
Germany's Integration Challenge

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“Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland.” (“Germany is not a country of immigrants”). This sentence was repeated like a mantra by several German governments until the late 1990s. Since then, even the conservative Christian Democrats have acknowledged a very different reality, although they do not miss an opportunity to emphasize that Germany is nevertheless neither a “multicultural society” nor, as declared in a May 2001 position paper, a “classical” immigration country.

However, the official statistics speak for themselves. The demographics of a city such as Stuttgart are typical: with 600,000 inhabitants, every third person is a first- or second-generation immigrant. Though nobody can deny the numerical reality of immigration, the emphasis on Germany not being a “classical” immigrant country does accurately reflect a reluctance to invite immigrants to settle down permanently. It remains to be seen whether the grand coalition of Christian and Social Democrats under Chancellor Angela Merkel’s leadership will meet the integration challenges that arise from the fact that Germany most definitely *is* an immigration country, whether “classical” or not. The integration of immigrants and their offspring is an important challenge for Europe, as reflected in the European Commission’s Common Agenda for Integration¹—and Germany should set a good example as a “motor of integration.”

As the October-November 2005 riots in France made clear, having a conversation about integration is now more urgent than ever, not only in Germany but also in other European countries. Germany’s coalition government of Social Democrats and Greens, in power from 1998 to 2005,

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turned immigration and integration into important and controversial topics of discussion. Several events since then have influenced and provided a backdrop for public debate, underscoring the problems at the heart of the integration discussion in Germany:

- Germany's first-ever immigration law
- The reform of the citizenship law
- The aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001
- The alarming results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) carried out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).²

THE IMMIGRATION LAW: AN IMPORTANT FIRST STEP

Germany's new Immigration Act came into effect on January 1, 2005, having received important support from most relevant social organizations, from churches to labor unions.³

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However, an innovative "points" system had fallen victim to negotiations between the red-green government and the oppositional Christian Democrats, who held the majority in the upper chamber. The points system had been designed to privilege newcomers who met certain "integration-relevant criteria"

in categories like age, education, work experience, family status, and language ability and to offer them an initially unlimited settlement permit. The Christian Democrats had opposed the law from the beginning, saying it would encourage immigration at a time when inflows of foreigners should be restricted because of unemployment. However, experts have repeatedly argued that Germany will face a near-term shortage of qualified labor, and that the country must prepare itself to recruit highly qualified immigrants, even if this means starting out gradually.

The legislation undeniably lost substance in the course of these negotiations, but it still introduced obligatory integration and language courses for newcomers. The measure rightly acknowledged that knowledge of the German language is an unconditional prerequisite for successful integration, both in terms of the labor market and for the sake of migrant children, whose educational opportunities increase when their parents are proficient in German.

However, the Immigration Act also clearly demonstrates how diffi-

cult it is for Germany to embrace the advantages of welcoming motivated and highly qualified immigrants. Researchers never tire of discussing the ongoing demographic change—Germany's total fertility rate of 1.4 children per woman is among the lowest among Western countries—and the foreseeable need to apply an active immigration policy to attract labor. The points system would have been a good opportunity not only to send a signal, but also to gain initial experience in the recruitment of highly qualified migrants. Immigrants under the points system would have entered the country as potential new German citizens rather than as temporary, less qualified labor—like those migrants in the 1960s and 1970s who were supposed to leave after a short while, but became permanent immigrants. The points system also could have helped to change the image of migrants in Germany. If highly qualified Turkish immigrants had come to Germany, this probably would have dispelled several common stereotypes about Turks or Muslim immigrants. The importance of this symbolism cannot be overstated, considering the strikingly pessimistic tone of integration discourse in Germany. This attitude is a reflection of the fact that Germany, contrary to “countries of immigrants” like Canada, the United States, or Australia, has never dealt with “highly-skilled immigrants” as a defined category of immigration.

NATIONALITY LAW: RIGHT OF THE SOIL

The Nationality Act of 2000 was another very important step toward greater integration.⁴ For the first time, it introduced a *jus soli* (“right of the soil”) component, under which citizenship results from being born in a particular country. Given Germany's archaic citizenship tradition—with its emphasis on descent—this was a milestone. Since January 1, 2000, the native-born children of foreigners can, under certain conditions, become German citizens by birth. This law adds up to 40,000 citizens annually—from 2000 to 2005, almost 250,000 children of non-German parents were born into German citizenship.

Although this reform was clearly an important step, the initial proposal went much further by including the possibility of dual citizenship. However, under pressure from the Christian Democrats, this provision was dropped. This has prevented many migrants from applying for naturalization. It is true that in 2000, the total number of naturalizations reached a record high at 186,000, but since then the figure has been declining, to 128,000 in 2004. There are still 4.5 million out of 6.7 million foreigners who fulfill the requirement of a minimum of eight years' permanent resi-

dence in Germany that would entitle them to apply for naturalization if they were prepared to give up their original citizenship.⁵

The ban on dual citizenship is absurd, not least because about 40 percent of all immigrants who have been naturalized since 2000 have been allowed to keep their former citizenship for certain reasons. For example, sometimes the cost of denouncing citizenship is unreasonable. Some countries, like Iran, do not release people from citizenship; citizens of other EU states can maintain their citizenship as long as these EU member states reciprocate for German candidates. The argument that one can only be loyal to one state, therefore, seems to be groundless. It should also be

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noted that dual citizenship was tolerated before 2000. A more flexible attitude toward dual citizenship not only would help to increase the number of naturalized migrants, but it would also thereby encourage their political participation.

As potential voters, these immigrants could articulate their interests more effectively. It is thus not surprising that approximately 600,000 voters of Turkish origin are not seen as a group with common interests. They are more

or less ignored by the two main parties, the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, and they have failed to organize themselves to speak with one voice.

