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Evaluating the Turkish Minority's Situation in Germany and Suggestions for a Possible Solution

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1. Introduction

With approximately 2.7 million members, the Turkish minority is Germany's largest ethnic minority. Many citizens of Turkish origin were born in Germany. They have been living in Germany for many years – some of them even for forty years. They are peaceful and abide by the Constitution and are members of all social spheres. Through its culture and its values, the Turkish minority enriches the Germany majority community. It complies with the duties that accrue to German citizens. Nevertheless, Germany denies them fundamental human and minority rights.

The Avrupa Demokrasi Vakfi (European Democratic Foundation) dedicates itself, among other things, to achieving these rights, to an inter-cultural dialogue, and to a peaceful coexistence between all humans regardless of their origin, culture, or religion. Germany's current legal and socio-political situation, however, significantly complicates this goal. In this regard, I will now highlight several of the issues and will submit suggestions toward a solution.

2. Media Representation of the Turkish Minority

In recent years in Germany, Turks have been regularly confronted with negative headlines. Increasingly, Islamophobia – which given 2.7 million Turkish-Muslim residents in Germany is equal to Turko-phobia – is spreading and national agencies are not combating it effectively. The unilateral and negative representation of the Turkish minority – even in the public media – has a negative effect on public opinion. It only inflames the prejudices of the majority German society. Thus, Turko-phobia has significantly increased in Germany. Negative events are cherry-picked. The appearance of general validity is underscored. In contrast, daily realities or positive events and developments are hardly taken into account.

Similar circumstances are explored in different ways among the German public – regardless of the actor's origin or cultural and religious background.

Thus, for example, the terrible September 11 attacks in the US or the attacks in Madrid and London were reacted to with empathy and with declarations of sympathy, while the terror attacks in Istanbul were more or less passively observed with warnings even of the possible risk that fundamentalist Islamic terror would be imported to Europe.

Each year, the Turkish minority pays 120 million Euro in fees to the broadcasting companies. Nevertheless, rarely is their native language heard in the German media. Establishing a German-Turkish television channel could alleviate this problem while simultaneously contributing to the integration and promotion of cultural diversity.

Unilateral and negative reporting on the Turkish minority also prepares the soil for political party behavior that is driven by election tactics – especially in the case of conservative and extreme-right parties and groups. This makes it more difficult to take the necessary political steps toward solving legal and socio-political discrimination against the Turkish minority.

It is particularly troublesome that extreme-right groups are becoming members of state legislatures and municipal councils through ever-improving election results that are financed with public funds and built on anti-Turkish, anti-Islamic, propaganda (see the pictures attached). This leads to the conclusion that to a certain extent their ideology is anchored and accepted among the German people.

3. The Turkish Minority's Political Participation

Political participation is the basic condition for integration. The Turkish minority however is completely excluded from the democratic process.

The local elections law forms a special barrier to realizing democratic rights. Of 15 EU countries, 10 European countries grant non-EU foreigners a passive right to vote. Of these, 5 countries grant them an active right to vote. While Germany and France, as founding EU nations, have the highest share of immigrants among their total populations, they connect citizenship to the local elections law. Thus, they deny non-EU foreigners the right to vote. The result is an exclusion from basic democratic rights and thus a loss in the quality of democracy.

The Turkish minority that has been residing for almost 50 years in Germany and all other non-EU and EU foreigners should be granted the right to vote in local elections. To achieve this the required change in Article 79, Section 2, of the German Constitution must be carried out. This is the only way they will be able to realize their basic democratic rights which at the same time would be an increase in the quality of democracy. By influencing political decisions they would then be able to finally secure the solution to long-standing migrant issues.

There are only 5 representatives of Turkish descent among 611 representatives in the German Parliament. This corresponds to a share of approx. 0.8%.

The Turkish minority is widely dispersed throughout all regions in Germany. Nevertheless only 2 of the 13 states have a representative of Turkish descent. Particularly remarkable here is that the most populous state of Nordrhein Westfalen – where most citizens of Turkish descent live – is not represented in the parliament by a single politician of Turkish descent. The entrenched parties, the CDU (conservative), CSU (conservative) and FDP (liberal) also don't have any state or federal representatives of Turkish descent, even though there are many citizens of Turkish descent who are active in these parties. Thus, these parties do not appear to be interested in politically representing citizens of Turkish descent.

In order to imply that they are a party that is friendly to Turkish interests and to obtain the votes of the Turkish minority, the entrenched parties do list politicians of Turkish descent; yet they have them run in electoral districts where there is almost no chance of winning or hold them in lower slots.

