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# Radical Consequences of Benign Neglect: The Rise of the PKK in Germany

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## INTRODUCTION

For decades, German political leaders have avoided developing effective initiatives geared toward long-term social integration of Turkish and Kurdish immigrants. This lack of official recognition has prompted descendants of Kurdish and Turkish immigrants to organize politically in order to increase their domestic influence. Driven by continued social alienation and economic marginalization, this process has encouraged radical elements to amass control within long-term immigrant communities.

The politically disenfranchised and socially segregated German-Turks and Kurds have founded hierarchically structured and competing communities. Tightly-knit organizations within neighborhood cultural clubs and public information offices are now frequently controlled by members of marginal and militant sub-groups, including the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Kurdistan Popular Liberation Front (ERNK), originally the PKK's civilian network and intelligence system in Turkey that evolved into the organization's political organ, and the Turkish radical fundamentalist "Kaplancis."<sup>1</sup>

The author investigates the factors contributing to an increase in political mobilization among radical Kurdish activists in Germany. It is argued that the country's new citizenship laws effective January 2000 will not prevent further

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inter-ethnic clashes between German-Kurds and German-Turks. In fact, one of the unanticipated outcomes of the citizenship changes will be an increased sense of economic and socio-political rivalry among a range of social groups. In particular, Germany's newly created minority groups such as the Kurds and the Turks will be negatively affected by the larger public's view of their perceived inability to assimilate to majority norms. It is also argued that the German government will not be able to undermine and reduce the political and social influence of the PKK through the citizenship reform alone. The PKK continues to attract young German-born Kurds into its cadres through effective marketing campaigns based on an idealized myth of the homeland.

### **CITIZENSHIP REFORM**

The German coalition government's citizenship reform will have little effect on the strategies employed by organizations such as the PKK. It will be extremely difficult for the government to prevent the continuous recruitment cycle of young members into these organizations. As a consequence of decades of political and social neglect of second- and third-generation immigrants by German institutions, several organizations, including the PKK, have filled a void for social and religious services, offered cultural support structures, and provided neighborhoods with a sense of community. The radical groups tend to be as unsympathetic to the German liberal democratic society as German integration policies have been to Turkish and Kurdish immigrants.

Granting political rights to Turkish and Kurdish immigrants is a long overdue reform, yet it is not the panacea that will lead to social harmony in Germany. The Social Democrat/Green Party coalition government intended to reach out to a large group of politically disenfranchised residents by offering them equality in legal status. Unfortunately, the citizenship changes were superimposed by parliament without the support of public education campaigns or social cohesion efforts to prevent discriminatory treatment of the foreigners who will soon become German minorities. The German public will most likely continue to be prejudiced toward persons of Turkish or Kurdish ethnicity despite the fact that many of them will hold German passports. At the same time, entrenched militant organizations such as the Kurdish Workers Party have no intention to fade from specific neighborhoods just because of these cosmetic reforms.

In 1994, the Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Essen carried out a number of surveys suggesting that every third Turkish and Kurdish resident in Germany intended to apply for German citizenship.<sup>2</sup> More recent opinion polls seem to indicate that a vast majority of long-term immigrants will apply for German citizenship status as soon as it becomes a realistic option.<sup>3</sup> This shows that immigrant Kurds and Turks recognize German citizenship as an opportunity

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to advance and achieve status in German society, not necessarily at the expense of their culture, but because many see benefits to citizenship. A growing number of German-Kurds and Turks are interested in influencing neighborhood policies by actively participating in communal electoral boards that allow foreign residents to have consultative non-voting membership (*Ausländerbeiräte*).<sup>4</sup>

Official recognition of Germans with Turkish and Kurdish ancestry may gently nudge society towards the acceptance of a less ethnocentric self-image. It may also discourage numerically strong immigrant groups like the Turks from political mobilization along religious lines and ethnic demands. However, it would be naïve to assume that militant organizations such as the PKK can be assuaged by changes in citizenship laws alone. The PKK is well-established in Kurdish communities and its leadership aims to become the representative voice for all Kurds in Germany. The organization's main goal is to manage and control the information about Turkish-Kurdistan that is disseminated in Germany. By doing so, the PKK hopes to gain stronger political support for the creation of an independent Kurdistan.

