



**arteveldehogeschool**

LID VAN DE ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT GENT

# POLITIZATION OF THE REFUGEE ISSUE

**Hanne Verstraete, Karen Moonen, Simon Van Meervenne & Stan Driesens (students)**

**Bart Van Bouchaute & Tim Vanhove (lecturers)**

*Bachelor Social Work – specialisation social policy*

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# Research project

*with students 3th year social work-  
specialisation social policy*

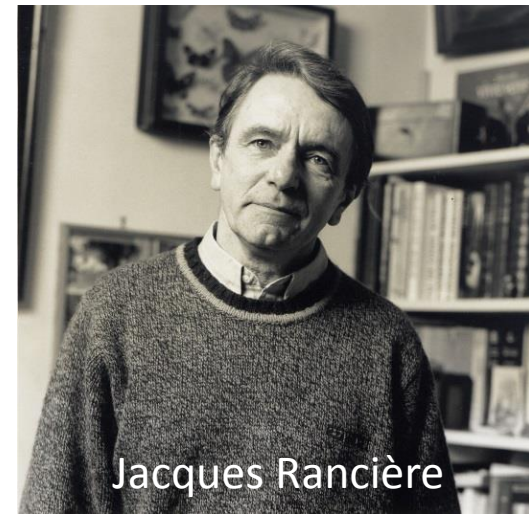
- Three research projects based on specific questions of organizations in our working field
- One central focus

*“What is the role of civil society organizations in the politization of the refugee issue?”*

# Politization?

## *Challenging the existing order*

- ***The existing social order***
  - Everyone and everything has his right place
  - This order is considered as normal, as common sense
- ***Every existing order creates its own inequalities***
  - Modern democratic societies claim that all members are equal
  - But in reality this equality never exists
- ***Politization***
  - is the process of questioning and challenging the existing order
  - based on the assumption that we are all equal
- ***In this process everyone can act political***
  - all kinds of methods and actions can be used,
  - the key point is that people start to think and act 'political'



Jacques Rancière

# Politization *challenging the existing order around refugees*

- ***The existing social order***
  - is considered as normal
  - creates its own inequalities
- ***Politization***
  - questioning and challenging the existing order
  - based on the assumption that we are all equal

## 'REFUGEES'

have very specific places  
in the existing order:

- "the asylum seeker"
- "the recognized refugee"
- "... not recognized..."
- "undocumented immigrants" ...

with proper procedures, (no) rights,  
position in society, (no) voice...

and this existing order is considered  
"normal"

***(How) can people question and  
challenge this existing order?***

# Politization of the refugee issue?

## *Three research projects*

ORGANISATION	ACTOR	ISSUE
NGO 'Refugee Flanders'	ADVOCACY ORGANISATION	<i>How can an NGO influence the creation of safe and legal access to Belgium/EU?</i>
Municipal social welfare	WELFARE WORKERS	<i>How can public welfare workers realise human rights for refugees?</i>
Voluntary organisations in Gent	VOLUNTEERS	<i>How can volunteers become politicised?</i>

# HOW CAN VOLUNTEERS BECOME POLITICIZED?



# Volunteer initiatives



Collecting for Calais



Lesbos refugees aid



Solidarity chain Ghent

Cirkel van Stilte Gent  
woensdag 27-02-2008

# Volunteer organisations are ...

## depoliticising

- Replace the failing support of the responsible authorities
- Limit solidarity with refugees to first aid support
- Volunteer initiatives obstruct a more structural approach to maximise human rights

