

Question Time on Race Equality

On the evening of Friday 21 March 2014, the UK Race and Europe Network (UKREN) hosted a debate at the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in London. The aim of the event was to share the views of four major UK political parties on race equality and immigration issues in advance of the European Elections. [Annesley Abercorn](#) (Conservative Party candidate), [Anuja Prashar](#) (Liberal Democrats candidate), [Kamaljeet Jandu](#) (Labour Party candidate) and [Jean Lambert MEP](#) (Green Party) agreed to take part in the event. UKIP were invited, but declined to join the debate. The discussion was moderated by [Kurt Barling](#), the tough but fair BBC special correspondent and professor of journalism.

The debate started with an interesting discussion on **whether EU institutions are able to deal with racism**. As the [latest report](#) of the [European Network Against Racism](#) (ENAR) proves, racism is still very alive in Europe, and European Institutions should take every possible step to eradicate it. The candidates had evidently different views.

There was an interesting clash between the Conservative and Liberal Democrats speakers **on the role of Europe or the 'Nation State' in tackling racism**. Annesley Abercorn (Conservative Party) stated that *“racism is very low in the UK and it is different in every European country”* and believed that it should therefore be dealt with at a domestic level, while Anuja Prashar (Liberal Democrats) stated that *“there are no different forms of racism in the same way as there aren't different forms of capitalism”* and was of the opinion that racism should be tackled at a European level.



Kurt Barling and Anuja Prashar

Kamaljeet Jandu (Labour Party) reminded the audience of the importance of migrants in the UK economy and said that *“people of colour are too often seen as people of cheap labour”*. He also stated that *“there is a culture of institutional racism in UK, in rest of EU racial discrimination is direct on colour of skin”*.



Kamaljeet Jandu

On the issue of immigration, Annesley Abercorn (Conservative Party) called for more assimilation and more control at the UK borders: *“We need to control free movement. The UK is saturated and communities can't be assimilated”*. Anuja Prashar (Liberal Democrats) replied that the Conservatives should stop using the word *“assimilation”* and use the word *“integration”* instead, as it is a far more friendly word: Integration is a two-way process, meaning that the efforts have to come from both ways.

On the issue of data collection in European countries, Kurt Barling mentioned that the UK was making progress but that data collection wasn't a common practice across Europe. For example, equality and diversity monitoring forms are not used in French job applications. Kamajeet Jandu (Labour Party) mentioned the issue of discrimination in the job market and the importance of data collection as a proof of this discrimination. Jean Lambert (Green Party) agreed with him, stating that *“We need to make the case from UK experience on why it is important that EU collects equality data: How can we use this data? We need arguments to prove that the data matters.”*

Annesley Abercorn (Conservative party) stated that it was very difficult to collect this kind of data. He mentioned that *“It is clear that there is a problem with certain communities resorting to crime and we need to address this. For example in some areas of the UK, there is a disproportionately high number of crimes committed by Black individuals”*.

Jean Lambert (Green Party) reaffirmed the need to promote the value of diversity: *"the EU should do more to promote diversity, and tackle inequalities"*. She denounced *"the awful discrimination and the attack of citizenship"* that the Roma people endure despite having lived in Europe for centuries.



Jean Lambert MEP

On the issue of promoting diversity in the workplace, Kamaljeet Jandu (Labour Party) recalled the existence of a surplus in the budget and suggested the use of this money to challenge discrimination and racism in the workplace as a long term investment. Anuja Prashar (Liberal Democrats) stated that despite the fact that the Race Equality Directive was applicable within countries like Britain, the mentality of the population was what needed to be changed in order for the law to really be effective.

Annesley Abercorn (Conservative Party) said that he was in favour of level playing field in employment and banishing all forms of discrimination, but at a domestic level. He stated that some communities were not integrated enough and that was the reason why they were not applying for certain jobs, a statement that Anuja Prashar (Liberal Democrats) strongly disapproved, arguing that migrants were forced into certain kind of jobs.



Annesley Abercorn

Ella Vine, from the organisation [EU Citizens Vote](#) asked the candidates their views on the Government's **discriminatory policy against EU citizens**, particularly the Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian communities. She used the term "segregation", in contrast of the terms previously used: "assimilation" and "integration".



Ella Vine

Mr. Abercorn (Conservative Party) accused the Labour Party of having failed with its migration policy and stated that the best way to restore credibility would be to stop the "overflow" of migrants and give those here a better chance to assimilate, and to impose some limits i.e. to "reduce the freedom of movement". Mr. Abercorn mentioned the "peaceful" assimilation of the Indian and Caribbean communities during the 60s-70s, a statement that irritated a number of people in the audience.

Anuja Prashar (Liberal Democrats) replied that stopping people from entering the UK but letting money come in was hypocritical and far from an integrated vision: *"It is illegal to try to keep people out of the country"*. Jean Lambert (Green Party) accused the current government of trying to solve problems that did not exist. She stated that people were not always aware of their rights and obligations when they arrive in a new country and that instead of reducing the availability of foreign language documents on the UK with a view to "coerce" migrants into learning English, the Government should offer support to these individuals in ways that they can fully understand.

Human rights issues: should European institutions have more power? Annesley Abercorn adhered to the Conservative Party's position when he stated that *"Human Rights should be dealt with at a domestic level"* and the European Court of Human Rights was *"a silly instance"*, to which Anuja Prashar responded that *"you can't domesticate the way you handle human rights. Human rights are the same everywhere"* and Jean Lambert added what was probably the most interesting quote of the evening: *"We've got to stop using the Daily Mail as our legal adviser on the role of the European Court of Human Rights"*.

Conclusion

Clearly there was a strong divide between the panellists on even the levels of racism in the UK, let alone whether it was best dealt with at the national or EU level. Strong immigration controls, limiting the EU freedom of movement and assimilation of migrants was the language of one candidate MEP; integration and a rights and obligations-based policy the language of others.

Immigration, freedom of movement and the role of European institutions will be major issues of debate in the lead up to the European Parliament elections. The UKREN organised event was but a taste of things to come.