Despite political, ethnic, and religious differences among Turkish migrants, they definitely have at least one common interest—better educational opportunities for their children. They are, however, far from the American situation, where candidates explicitly and publicly fight for the votes of immigrants, and where their descendants are seen as full U.S. citizens. This republican tradition is not yet fully developed in Germany. Could anybody imagine a German chancellor giving a weekly radio address in the language of the country's largest immigrant community, as has happened in the United States?

MUSLIMS IN GERMANY: CONFRONTING SUSPICION

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 brought the integration of Muslim migrants and their organizations to the forefront. If Muslims spoke with one voice, they could more easily confront the general suspicion they

occasionally face. However, they have not yet succeeded in establishing one or two representative and integrative umbrella associations (without self-denying ethnic and religious plurality within the Muslim community). The German authorities need an acknowledged and accepted representative body of Muslims as a prerequisite for introducing Islamic religious education in schools—taught in the German language and under the supervision of the state—and for the education of imams at German universities.

These measures are a necessary step to “naturalize” Islam in Germany. Under no circumstances should the majority fall into the trap of building up an artificial polarity between being German and being Muslim. One can, of course, be German and Muslim at the same time, even though some have difficulties with this idea. Germany, as well as other European states, would be well advised to build a more relaxed relationship with moderate Muslims and their organizations and to help them find their place in main-

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stream society. And Muslims should do everything possible to identify and dissociate themselves from the black sheep within their communities. To reach out to all migrants, the new government should encourage and strengthen the moderate, secular, and progressive parts of the Muslim community.

The publication of cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* and the ensuing violent protests in the Middle East are proof to many German politicians that Islam and democracy are incompatible and that the integration of Muslims into Europe is therefore doomed to failure. However, those who focus on violent overreactions abroad should note the peaceful reactions of the estimated 15 million Muslims in Europe. After all, embassies were being attacked in Damascus, not Berlin. In fact, we underestimate the effect a successful integration of Muslims into Western societies would have for people in the Middle East. It would be a sign for them that democracy and Islam are not irreconcilable and that their union could be realized under the roof of a constitution with universal human rights—and there is nothing that Islamic extremists fear more.

CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

The results of the OECD'S PISA study underline that the educational situation of migrants is one of the most urgent problems for many

European countries, and in particular for Germany. The study found that in no other country was the correlation between the socio-economic status of parents and the educational attainment of their children as strong as in Germany. This applies to all children from a blue-collar background, but especially to those of migrant families with a low educational background, as they lack the necessary resources to advance their children educationally. PISA found that the chance of a child from a white-collar background being referred to a high school after his or her first four years at primary school is four times higher than the chance of a child from a blue-collar background—even if they demonstrate exactly the same abilities in mathematics and reading comprehension.⁶

There is no question that the integration of migrants will succeed only when we offer opportunities and make demands at the same time. But for far too long we have ignored the fact that the first generation of guest workers who came from Turkey, Italy, and other southern European countries, simply could not provide the educational support needed to

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help their children move up the social ladder. The result is too many second-generation migrant children leaving school without a degree and too few migrants in top positions who could serve as positive role models. If there is one main conclusion to draw from the German experience, it is that education is the most important driver toward successful economic, social, and political integration of migrants.

Because education is an area where politics definitely counts—whether in relation to the organization of pre-school care, the school system, the qualification of teachers, or the acquisition of languages—Germany and other EU member states would be well-advised to realize the potential benefits of migration and integration and therefore to do everything possible to foster more equality of opportunity and intergenerational mobility. The current federal and state governments' success or failure will be assessed through its efforts to improve the educational opportunities of children with immigrant and blue-collar backgrounds.

GERMAN LEITKULTUR

Ongoing debate on the issues of immigration and nationality law and on educational opportunities for children shows us that policy still matters. These issues are not simply the economic concomitants of globalization—their effects on the labor market and the welfare-state crisis confound not only Germany, but also the growing cultural heterogeneity for which Islam stands. It is unclear whether all these issues will be addressed in a public debate about the need for a German *Leitkultur*—a leading, or hegemonic, culture of Germany—to which immigrants must assimilate. And it is no coincidence that the advocates of German *Leitkultur* are the same who buried the idea of a multicultural society a decade ago. However, the basis for cohesion need not be a diffuse or hegemonic culture. Rather, the ideal would be republicanism in a multicultural society, where immigrants are respected as potential citizens with rights and duties, and not simply defined by their ethnic origin, religion, or skin color. In the United States or Canada, a naturalized immigrant would never be seen as a “Turk with an American passport.” Instead, he or she would be called an “American of Turkish origin” or even “Turkish-American”—a meaningful distinction that too many have not yet understood in Germany. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 Commission of the European Communities, “Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Common Agenda for Integration—Framework for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals in the European Union,” September 1, 2005, <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0389en01.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2006).
- 2 Information about the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment is available at <www.pisa.oecd.org> (accessed April 10, 2006).
- 3 The so-called Immigration Act entered into force on January 1, 2005. Information in English about the Act is provided by the German Ministry of Interior at <www.zuwanderung.de/english/2_zuwanderungsgesetz.html> (accessed April 10, 2006).
- 4 The so-called Nationality Act entered into force on January 1, 2000. Information in English about the Act is provided by the German Ministry of Interior at <www.zuwanderung.de/english/2_Staatsangehoerigkeit.html> (accessed April 10, 2006).
- 5 Other prerequisites are proof of adequate fluency in German, no criminal record, allegiance to the constitution, and an independent source of livelihood.
- 6 For information on the educational situation of Turkish migrants in Germany see Janina Söhn and VeySEL Özcan, “The Educational Attainment of Turkish migrants in Germany,” *Turkish Studies* 7(1) (2006): 101–124.

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