On a domestic level, the projection that the Social Democrats will gain increasing numbers of voters is significant to Turks and Kurds hoping for German citizenship. An opinion poll published in January 1999 indicated that approximately 68 percent of all Turks and Kurds intend to apply for German citizenship. To the chagrin of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), 48 percent will vote for the SPD, an astonishing 6 percent will vote for the Green Party, and a mere 4 percent will vote for the CDU.<sup>5</sup> One reason for this result is that disproportionately large numbers of Kurds and Turks in Germany are employed in the manufacturing, construction and distributive services sectors. These sectors are more unionized and are therefore linked with the Social Democrats. In 1995, 50 percent of all first-generation immigrants made their living in either blue-collar or manufacturing jobs. Statistics for second generation immigrants in the same year indicate that 45 percent were employed in manufacturing, whereas only 31 percent of the German labor force was involved in blue-collar work and manufacturing.<sup>6</sup>

#### **SOCIAL STRATIFICATION CONTRIBUTES TO PKK SUCCESS**

The term *Ausländer* or foreigner traditionally expresses a rather territorial concept separating outsiders from *Inländer*, or persons residing within the borders of Germany. This basic territorial notion barely hints at the complexity of the questions of legal membership and cultural acceptance in the country. The German term *Ausländer* incorporates a sense of cultural, behavioral and social distinctiveness, which separates those who participate in the larger German society (in the sense of native or homebred) and others who are semi-excluded because of

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their ethnic origin. This societal self-understanding should not be confused with fanatic ideas of Germanic superiority based on the purity of the bloodline. Instead, this separation between insiders and outsiders is linked to a group-based self-understanding instead of the outdated *völkisch* or extreme nationalist perception.

Germans see themselves at the center of their own society today. They are fully aware of their high status, and believe it is based on a variety of factors such as educational levels, degree of prosperity and future expectations. Germans also benefit from belonging to a clearly identifiable majority group, even though many eastern Germans consider themselves somewhat marginalized by western Germans. At times, this sentiment encourages a need for empowerment in relation to other groups in the country. Turks and Kurds are particularly vulnerable to eastern German resentment and rejection because the two groups compete directly for jobs and social welfare benefits.

For immigrants who do not belong to the officially protected categories of minorities it is extremely difficult to break into the circle of insiders. Simple indicators such as language use (one's degree of German fluency can reveal a person's ethnic and socio-economic background, educational level and class), codes of behavior, employment history, appearance and even a neighborhood address can give away a person's peripheral status in society.

Second- and particularly third-generation immigrants of Turkish and Kurdish ethnic origin tend to become obviously German in their mannerisms, tastes, social attitudes and expectations in life. At a minimum, they are less familiar with Turkish and Kurdish traditions and lifestyles and have experienced Turkey during summer vacations only. Ironically, modern Turkish society does not consider German-born Turks "real" Turks. Often, German-Turks (and Kurds) are labeled "*almançılar*" by Turkish society. The term means "those from Germany," and is intended to disparage semi-Turks or foreign Turks.<sup>7</sup> In Turkey, the public believes German-Turks are people who have been affected to such an extent by their country of residence that they no longer culturally fit into modern Turkish society. In a similar way, many Germans believe that foreigners have difficulties achieving a complete "cultural transfer" because they allegedly maintain social, cultural and religious links to their homelands. This is particularly the case with Turks and Kurds in Germany who are popularly categorized as unwilling to assimilate. Germans frequently interpret their Islamic faith as an impediment to becoming a true German. In general, immigrants are expected to undergo all the adjustments whereas the host society assumes little responsibility for adaptation. The majority population in Germany sees no benefit in encouraging cultural pluralism. In fact, they oppose it for fear of worsening competition and unemployment, particularly in the East.

