-wing populist movements in Europe. The great challenge for the Liberal movement is to make sure we stand firm in our ideals and in our ideology as these movements grow stronger. The temptation to play along may be great, especially if there seem to be great electoral success

in doing so. But we can learn from the mistakes of others. Take the socialists in Finland, The Finnish Social Democratic Party did its best to appease the rising True Finns in the 2011 parliamentary campaign in Finland. Suddenly, the otherwise sane-seeming party leader decided to proclaim the importance of everyone coming to Finland having to live by Finnish laws, as if anyone would have suggested otherwise. In the same speech the party leader of the social democrats made sure to condemn the death threats I had been receiving, but doing so by adopting the rhetoric of the forces linked to these threats did not give her any points for style.

The election results were catastrophic for the social democrats. Trying to accept the premise of the argument from the populists did not win them any votes. The election results were the worst for the Social Democrats ever recorded in Finnish history. Playing the game of the populists did not result in any electoral success. The opposite was true. Here the socialists for once can teach us Liberals something. Playing nice with the enemy does not lead to victory. It leads to defeat. Let us not forget that.



# Clear Liberal Policy is the Best Antidote to the Populists

Annika Arras, Campaign Manager, Reform Party of Estonia

Annika Arras has been Estonian Reform Party's campaign director since 2007, before that she was working as a communications manager in the party's communications department for three years. She has experience from grass roots campaigning to strategic level operations during two parliamentary elections, three local elections and two European Parliament elections, plus party organisational work in between the campaigns. Since 2011, she has also taken responsibility for running training for the party, and under her lead over 2000 people were trained for the local elections in 2013.

Populists are here? Yes.  
They are not going anywhere? No.  
You cannot ignore them? No.  
You should deal with them? Yes.

How?

By making an antidote to the populists, using your best recipe, which is:

- A healthy dose of clear Liberal policy
- Passionate people to spice it up
- Focusing on the results, not the means, gives a wonderful flavour
- Don't shake, don't stir, just stand firm to your plan

You may be perfect in marketing, political technologies and communication, but without a clear Liberal policy and passionate people believing in it, you aren't any better than the loud populists. Emotional reasoning getting ahead of practical argumentation is part of the human brain. So too is the need to live in a constant progress – wanting something more and better in everything that enhances the quality of your life.

You cannot argue with that? Who would not want to have a better life, right? So, when the populist says, "Politicians are self-interested, they don't care about the people" or "Many people have been left out from the success that is supposed to belong to all of us" you must take it as a normal human act, because even populists want and are entirely entitled to have a better life too.

Once you agree with this statement, your blood pressure might not rise the next time you face a populist and this could be a good start in creating a real antidote to the populist accusations.

## **Defining populism**

Populism, in its purest form, is taking the right to speak on behalf of the people, knowing precisely their expectations and needs; handing out irresponsible and often utopian solutions to solve their problems or to fulfil their dreams.

Although the most populist statements commonly come from the opposing political ground, they are not automatically considered as populists. Opposition is part of democracy and in high demand (my childhood memories are from the time when having a different opinion was not allowed, so I appreciate robust debate).

Populist is more of a curse word in Estonia, I don't think the majority really understands what it means. It is not so much a lack of knowledge, it is just not an issue in our country. Actually, there are not any true populist parties in Estonia. We have some populist acts or statements, true populists can perhaps be found among individuals but not among the parties. One could even say that antagonistic statements are more used here than populist ones.

My party, the Estonian Reform Party, has been governing Estonia since 1999 and is considered to be absolutely non-populist party.<sup>29</sup> Could it be that the strong basis of the Liberal policy we have planted has kept the populism away? Has the continuous work to keep our manifesto always based on Liberal values and successful economic policy, being responsible and respecting, paid off? Not just for the party but more for the whole country?

I can only tell you what we have done here to accomplish such a situation. I am not a researcher, so my hypothesis could be crushed in seconds, but as a practitioner in communicating Liberal values to people for years I tend to trust my instincts.

## **Values-based communication**

We always stress that the result of our Liberal economic policies are higher pensions, salaries and other benefits in social welfare. These outcomes are strongly tied to the Liberal economic policy – without that, no benefits. We stick to the essence of Liberal policy and communicate the universal values we want to reach using these policies. Why so?

The Reform Party campaigns on the results instead of means. People want to see the outcome, not the process itself. Imagine your stock issue populist rhetoric. It draws on the future in a few appealing sentences. What makes us different then? Our values, the tangibility of our messages and trust. To combat populists we must put our goals on the posters not the technical solutions to achieve them, and have a trust and value base to prove it.