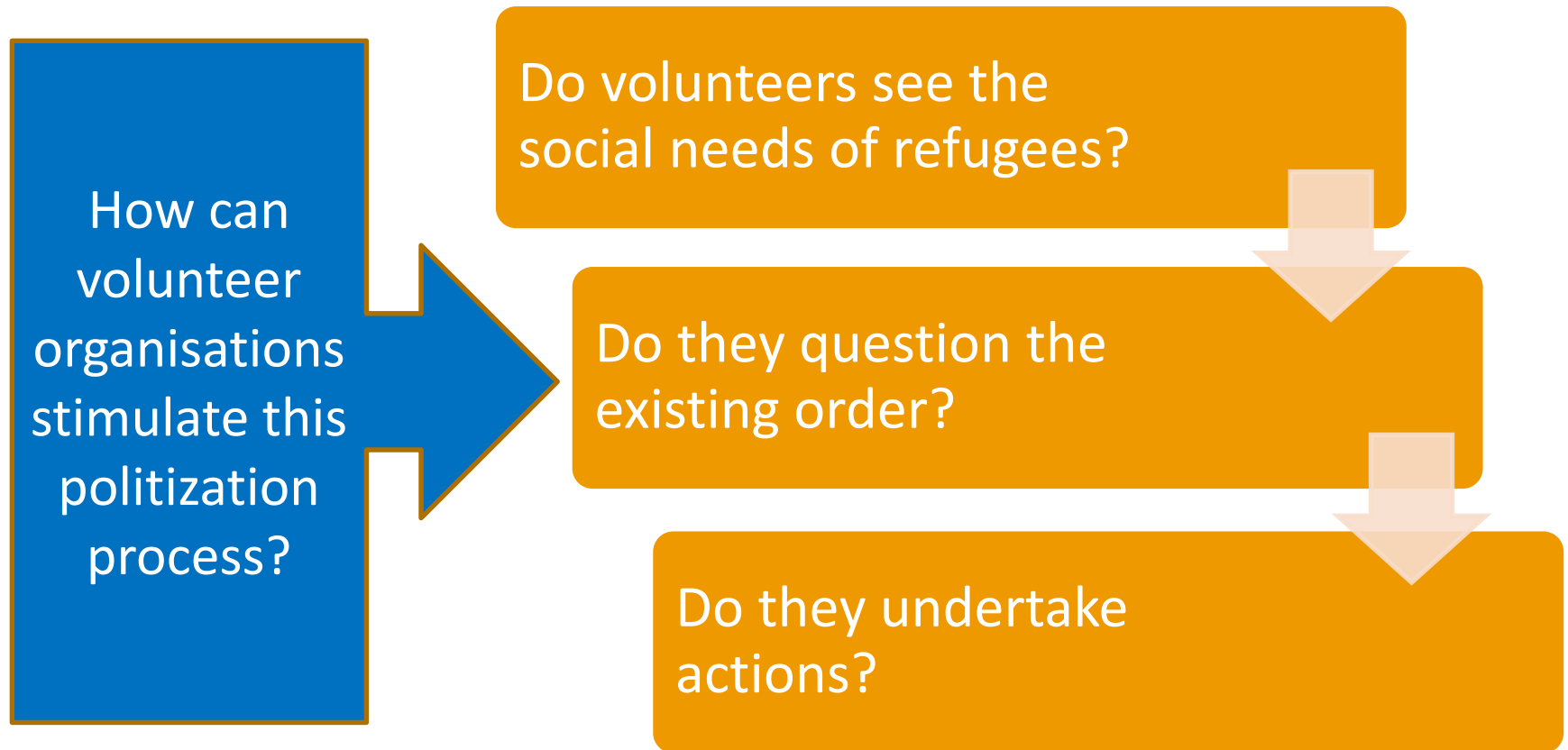
## politicising

- Citizens take action where governments fail
- They draw attention to the responsibilities of services and authorities
- They stimulate awareness of the involved volunteers



# Research Questions

## *How can volunteers become politicised?*



# Research method

- Focus on voluntary work for/with undocumented immigrants (“paperless”)
- Exploratory interviews with key persons
- Participatory observations in volunteer organisations
- Analysis & conclusions

We present one case

# Hand in Hand

- Started as antiracist campaign
- Focused on support for the “paperless”
- Actions
  - Support the complete integration process
    - Practical, juridical, ...
    - Claiming papers (regularisation)
    - Language, schools, work,...
  - Public campaigns

Mission statement:  
undocumented immigrants are seen as equal  
notions of ‘human rights’ & ‘human dignity’

# Politization of volunteers in 'Hand in Hand'(1)

- Assumption: volunteers & refugees are **equal**
  - Former “paperless” involved in all actions
  - Brunch where everything is discussed
- Broad & accurate view on **social needs**:
  - Material needs, education, social contacts, language, parenting support, legal aid....
  - Based on continuous dialogue with refugees



**Brunch with volunteers**

# Politization of volunteers in 'Hand in Hand' (2)

- **Out**

*[racist posters that black refugees spread illnesses]*

“Do I look sick to you? These people I work with are humans. The only one that is sick is you. Sick in your mind.”