Internal hierarchies are also visible within the long-term Turkish and Kurdish populations. Secular Turks look down on religious Turks, and both consider Kurds

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to have even lower educational, cultural and social status. Turkish and Kurdish school children who ride the streetcars in Germany on their way home from public school often demonstrate these social hostilities in their own forms. Secular German-Turkish girls are often seen pulling scarves off the heads of religious German-Turkish girls, while German-Kurdish and German-Turkish boys hurl insults at each other. Interestingly, the insults are heard more often in German than in Turkish. Sadly enough, some of the more common insults are terribly discriminatory and demeaning such as "*Ausgeburt*" (a creature with gross physical deformities) or "*Auswuchs*" (tumor or growth).<sup>8</sup>

### INTER-ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

Kurdish immigrants are exposed to myriad economic, cultural, political and social pressures in their immediate environments. Ethnic tensions seriously affect the immigrants' lifestyle choices and employment opportunities. Moreover, it is widely known that restrictions imposed by German society deny and limit choices for Kurds. Additional barriers are created by racism and discriminatory practices, external and internal obstacles to social mobility, levels of education, exposure to technical training and the continuing emphasis on de-industrialization in Germany. It is less well known that Kurds have also experienced prejudicial contempt from members of the German Turkish community. At times, the victimization of Kurds has been a direct consequence of the PKK's political activities against members of both Turkish and German society.

Varying levels of discrimination against Kurds in Germany intensify feelings of acute marginalization in the host country. At times, German editions of Turkish newspapers such as *Hürriyet*, *Milliyet*, *Yeni Günaydin* and *Türkiye* disperse the Turkish government's hostile rhetoric against Kurds among Germany's Turkish immigrants. According to Claus Leggewie, "a certain percentage of German Turks have adopted the anti-Kurdish stance of the Turkish-language media in Germany."<sup>9</sup>

Turkish stereotyping of Kurds by Turkish-language media is not a new phenomenon to German Turkish communities. Migrant workers brought stereotypes with them from Turkey to Germany. David McDowall has argued that Turks see the Kurdish minority as a "profound menace" to Turkish territorial integrity, suspecting Kurds of having secessionist political aspirations.<sup>10</sup> He mentions Turks who "began to use the term 'Dersim solution,' redolent of the genocidal tactics used in the 1930s, as shorthand for the method necessary to teach the Kurds a good lesson."<sup>11</sup> Some Turkish immigrants in Germany openly state their anti-Kurdish tendencies, and at times the widely available Turkish-language media exacerbates these attitudes. Hostilities between the communities are on the rise, especially during periods of highly aggressive activism by the PKK.

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The politics of the home region deeply affect interactions among ethnically diverse immigrant groups in host countries. Because Turks represent a much larger ethnic group in Germany than the Kurds do, Turks have succeeded in establishing more influential and tightly knit networks. Without a doubt, these networks also function as informal labor organizations. Moderate Kurds, on the other hand, often are careful not to appear too cliquish, for fear that Turks and German security forces will associate them with the PKK or ERNK. Moderate Kurdish neighborhood organizations have remained fairly weak as a consequence of the PKK's presence in Germany.

Turks benefit from a variety of circumstantial advantages in Germany in comparison to the Kurdish immigrants. The Turkish presence is officially recognized in the Federal Republic, whereas Kurds are counted statistically as Turks in Germany (only unofficial figures are kept, for "public security" purposes). Furthermore, Turkish immigrants receive more favorable news coverage in Germany's mainstream press while Kurds do not fare as well because of their reputation for political fanaticism. Kurds are often labeled PKK terrorists, criminals or violent thugs.