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on the populist features in Estonia I suggest you to read a research made by Open Estonia Foundation and Tallinn University Institute of Political Science and Governance "Populism in the Baltic states"  
[http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/media/valjaanded/uuringud/Populism\\_research\\_report.pdf](http://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/media/valjaanded/uuringud/Populism_research_report.pdf)

What makes us different then? Our values, the tangibility of our messages and trust (“yes, they are capable of making it happen”). To combat populists we must put our goals on the posters not the technical solutions to achieve them, and have a trust and value base to prove it.

One example that has been communicated and carried out is the so called parents’ salary. We needed to address the problem of decreasing birth rates and found that this is heavily influenced by the highly educated and well-paid women postponing having children because of the high alternative cost of staying home with the child (loss of income, losing skills and social integration, disadvantages in returning to the labour market).

A policy measure was created - the parents salary - where the previously earned salary was paid by the state to a parent until the child was 12 months old (based on the amount of social tax paid a year before the child was born by either parent). During this first vulnerable year women with higher education and income, were paid almost as much as they earned before having a child.

We managed to create policy that worked after we were elected by communicating the result, not the policy itself. For us, the policy itself was an important thing, a Liberal one – not to punish successful women (by implementing an equal financial support policy for all the new parents, irrespective of their income) but to honour the hard work they have done in becoming good professionals even when they have to stay home with a child. Not only that, the decreasing birth-rate meant we were in desperate need for new babies.

But we didn’t say any of this while campaigning; we just put on a poster: "We will create more security for new lives. For one whole year you will get the same amount of money you were paid for working before you decided to have a child."

We didn’t stop just there. We kept on making the system even better. Today, it is extended to a maximum of 1.5 years, which does not keep parents away from the labour market for a long time, thus making them less competitive.

### **Building trust takes time**

Over ten years ago, when the Reform Party was learning how to implement value- and goal-based campaigning, our new policy creation started in earnest. It has become a common practice for us since then. As we continuously kept strong Liberal values in our campaigns it was even possible to say during the 2011 parliamentary elections, “Your life will get better once the economy is doing well. You can be sure of it.” No specific benefits were offered. We were the governing party that was cutting the budget during the recession years, so we had no political capital to make promises to any certain benefits. You have no “extra” money and you as a government cannot take up a consumer loan to finance new social benefits. Years of hard work and standing firm to our principles was enough proof to get elected again and remain in power.

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Can you implement the same to your country? I'd say you cannot because each country and nation has its own cultural background, problems and issues to be solved. It is not good idea to copy policies, but it is an extremely good idea to copy values- and goal-based campaigns way of communicating and campaigning.

### **Ideological footprint**

I believe the best antidote to populism is clear Liberal policy. So you should ask, what are our values? What is our party's ideological footprint?

The Reform Party's core values derive from classical liberal ideology, though we can probably be called national Liberals or Liberal conservatives as well. This is because the focus of our policy apart from our economic stance, is on demographic decline, the protection of Estonian language and promoting conservative attitudes concerning citizenship policy.

We could even say that we are quite conservative also in a sense that we are protecting what we have already achieved in tax and economic policy etc. As a result of our campaigning style and communicating values and benefits, our opponents or outsiders, are criticizing us for being "too social". For us it is just a way of communicating, our Liberal values are unshakeable and the basis of all we do.

### **Flash parties**

It is essential for all Liberal newcomers to tap into liberal ideology and not just the message of change that has turned into a popular way of starting a party and winning elections with the help of professional marketing.

I believe both criteria have to be important as well, but without the ideological basis you will become so called flash party. In Estonia, Res Publica, started in 2001, but by 2006 it was already finished. Its reasons for failing tend to be the well-documented ones. New Liberal parties have been created during recent years in Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia etc. But, have they defined their ideological footprint?

Recently there have been quite a number of success stories of starting from scratch and on the one hand, it is a pleasure to have new energetic people, new ideas and a strong wish to do this better. It is actually a relief to know that people care enough to take action, to be responsible for the future of coming generations. On the other hand, it raises a question – are they here to stay or will they just be ephemeral? I'm most certain they came to stay, but once the political reality hits, it might not be possible to if they haven't created a strong values-based ideological foundation for their party.

Energy runs out, values prevail. Once people are worn out, will they stick together, will they keep on going? Voters may be emotional but they are not stupid and in the longer run they will punish any party who betrayed their trust.