- ...

- Undertaking **actions** targeted on:

- **Individuals:** Ghanees volunteer confronts neighbours
- **Services:** challenging professionals to deliver services according to the real actual needs
- **Society:** remembrance wake for the fallen during the dangerous trip to safety



# Remembrance wake Nov 2th 2015













# How is politicization of the volunteers stimulated in Hand-in-hand?

- **Equality in a horizontal organization**
  - Experienced volunteers, ex-paperless, students... = all equal
  - Refugees are not passive receivers of help
- **Mission > politicized practices – volunteers can participate**
  - Support for and with the “paperless”
  - Sensibilisation with volunteers in school, associations, clubs, ...
  - Public actions and statements
- **Sharing relevant information**
  - Informal during all activities, brunch...
  - Formal: thematic infosessions, magazine...
- **Position in the work field**
  - Constructive & critical in a network with other organizations
  - Total independent from the government



# HOW CAN PUBLIC WELFARE WORKERS REALISE HUMAN RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES\*

\* How can we activate them towards that goal



# The question :

- Complaints of refugee organisations
  - Incorrect or incomplete aid by welfare workers
  - Refusal of aid
- Problems with specific procedures [depending on legal status of refugees]
  - Danger for stigmatisation
  - Contradiction with equality-principle
  - Different treatment in a positive and negative way

# Research methodology

- Exploratory interviews with experts
  - Human right researchers – field workers – scholars - ...
- Depth interviews with municipal public welfare institutions
  - Bottom-up (case workers)
  - Top-down (political board)
- Diversity of political background and demographic situation



# Profile public welfare worker

(Boeie)(Bovens & Zouridis)

- Strong aim and incentive towards procedures and technical correctness
  - Implementing and controlling function
    - You get something – for something policy
- ⇒ Pressure on the role and autonomy of the welfare worker

## Municipal Welfare center

First line service led by political board

Finnish 'Kela' & Dutch 'Gemeentelijke sociale dienst'

# Problems within public welfare for refugees

- Different municipality – different treatment
  - “not in my backyard syndrome”
- Problems with access of public welfare
  - Out of fear
  - Out of disinformation
  - Because of specialization within social work

# Reasons?

## Internal constraints

- Public Welfare workers see themselves as facilitators
- Trapped position between client and boss
- Accept that their actions will not lead to results
- Too weak to voice their concerns or opinions
- Lacking knowledge of influencing politics and public opinion
- Administrative pressure

# Reasons ?

## External constraints

- Strong influence on decision-making by the Council
- Depending on regional and national funding
- Influence by national policy making
- Trends in society

# Solutions on the level of the public welfare worker

- Welfare workers should take **discretionary space**
  - Every rule needs his interpretation (De Haene, 2015)
  - Discretionary space >>  
space for promoting human rights for 'refugees' (asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented immigrants...)
- Knowledge, skills and ethics of the welfare worker

# Solutions in the environment of public welfare worker

- Social education (training the minds)
- Uniting individual social workers
- Influencing policy-makers
- Installing pride of social work (winning the minds)
- Fight to get municipal social work less influenced by policy makers but based on universal human rights and solidarity