Most reports about the ethnic group, however, are related to criminal activities such as extortion, blackmail, stabbings and self-immolations performed by fervent Islamists and radical Kurdish nationalists. Moderate Kurdish voices are often drowned out by the more aggressive tone of the revolutionary cadres. The German and German-Turkish press has focused on the sensational aspects of the struggle for a Kurdish state. For example, they have reported on terrorist threats against public officials in Germany without offering any additional comments on the persecution of the Kurdish people. Meanwhile, public opinion in Germany is increasingly turning against the Kurds as an entire community. In general, the Kurds are now associated with radical nationalism, the PKK and other terrorist groups that continue to shock German society by committing brutal acts of torture and murder. Public discussion regarding the "Kurdish problem" mainly focuses on ways to extradite radical Kurds to Turkey.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that the PKK has strategically orchestrated events to create the perception that Kurds can be a threat to the German public. Negative media attention serves to build the PKK's image as a rapidly growing and highly effective radical organization for Kurdish interests. The PKK wants to be seen as potentially dangerous, generating public concern and fear is an effective way to get serious attention.

A typical example is the festivities surrounding *Nawruz*, the Persian New Year celebration. *Nawruz* is observed in Anatolia, Afghanistan, parts of India and Pakistan, Iraq, Iran and Egypt. However, since the PKK has called for mass-scale public protests, temporary occupations of public buildings, street battles with police, demonstrations and anti-Turkish activities during *Nawruz*, the festivities

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have been re-labeled the "Kurdish New Year" by the German press. This has created the impression that *Nawruz* has a brutal and bloody origin. The German public now associates the word *Nawruz* or "Kurdish New Year" with violent Kurdish protest marches through cities with large Muslim immigrant populations.

The German public, the mass media and especially the *Länder* governments have to take responsibility for allowing the PKK to control media images. Kurdish radicals are permitted to manipulate an entire ethnic group into being ostracized for its own political purposes. Moderate Kurds are not in the position to counteract the PKK's manipulation without strong support from the German government for a democratic approach to Kurdish representation. Unfortunately, public officials seem to care little about such "minor ethnic troubles."

Kurds experience discriminatory patterns of abuse at the hands of Turks on a daily basis. Turkish foremen or supervisors in German companies assign Kurds the least desirable duties or so-called 3-D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult). Turkish supervisors can influence who is hired or laid off, who deserves to be promoted and who will remain in a dead-end job. German supervisors are often oblivious to the political dimensions in the decision-making processes affecting Kurds, assuming that the immigrants will "work things out amongst themselves," or that it is best "not to get involved."<sup>13</sup> German businesses and semi-skilled employees benefit from the lack of solidarity among immigrant communities. The discord among lower level workers keeps them in inferior positions.

The fact that the PKK has a clear interest in intensifying such grievances between Turks and Kurds in Germany is neglected in this type of rationale. The less German Turks and German Kurds cooperate, the easier it will be for the PKK to encourage disillusioned and angry young Kurds to join its radical ranks. A sharpened sense of relative deprivation and group mobilization within the immigrant communities, as theorized by Ted Robert Gurr, only assists the PKK's ideological focus on ethnic and class dimensions to the struggle for an independent Kurdistan.<sup>14</sup>

#### PKK RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

The creation of continued layers of conflict among second- and third-generation Kurdish and Turkish immigrant groups is essential to the PKK's long-term goal of representing the Kurdish voice in Europe. The PKK's feeder system and support structures depend on vigorous hostilities between German-born Turks and younger generations of German-born Kurds who lack the personal experience with the Turkish state as the "oppressor enemy." The PKK's cadre leadership targets German-born Kurds to encourage "awareness for the Kurdish struggle," effectively utilizes MED-TV to spread nationalist and political propaganda and incites violence in specific neighborhoods in order to stimulate and sustain ethnic tensions.

PKK recruiters can find it difficult to make emotional appeals to second- and third-generation Kurdish immigrants when German Kurds begin to envision themselves as culturally mixed—part German, part Kurdish. It is preferable for the PKK leadership that German Kurds create their own subculture based on an eclectic assemblage of Kurdish origin myths to distinguish themselves from Turks. Once the PKK succeeds in establishing an emotional link with such a subculture group, it is easier to mold members into the PKK structures. Young German Kurds recognize that they are not fully accepted by German society. This clearly helps trained PKK recruiters reach out to insecure sub-units of Kurdish adolescents and young adults. In exchange for membership and activism within the PKK structures, young Kurds are offered a Kurdish dream world complete with a myth of origin, sense of ethnic harmony, social status and respect.