It is a thin line to cross to become a populist party, especially in these turbulent European times. Economic recession and the high employment rate is a hotbed for populism. The populist reaction to the recent financial crisis was that governments have to do something, whatever it takes.

It is an alarm bell to all of us and can be transferred easily to building a party and winning elections. To do something, to do whatever it takes to get the voters' attention! Do not cross that border. That way you will not become a populist yourself and your party is here to stay to combat populism.

One thing is clear - there is no election success without a clear policy. No political technology will help if there are no passionate people with a deep understanding of the problems and their real background in their country and without strong Liberal beliefs. Believe in that and act based on that belief.





# Conclusions

Peter Schröder, Political Consultant, (ed.)

Peter Schröder is an independent political consultant and strategy planner for political parties, governments and NGOs. He began as Secretary General of the federal state organisation of the Liberal Free Democratic Party (F.D.P.) in Schleswig Holstein. Subsequently, he headed the Department for Communications and Elections at the party headquarters in Bonn. After a time as a director of the advertising agency for social marketing (BOSS) he started his career as a freelance consultant, and is active in more than 80 countries in all parts of the world.

Before outlining this study's conclusions, I want to make some general strategic remarks for success in the European elections of 2014.

1. The elections will be won or lost in the member states of the EU, not at the European level. The election laws and the needs of the people are different and therefore it is necessary to adjust strategies to national legislation and political conditions.
2. To ensure the success of ALDE member parties in these elections, we have to campaign for more votes for the ALDE member parties, and not for fewer votes for the nationalists and populists.
3. The task of stemming the proliferation of nationalist and populist parties lies not only with the ALDE parties, but with all parties which have an interest in building and developing Europe. The other parties organized in groups in the European Parliament, such as the European People's Party, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, the Greens/European Free Alliance and the European Conservatives and Reformists Group are very often much bigger than the Liberal parties in their respective countries. They could be much more successful in reducing the influence of the extremist parties.
4. The attempt of ALDE member parties to stop the nationalists and populists seems to be driven by the idea that we could lose our position as the third-largest group in the European parliament and therefore our position as 'kingmaker'. If this is the real reason for the ALDE campaign it is a very dangerous path because the voters in the member countries are not linked to this thinking. If the attempt to stop nationalists and populist is to rescue political culture in Europe, then the task is given to all democratic parties and not only to the ALDE parties.
5. If ALDE member parties want to achieve a strong election result they should concentrate their efforts on competing with all parties, especially with those which have similar political positions as ALDE parties.

It is necessary to demonstrate that there are real differences between the ALDE parties and the other competing parties. This is the basis for all offensive strategies. The contributions by the authors of this publication clearly highlight that, at the end of the day, the Liberal position must be presented to the voters.

6. But, in contrast to my points 3 and 4, ALDE member parties cannot lean back and leave it to other parties to fight against the nationalist and populist parties. ALDE as a pro-Europe party is obliged with all other democratic parties to fight the extremists. Advice and ideas on how to do this successfully permeate this publication.

### **Field of action: Knowledge of the voters**

The competition between nationalist and populist parties on the one side and Liberal parties on the other is difficult to manage. The vast majority of voters – if not all – allow themselves to be influenced emotionally. They are not well informed and have little interest in dealing with complex problems. Parties such as the Liberals, which try to attract voters with rational arguments and technical solutions, are, under these circumstances, in a difficult position. They try to win votes with objective evidence and rational arguments without appealing to voters' emotions and are then astonished that they do not reach the hearts and the feelings of the people. The most important advantage of nationalist and populist parties is that they offer oversimplified solutions which appeal to the emotions of the reluctant radical voter. The emotions of these people are based on uncertainty and fear. The task of the Liberal parties is not to lose our nerve and to avoid mistakes.

### **Field of action: Parliament**

There is one field of action in the competition among the parties in the European and national parliaments. Politicians overestimate the effect of their appearance in parliamentary debates on topics which are of great public concern. Debate in parliament is like a theatre performance. The audience is sitting in the hall and we know they ultimately decide the results of the election. But, in reality, there is a thick curtain between the actors on the stage and the audience in the hall. What do the people really know about the activities in parliament? How much information about debates in the European Parliament reaches the popular press or the general public?

How much coverage is there of the debates in the European Parliament in the national media? And how small is the number of people who set information from the European Parliament in contrast to the simple emotional messages of the nationalists and populists? A rhetorical success in debate with extremists in parliament has no measurable effect. It is still important and right to manage the debates in parliament successfully, as Elisabeth Drury and Marley Morris propose in their contributions. But the location of the appearance has to leave the parliament and has to go public, into the media, the talk shows and much more importantly, must involve talking directly to ordinary people.