***HOW CAN AN NGO INFLUENCE THE  
CREATION OF SAFE AND LEGAL ACCESS  
TO BELGIUM/EU?***



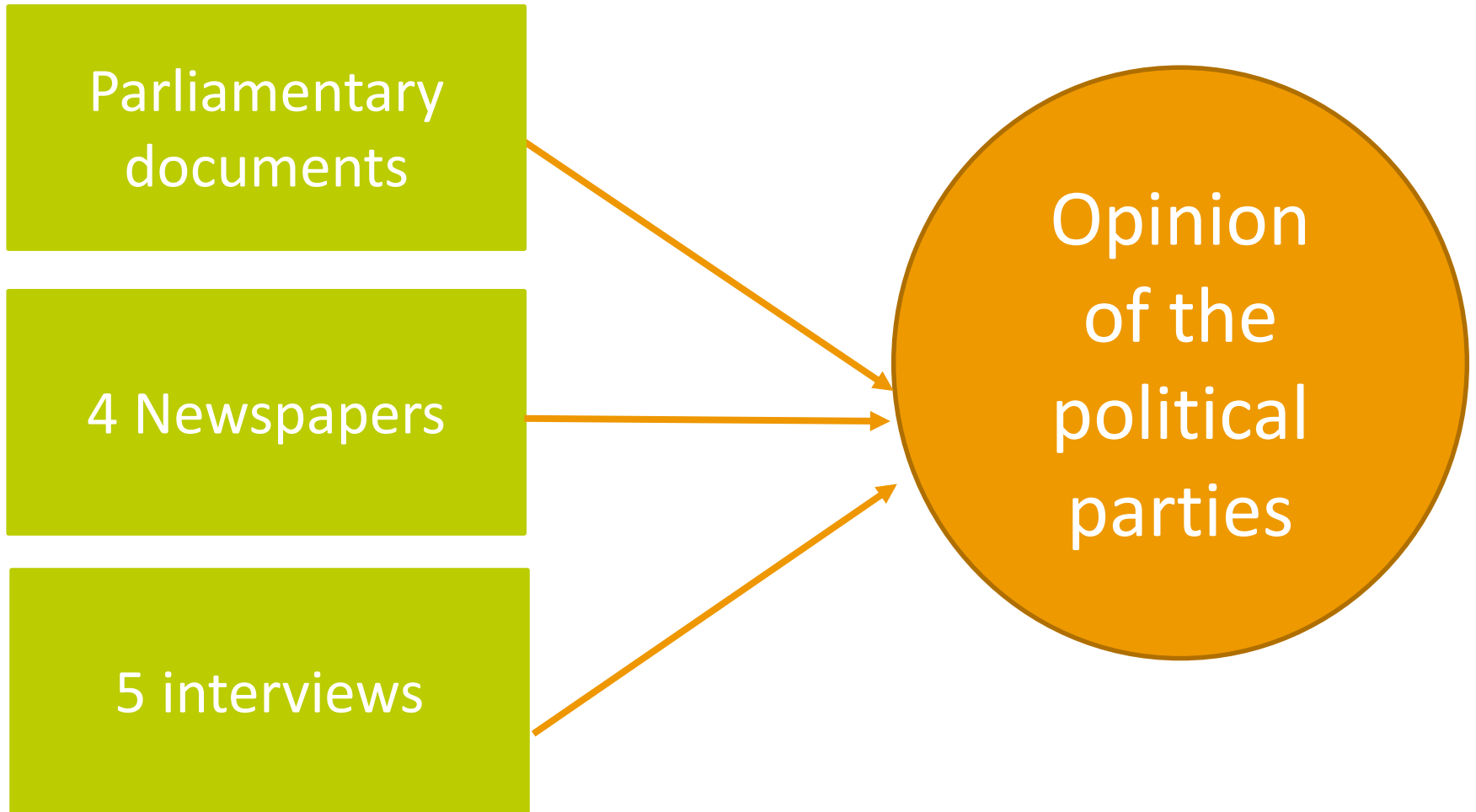
# Context

- Refugee Work Flanders in a dual position
  - Service > works as a partner with the government
  - Advocacy > is critical for the government policy
- Aim:
  - Convince political parties to create safe and legal ways to enter Belgium and the European Union.
- Method
  - Lobbying
  - Problem: negative change in public perception