For the Kurds, it is a rather painful process to claim nationhood without a state. As a consequence, Kurds generally attempt to focus on cultural, linguistic and religious identifiers to distinguish themselves from the Turks in Germany. This approach to communal unity has failed, however, since the German majority population cannot tell Turks and Kurds apart. The lack of clear identification has opened up opportunities for the PKK to offer its own version of identity creation. German Kurds are far from representing a homogenous community. Language patterns differ by region of origin and many German Kurds do not speak Zaza or Kurmançi [Kurdish] very well. Kurds run the gamut from roots in traditional rural peasantry to elite urbanites, and belong to different Islamic sects. The majority of Kurds are Sunni, but German Kurds offer strong Shiite, Alevite and Yazidi representations as well.<sup>15</sup> Fairly recent estimates (1994) indicate that at least 300,000 Alevites live in Germany.<sup>16</sup> Realizing its moment of opportunity, the PKK leadership in Germany acquired almost complete control over interpretations of Kurdish identity.

It is only logical that the PKK is taking advantage of this weakness in Kurdish identity. The creation of a common enemy serves to unify those who feel marginalized. The Turkish state, and by extension every Turk in Germany, is the enemy. In some PKK circles the German state is seen as supporting status quo policies within the Turkish state. In other words, the PKK sees Germany as a supporter of Kurdish repression, and therefore the German state represents a second tier enemy. What makes a Kurd a Kurd in Germany is a deeply internalized sense of dual persecution. This becomes clear when Kurds complain about being treated as lesser human beings by both Germans and Turkish immigrants.

Many Germans find this Kurdish identity-creation puzzling and, as a consequence of a lack of understanding, dismiss or simply ignore it. Germans identify Turks by their religious practices and phenotypical markers. In the past, identification was even simpler as it focused on specific clothing patterns or sections of neighborhoods. Clearly, Germans mistake Bosnian Muslims, ethnic Albanians and

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even Muslim North Africans for Turks on a regular basis. Obviously, this is extremely frustrating to all immigrants, but even more so for the Kurds who have difficulty explaining that they come from the region of Kurdistan. In general, Germans are not really sure about what the distinctions are and how they matter.

In a conversation with a German university student, the quandary over how to clearly distinguish Kurds from Turks became quite obvious. I inquired about Kurdish restaurants in the area and was surprised to hear that "we don't really have Kurdish restaurants here because of all the violence linked with Kurds. You know the PKK problem. I don't think that Germans would eat at Kurdish restaurants. How do you distinguish between Kurdish and Turkish people anyway? I imagine the Kurds to look darker, more Anatolian, perhaps?"<sup>17</sup>

### RELATIVE DEPRIVATION IN COMPARISON TO TURKS

Long-term immigrant communities in Germany such as the Turks and the Kurds are experiencing high levels of social frustration due to the continued obstacles to reaching higher levels of economic success. An inability to attain economic and political goals often leads to explosive responses through processes of group mobilization. In Germany, two points are frequently confused when discussing the origins and long-term effects of relative deprivation among immigrants. Habitually, Germans assume that Turks and Kurds are frustrated by their social position in comparison with the economic wealth of the larger German society. The acute sense of relative deprivation within the immigrant communities rather than between the dominant German society and the minority communities is neglected.

Ingrained Kurdish-Turkish hostilities in Germany are multi-layered, and Germany's continuing unification process adds to the dilemma. The proverbial *Mauer in den Köpfen* or "Wall in the Minds" of eastern and western Germans has not been deconstructed, and may be on the rise again. The *Ossie-Wessie* discourse, with the disparaging terms used by eastern and western Germans to label each other, profoundly impacts Turkish-Kurdish relations in the country. Germans, in the old as well as the new *Länder*, perceive inter-ethnic political conflicts among immigrant communities as an irritant, if not a threat. Technological modernization and increasing unemployment are the themes dominating the German consciousness, not inter-ethnic relations between Turkish and Kurdish immigrants. Moreover, many eastern Germans believe that their situation in regard to reunification should be the focus of united Germany's reform efforts. A perception exists among eastern Germans that they must compete with foreigners for resources.