**Field of action: Media**

For the media the positions of the nationalists and populists are attractive, because they promise controversy and sensation. That is the reason that people buy a newspaper or listen to the radio or watch television. The media and the naïve anti-populists popularise the extreme nationalists and populists. They confront them with allegations and protest publicly against those positions. Sometimes parties are also part of this campaign. But with these activities they help the extremists, because they push them into a corner from where voters, mostly reluctant radicals, follow the political debate. These voters are very often in opposition to the ruling mainstream parties and sometimes in opposition to the whole political system. They have lost confidence in the parties and the system. And these parties, the mainstream media and naïve anti-populists show them that there are other parties which are also in opposition to the system. No doubt that is the appeal of these parties. They get the feeling that these parties understand them and they are prepared to vote for them. But their voting decision does not express the acceptance of populist and nationalist issues, but rather the discomfort with the system.

It is important not to ignore the existence of the nationalist and populist parties as Astrid Thors writes in her contribution: "Populists are like other problems – if you ignore them they grow bigger." But it is also important to take action and not to sit immobile like a rabbit in headlights. The worst mistake is to give them popularity and the chance to address those voters who are alienated from the political system.

**Field of action: National campaign**

We know that the situation within each of the member states of the EU is different. The status of populist and nationalist parties is very often not related to special problems in the country. There are countries with a long tradition of nationalist and populist parties. In some countries these parties are new and growing. In other countries there is a decline of such parties. Because of this development it is clear that there is no general strategy at the European level against the extremists. The Liberal parties have to fight their campaigns under the particular conditions prevailing in their own countries. Valuable techniques for the verbal presentation of rhetoric and framing are evident in the contributions of the authors in this publication.

But it has to be clear that one should not use only so called push-factors. That means that one cannot decide the fight by putting negative connotations on the populist and nationalist parties, because this will support them and guide the reluctant radicals or floating voters directly into the arms of the extremist parties. It is necessary to attract the voters with so called pull-factors. These are clear Liberal positions. However, they must be presented in the style of populist parties. That means a simple message with the description of the outcome for the people, not rational, but emotional, in order to reach the hearts of the voters.

The Liberal parties should not defend their position against the position of the nationalists and populists. It is necessary to use the Liberal position for attack and for building hope for the future. It is true that hope is emotionally weaker than fear. Therefore, the hope of Liberal solutions has to be accompanied by an image of fear creating disaster as the outcome of nationalist or populist solutions.

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**Field of action: Confidence building**

One of the reasons that nationalist and populist parties are able to grow is that the mainstream parties have lost confidence. The people no longer trust in their ability to solve problems and in the honesty and fair-mindedness of political parties. It is worthless to try to rebuild or establish trust into the political party system or into a single party in a short time. The brands of the parties are very often irrevocably damaged. The attempt to rebuild confidence has to start with the presentation of trustworthy candidates. People do not trust any longer in institutions but in people. Therefore, it is important to concentrate on committed people, dedicated to Liberal values and attitudes and to let them communicate the message.

Trust is the basis for all communication. If people have the feeling that they cannot trust in the words of a speaker then he or she can say all they want and the audience will still not believe them. Annika Arras made special emphasis of this subject in her contribution.

**Field of action: Communication**

The contributions of most of the authors in this publication focus on communication. They provide important advice and examples on how to conduct a direct dialogue with voters, for debates in parliaments and talk-shows etc. For campaign communication, it should be clear that Europe is not the product to sell and also “explaining how Europe works” does not fit with any of the layers of persuasive communication, as Andor Admiraal from Audience Oriented Messaging writes.

Unity is important for communication by Liberal parties in their national setting. In many parties, we have wings which sometimes hold populist or nationalist views. In all likelihood, all individual members of ALDE Parties are Europe-minded. In such cases the leadership of the parties has to evaluate what position can be adopted in public debates and what cannot. The old Chinese general, Sun Tzu, said that “if your army is not united, you should not enter the battlefield”. This is also true for political campaigning in elections. If the party is divided on crucial political issues it cannot use those issues in its main message.

All the contributors to this publication highlight that the Liberal values and Liberal issues have to be the most important messages for the voters. A clear Liberal position is the best way to reduce the influence of nationalists and populists and ensures electoral success.



### **European Liberal Forum (ELF)**

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the foundation of the European Liberal Democrats, the ALDE Party. A core aspect of our work consists in issuing publications on Liberalism and European public policy issues. We also provide a space for the discussion of European politics, and offer training for liberal-minded citizens. Our aim is to promote active citizenship in all of this.