politization

# Research Methodology





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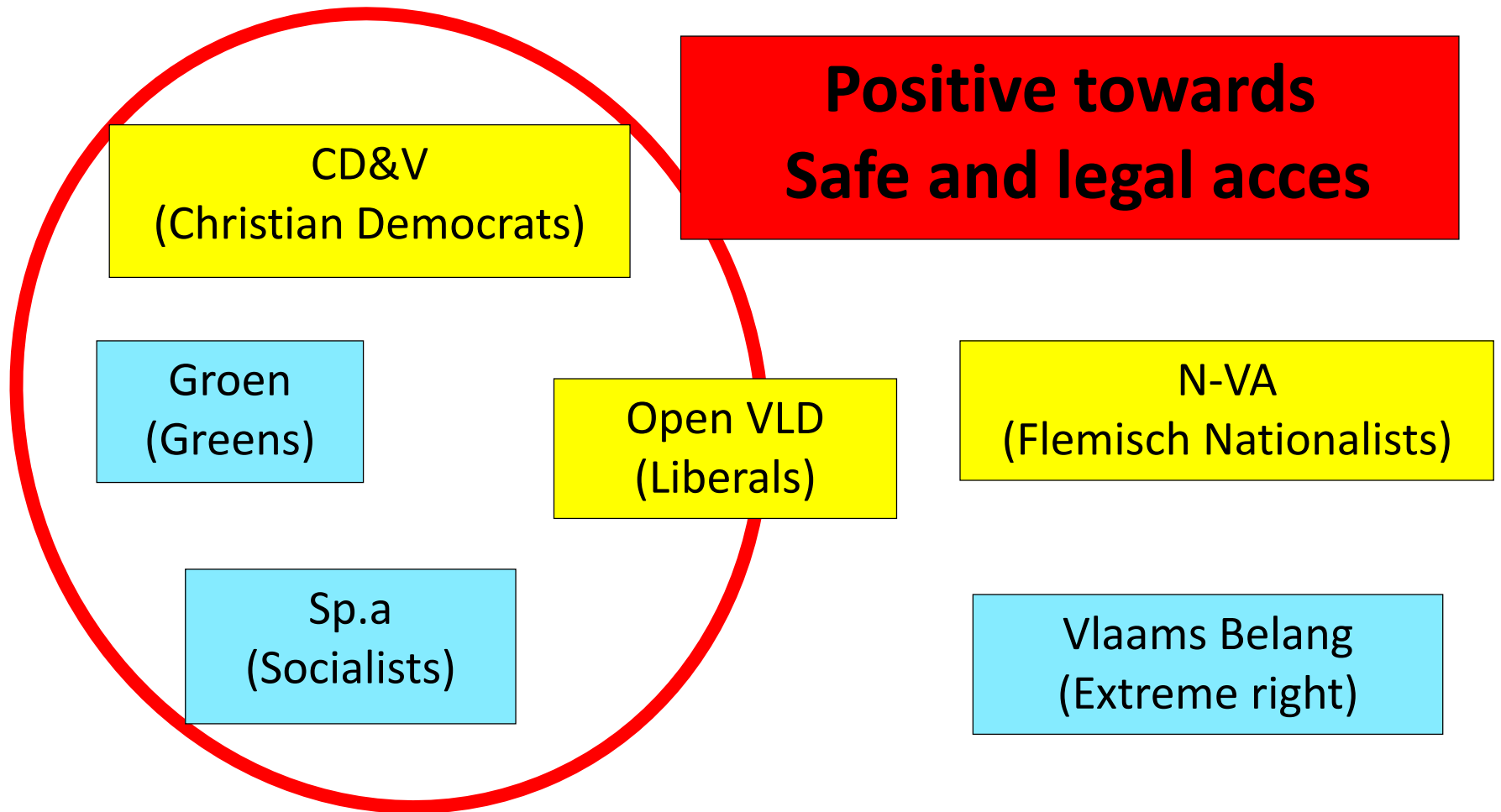
fx

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	nr.	argument	gevonden in	omschrijving	code	
2	1	Katja Gabriëls: Daarnaast, en het werd hier al gezegd, heeft Europa net als België dringend nood aan een coherent beleid, waarbij asiel en migratie hand in hand gaan. We maken er best ook een positief verhaal van. Migratie kan, mits goed aangepakt, veel mogelijkheden bieden. Wij pleiten er al langer voor om meer economische migratie toe te staan. Mevrouw Lanjri, inzake asiel pleiten wij ook voor humanitaire visa en voor de toepassing ervan.	<a href="http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/pdf/54/ip042.pdf">http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/pdf/54/ip042.pdf</a>	Coherent beleid van Europa nodig. Voorstander van humanitair visa.	1.1.1	
3	2	Gabriëls: Wij zijn verplicht om ervoor te zorgen dat mensen in nood op een legale manier naar veiliger plaatsen kunnen gaan en de noodzakelijke opvang kunnen krijgen. Wij zijn dan ook tevreden dat er extra inspanningen worden geleverd in het kader van resettlement. We hebben begrepen dat België zelfs meer plaatsen voorstelt dan wat de Europese Unie op dit ogenblik voorstelt.	<a href="http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/pdf/54/ip042.pdf">http://www.dekamer.be/doc/PCRI/pdf/54/ip042.pdf</a>	Voorstander resettlement.	1.1.3	
4	3	Het gaat niet om een beleid van open grenzen, maar om te aanvaarden dat dit mensen zijn met talenten, met mogelijkheden en met capaciteiten, die uiteindelijk in ons land en de hele Europese Unie ertoe kunnen bijdragen dat ons economisch draagvlak wordt versterkt. Zij vormen geen bedreiging van onze welvaart; zij zijn mensen die kunnen meebouwen aan de versterking van ons sociaal model. Wanneer gaan wij zo praten over deze factor, in plaats van in termen van angst?			1.3	
5		Iedereen is hier inderdaad welkom, op voorwaarde, zo zei collega Verherstraeten, dat men niet alleen rechten, maar ook plichten heeft en de				