In the eastern regions, there is a strong feeling of past abuse by the communist regime and that this suffering has not been properly acknowledged.

Mixed into this feeling of a western lack of understanding and empathy for the east is a real fear that “culturally foreign people” such as the Turks and Kurds will benefit from western public sympathy in the long run. Eastern Germans believe that they should be the primary recipients of such sentiments.

### **PKK VIOLENCE AND MEDIA IMAGES**

It is not surprising that myriad facets to the “Kurdish question” are ignored in Germany. There may be an element of sympathy among members of the German public for the suffering endured by impoverished Kurdish families in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey. But this is only the case as long as Kurdish victims of violence and war remain in their respective territories. Kurds on the move are seen as a potential menace to public safety in German cities. When in January 1998, Kurdish refugees from Turkey and Iraq arrived via rickety ships on Italian shores (i.e. EU borders), the tone of official German rhetoric reached cacophonous heights in an attempt to hold back “the massive influx” of illegal Kurdish immigrants.<sup>18</sup> The response was clearly disproportionate to the arrival of a total of 3,000 Turkish and Iraqi Kurds in Italy.<sup>19</sup>

For a number of reasons, Kurds have acquired a nasty reputation for political radicalism and criminal entrepreneurship in Germany. The PKK’s strategic efforts are at the center of this issue. European anti-crime units believe that PKK activists are involved in numerous financially lucrative terrorist enterprises in the region. Since the early 1990s, Kurdish nationalist groups linked to the PKK have committed violent criminal acts aimed predominantly at Turks in Western Europe.<sup>20</sup> Turkish residents in Berlin and London have requested special police protection against repetitive arson attacks and bombings of their businesses and private homes. Despite investigations and stricter prosecution of PKK-sponsored activists, radical Kurds have not suffered any significant setbacks over the past several years. Rather, anti-crime units have registered a noticeable increase in arson attacks, beatings of Turkish residents and extortion schemes.<sup>21</sup>

Most of the financial resources that the PKK leadership can access are used to purchase weapons for the “war of national liberation,” to produce and disseminate propaganda materials and to provide active cadre members with sufficient cash flow. The money is said to come from three sources: the international drug trade to Western Europe, the cross-border transit of humans and detailed extortion schemes. One-third of all the expenses of the war of independence in Turkey are covered by the sale of drugs including trespassing charges for Turkish drug dealers.<sup>22</sup>

The hard-line approach to restraining Kurdish radicalism applied under the former Kohl government is a deficient if not failed policy. When the PKK was declared an illegal terrorist organization in 1993, its criminal cadres “went under-

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ground” and became harder to monitor. In addition, the ranks of the 5,000 to 7,000 active members of the PKK in Germany prior to 1993 swelled to about 9,000 activists by 1996.<sup>23</sup> More recent figures for front-line activists are estimated to be even higher at about 10,000 cadre members.<sup>24</sup> Similarly disappointing to the German government are statistics that indicate rising numbers of PKK sympathizers within previously moderate Kurdish communities. The official count of quiet supporters of the movement prior to declaring the PKK an illegal terrorist organization was 20,000 to 25,000 men and women. After the PKK was labeled a terrorist organization, some 50,000 Kurds were believed to have participated in secondary actions supportive of the PKK’s activities.<sup>25</sup>

Another potential complication stems from the fact that German authorities do not know how large the potential for mobilization is within the European, and in particular, German Kurdish communities. While estimates of the size of the Western European Kurdish immigrant populations range to about one million or more, the German government now assumes that it has at least 500,000 to 600,000 Kurds within its borders.<sup>26</sup> The growing estimates for Kurds in Europe do not necessarily reflect a continuing influx of new Kurdish refugees or even a higher birth rate. The most fascinating or unnerving phenomenon, depending on one’s political perspective, has been that increasing numbers of officially registered “Turks” have decided to claim their Kurdish ethnicity. Before their exile in Europe, the Kurds never had such freedom to express their separate culture, language, and ethnicity. The social and political behavior of the Kurds has been directly influenced by the type of public environment in which they have operated. Despite discrimination, Kurds believe it to be their democratic right to publicly claim their ethnicity. In addition, claiming Kurdishness is an act of solidarity with brethren in Turkey who are unable to do the same for fear of reprisals.<sup>27</sup> One simple indicator measuring the rise in Kurdish self-awareness and pride within Germany is the increasing number of Kurdish rather than Turkish names given to newborn children.<sup>28</sup>