Our foundation is made up of a number of European think tanks, political foundations and institutes. The diversity of our membership provides us with a wealth of knowledge and is a constant source of innovation. In turn, we provide our members with the opportunity to cooperate on European projects under the ELF umbrella.

We work throughout Europe as well as in the EU Neighbourhood countries. The youthful and dynamic nature of ELF allows us to be at the forefront in promoting active citizenship, getting the citizen involved with European issues and building an open, Liberal Europe.

[www.liberalforum.eu](http://www.liberalforum.eu)

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Friedrich Naumann  
STIFTUNG **FÜR DIE FREIHEIT**

### **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) Regional Office for Central, East and Southeast Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia (CESE)**

The major tasks of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (FNF) are the promotion of democracy, human and civil rights, pluralism and market economy. To achieve our goals, we use the classic instruments of political education, political consultancy and political dialogue, such as conferences, workshops, publications and exchange programs. In our projects we cooperate with liberal-minded networks of political parties, citizens' initiatives, human rights organizations, think tanks and scientific institutions. In the vast region of CESE, the Foundation maintains offices and projects in six sub-regions: Central Europe and the Baltic states; Southeast Europe; West Balkans; Ukraine and Belarus; Russia and Central Asia; and South Caucasus. Currently, the CESE Regional Office in Sofia coordinates activities in 27 project countries. The Foundation has some 40 staff members in the region's ten representative offices. Our activities in the entire region amount to roughly 500 events per year with several thousand participants.

[www.msos.fnst.org](http://www.msos.fnst.org)



### **Stichting Internationaal Democratisch Initiatief (Stichting IDI)/ International Democratic Initiative Foundation (IDI)**

Stichting IDI is an important pillar in D66's international work. In 1989, IVSOM, the Central and Eastern Europe Foundation of the D66 party, was founded to support democratisation and economic transition in central and eastern Europe. In October 1997, IVSOM was renamed the Stichting Internationaal Democratisch Initiatief (Stichting IDI). The foundation is independent but also forms an integral part of political party D66. Over the years Stichting IDI's field of operation was expanded to include countries outside central and eastern Europe. Nowadays, the IDI foundation is mainly active in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, Turkey and the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. Furthermore, the IDI foundation maintains and develops relationships with likeminded political organisations in many countries around the world.

[http://site.d66.nl/d66nl/item/idi\\_internationaal\\_democratisch](http://site.d66.nl/d66nl/item/idi_internationaal_democratisch)



### **Centre for Liberal Studies**

Centre for Liberal Studies (CLS) was established in 1994 as foundation and then re-established in 1999 as civic society organisation. It is a non-governmental, non-partisan, non-profit think tank. The main objective is to develop contacts between exponents of liberal thoughts, to contribute to clarifying the definition of liberalism, to define its place in contemporary society, and to apply liberal approach in political, economic, social transition of the Czech Republic towards a full-fledged liberal democracy.

Due to a long-term absence of any stable liberal political party in the Czech political landscape, CLS is along with Liberal Institute the only promoter of liberal ideas in this country. Activities of CLS focus on panel discussions, round tables, conferences and expert publications in various fields.



### **Svenska bildningsförbundet (SBF)**

Svenska bildningsförbundet was formed in 1973 by the Swedish People's Party together with its women's and youth league. The initial goal of SBF was to organize local workshops and provide training for candidates and campaign staff in fields relating to the mission of the party. Today the role of Svenska bildningsförbundet has grown and matured to an organization that provides political support in a wider sense. SBF wants to drive the conversation in society by creating spaces where political and societal matters are being discussed from a liberal point of view.

As a strong advocate of liberal solutions to today's societal challenges Svenska bildningsförbundet hosts seminars, both short weekday-evening-seminars and full day more comprehensive seminars on a wide range of topics. SBF also commissions opinion polls and surveys to gain a better understanding of how society views different topics.

<http://www.bildningsforbundet.fi/start/>





Populism thrives on easy, repetitive and emotive messages. Far too often, mainstream political messages are drowned out by the foul cry of populist rhetoric. The far right and far left are offering simplistic solutions which threaten the future of the European Union. To help combat such sentiments ELF has brought together key speakers from its 2013 series of workshops and seminars dedicated to developing communication strategies to target populist rhetoric. The leitmotiv of this publication is to encourage Liberal-minded Europeans to voice their views with confidence and clarity.



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