+ Vlaams Belang PvdA CD&V OPEN VLD spa GROEN N-VA



# Analysis

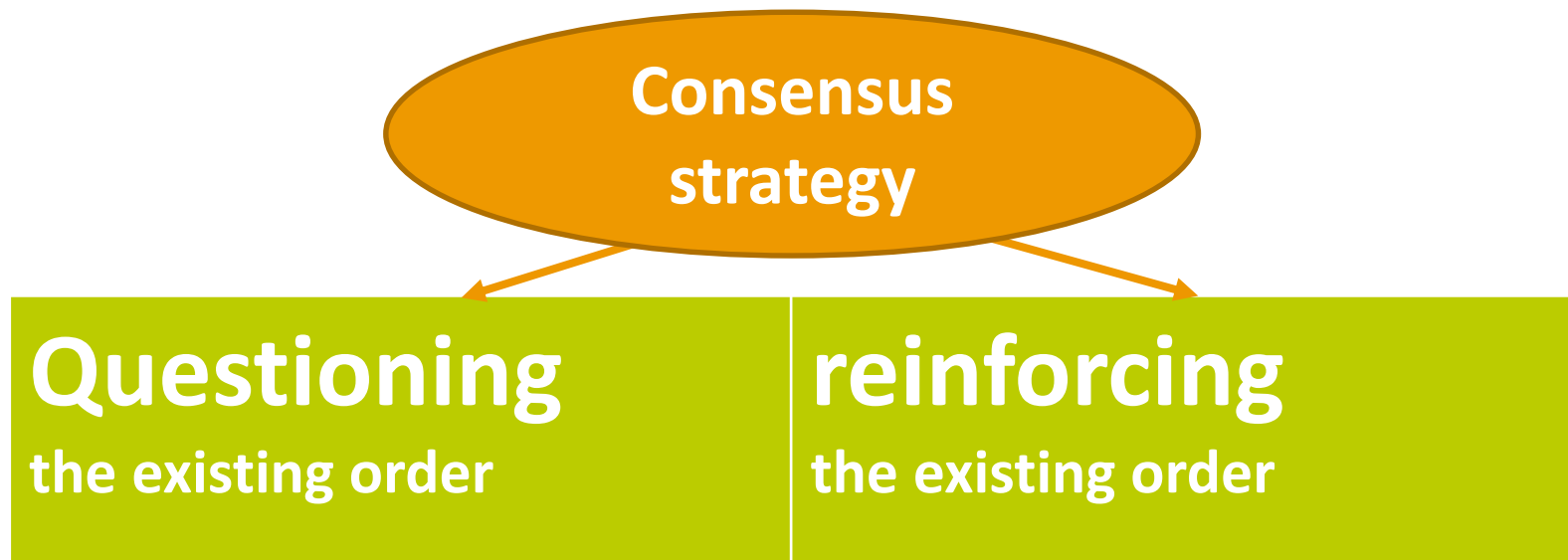


# Recommendations

- Bringing key figures together -> pressure on right wing nationalists (N-VA)
- Reference to past initiatives
  - Belgium: Kosovo (1999)
- Use of examples of other countries
  - Germany
  - Switzerland

# Strategic dilemma?

- Aim: safe & legal access
- Problem: negative climate for progression
- Strategy: search for common ground with political parties in the Belgian government



# Our approach ...

## Politization

is not in the first place

a specific method or action,

it is a process:

**everyone** can think and act ‘political’

starting from the idea

of a **more equal society**

and that is what really matters.