It would be extremely useful for the German government to collect more exact data on Kurds, but it continues to be almost impossible at this point. When the German government made the conscious decision to count as Turks all persons carrying Turkish passports, an option arose for Kurds to hide their ethnicity if they so desired. It had always been well-known that Kurds were over-represented in the ranks of Turkish immigrants to Germany and made up between 25 and 30 percent of the immigrants from Turkish territories.<sup>29</sup>

In its efforts to suppress Kurdish violence in the streets of larger cities, the Kohl government miscalculated the tenacity of the PKK. Instead of undermining the PKK’s base of support in Germany, Bonn’s aggressive anti-crime measures may have bolstered the PKK’s romantic characterization of itself as a group of freedom fighters with a noble cause. Now many young Kurds join the movement

to become part of an "elite organization" with an almost mythical fame for its defiance of the German state. Shortly after the March 1996 street battles (related to *Nawruz* celebrations) between German police units and radical Kurds, the German government re-evaluated its anti-terrorism laws to counter the urban warfare methods employed by the PKK.

One major error the German government made was to prohibit all Kurdish cultural clubs, Kurdish educational federations and satellite organizations along with the PKK in November 1993.<sup>30</sup> The German authorities believed that most Kurdish clubs were simply fronts for the PKK and therefore represented a potential terrorist threat to the state. The government's indiscriminate response to Kurdish organizations reveals the existence of key problems in regard to analyzing the origins of radical Kurdish behavior. The German government and the police force consistently demonstrate a very limited and insufficient understanding of Kurdish communities in Germany. Clearly, no established flow of information and process of discourse ever existed between German authorities and Kurdish community leaders to help distinguish between radical and moderate Kurdish cultural organizations.

The continued push by the PKK to internationalize its interpretation of the Kurdish plight has been a great success. Public campaigns created the impression that the PKK is the voice of Turkish Kurds, especially since the Turkish state has been so easily manipulated into violent responses to this challenge. Without a doubt, the PKK is searching for inventive approaches to creating credibility for itself by engaging in public education campaigns and by spawning such groups as the Kurdish-Parliament-In-Exile.

A lack of insight into the pluralistic political life of Kurds has abetted the German public assumption that the PKK is the sole political voice of the Kurdish ethnic group in the country. Diverging Kurdish voices have been dismissed or simply ignored by the German press, the political circles and the law enforcement authorities. Such miscalculations have played into the hands of the PKK. Instead of being dismissed as a radical splinter group active on European soil, the PKK has gained official recognition among the highest circles in Germany. As a direct consequence, moderate Kurdish leaders have lost any significant political influence over their communities.

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## CONCLUSION

The Social Democrat/Green Party's push for a change in citizenship laws, which promises to encourage long-term immigrants to apply for German citizenship in the year 2000, was a step forward for German Turks and Kurds. However, solely focusing on domestic German reforms will not ameliorate existing grievances between Turkish and Kurdish communities in Germany. Moderate Kurdish leaders must gain the opportunity to represent the diaspora to the German government. The assumption that the PKK represents all Kurds in Germany is a dangerous trap for all democratically oriented parties concerned with this conflict.

The PKK will use clever public relations campaigns, continue to amass power through coercion, and hide behind the atrocities committed by the Turkish military machine. If the German government has a real interest in searching for a way to undermine the success of the PKK's recruitment efforts in the country, it must make potentially unpopular choices. Avoiding the Kurdish question in Germany may be convenient now, but this simply postpones the inevitable—more violence in immigrant communities and increasing numbers of young people caught in the social complexities that convince them to turn toward the PKK.

Germany must make a commitment to the integration of immigrants and send a clear message that neither eastern Germans nor ethnic Germans will experience disadvantages because of public efforts to integrate minority groups. If the government continues to minimize the problem, the PKK will gain further influence among Kurds and continue to spread ethnic hostilities. Tragically, the political will to pursue substantive change is lacking in Germany, which means that no permanent solutions will be found. So far, German officials are ignoring the potential immensity of the growing conflict. ■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Faruk Sen and Andreas Goldberg, *Türken in Deutschland: Leben zwischen zwei Kulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994): 92-108. See for a listing of Turkish, Kurdish, and Islamic organizations, types of membership, and political/socio-religious orientations.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>3</sup> Ministerium für Arbeit, Gesundheit und Soziales des Landes NRW, *Türkische Muslime in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Duisburg: WAZ Druck, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> German Information Center, *Deutschland Nachrichten* (New York, NY: January 22, 1999). Eine am 18. Januar veröffentlichte dimap-Umfrage unter 1.038 in Deutschland lebenden Türken hat ergeben, dass 68 Prozent von ihnen einen deutschen Pass beantragen wollen, wenn sie die gesetzlichen Voraussetzungen dafür erfüllen. Bei einer Bundestagswahl wollen 48 Prozent für die SPD stimmen, sechs Prozent für die Grünen und vier Prozent für die CDU.

<sup>6</sup> Jürgen Friedrichs, "Ethnic Segregation in Cologne, Germany, 1984-1994," *Urban Studies*, vol. 35 i 10, (October 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Jenny B. White, anthropologist at Boston University and an expert in German-Turkish cultural questions, translates the term "*almancilar*" as "Germaners." J. B. White, "Turks in the new Germany," *American Anthropologist*, vol. 99 n 4 (December 1997).

<sup>8</sup> These comments are based on observations in the cities of Duisburg and Düsseldorf (Nordrhein-Westfalen) in 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Claus Leggewie, "How Turks Became Kurds," *Dissent* (Summer 1996): 82.

<sup>10</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 1997): 440-441.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, "CSU will Verurteilung von Gewalttätern nicht abwarten," March 22, 1996.

<sup>13</sup> These comments are based on conversations with Kurds in the city of Duisburg (Nordrhein-Westfalen), January 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 1998): 123-124.

<sup>15</sup> David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I. B. Taurus, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Faruk Sen and Andreas Goldberg, *Türken in Deutschland: Leben zwischen zwei Kulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994): 86.

<sup>17</sup> This paragraph is based on a conversation with a German student in the city of Halle (Sachsen-Anhalt) in December 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Boudreaux, *Los Angeles Times*, "Neighbors Seek to Yank Italy's Welcome Mat for Refugees," January 23, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Shada Islam, "Castle perilous," *Index on Censorship*, vol. 27 n. 3 (May-June 1998): 61-68.

<sup>20</sup> *The Guardian*, "German Police Raid Banned PKK Groups; UK Has No Plans To Follow Hard Line On Separatists," November 27, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> *Der Spiegel*, "Hilflos vor dem Terror," n. 13, 1996: 35-38.

<sup>22</sup> *Focus Magazin*, "Terrorismus-CDU Hardliner traf PKK Chef," November 20, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> *Focus Magazin*, "PKK- Aufhetzen und Zuschlagen," March 27, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998): 276.

<sup>25</sup> *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, "Erkenntnisse des Verfassungsschutzes über die PKK Anführer schwer zu greifen. In der Bundesrepublik werden neue Kämpfer angeworben," March 22, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Claus Leggewie, "How Turks Became Kurds," *Dissent* (Summer 1996): 82.

<sup>27</sup> These comments are based on conversations with Kurds in the city of Duisburg (Nordrhein-Westfalen), January 1998.

<sup>28</sup> Tilman Zülch, *Völkermord an den Kurden* (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1991): 111-113.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998): 276.

<sup>30</sup> *Agence France Presse*, "France Bans Kurdish Terror Organizations," November 30, 1993.