Turkish citizens who are active in the parties are overwhelmingly restricted to integration and migration policy tasks. Some of them repeatedly report even of party exclusion and ignorance. It seems that Turko-phobia is not only anchored in parts of the majority German society but has also extended into the German parties.

4. Legal and Social Discrimination of the Turkish Minority

The German education system puts migrants, and especially Turkish students, at a disadvantage. Professor Vernor Muñoz, UN-reporter for Human Rights in Education, shares this opinion.

Too often, because of claimed language impediments – which sometimes don't even exist – talented Turkish students are sent to special or trade schools. These students then rarely have the opportunity to visit schools of higher education or to even attempt a university education. In contrast to other foreign students, Turkish students in the education system often do not have the opportunity to learn their native tongue. Turkish classes in public schools are often not sufficiently offered and, in any case, step-by-step they are being discontinued. In contrast to other religions, religious education in Islam is not offered at state schools. State authorities also forbid us – in contrast to the symbols of other religions – from carrying the symbols of our religion. Turkish students must be provided the opportunity to learn their native tongue and religion. Furthermore and at least after primary school, classes in Turkish and religion must be offered as a regular elective. Appropriate preconditions must be established such as the additional training and availability of teachers and the development of lesson plans. Appropriate financial means should be made available from state education funds.

Different studies repeatedly show that migrants, and thus Turks in particular, are massively discriminated against in the education system and on the labor markets.

Generally, one has to conclude that the share of Turks in the education system's more demanding educational institutions is decreasing. The rate at which citizens of Turkish descent study is approximately three-quarters lower than for Germans (approx. 20% to 6%). Turkish students have been particularly disadvantaged through the introduction of education fees at universities because they overwhelmingly come from lower-income families. Many find themselves forced to discontinue or extend their studies.

Furthermore, it is a matter of concern that in many cities ghetto schools have formed in which are attended by hardly any German students.

The discrimination of the Turkish minority in the education system leads to a lower level of education and thus to fewer employment opportunities. But even with the same level of education, Turks are systematically put at a disadvantage. Thus, a study of the Federal Institute for Professional Education (BIBB) shows that under very specific circumstances a German student has a 70% chance of obtaining an apprenticeship, while a student of Turkish descent under similar conditions only has a 16% chance. In the same study, companies also say that they would much rather have a German apprentice. This phenomenon is also reflected among highly qualified workers. Thus academics of Turkish origin have almost double the rate of unemployment than German academics (approx. 10% to 5.5%).

And, Turkish Muslims wearing headscarves will have a very hard time even finding employment. Because they wear headscarves, their access to the labor market remains closed. Aside from massive economic and socio-economic effects on the German state, poverty, lack of prospects, and psycho-social issues are among the problems that the Turkish minority faces because of discrimination in the education system and on the labor markets.

The demands of the UN reporter Muñoz for paid-for pre-school education and the dismantling of the three-tiered school system must be implemented. And more value must be placed on cooperation between the schools and parents of Muslim children. In this way, specific issues can be dealt with and mutual solutions can be found. In particular, linguistic competencies and study habits of Turkish children must be fostered. The response to the problem of education shouldn't be the automatic instruction of Turkish children in educational institutions that provide lower qualifications. Both German educators and families must become aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

But instead of removing structural defects in the education system, students with a migration background – and thus especially Turkish students – are often blamed for the poor results of PISA studies.

Despite there being approx. 2.7 million Turks, there isn't a single Turkish cemetery in Germany. In the meantime, numerous German communities have set aside burial grounds for Turks. Though often the offered burial opportunities do not correspond to religious

prescriptions so that many Turks are forced to carry their deceased abroad. Just as there are numerous Jewish burial grounds for the near 110,000 Jewish citizens, German authorities should also create similar ones for the approx. 2.7 million Turkish citizens.

In contrast to non-Muslims, Turks and other Muslims acquiring German citizenship in the state of Baden Württemberg must respond to a series of questions relating to their political and personal views. The Minister of the Interior reasoned that the aim was to ascertain applicants' loyalty to the Constitution. The fact that there is a need for a loyalty test to test Turk's loyalty to the Constitution but not one for non-Muslims is not only discriminatory, it's also insulting.

Article 6, Section 1 of the German Constitution places marriage and family under the special protection of state authority. Yet the Immigration Act passed in July 2007 makes it more difficult for families to immigrate. It is discriminatory that these tighter regulations apply to Turks but not to other foreigners (for example, Americans, Israelis, Koreans, Australians, Japanese, or EU-foreigners). In this manner, families are torn apart and children are raised by single parents which often leads to marked psychological burdens for those who are affected. Often the result is an undesired separation of married couples. Thus, these rules in the Immigration Act are unconstitutional and also contravene Article 16 of the UN Human Rights Charter.

The Citizenship Law that came into effect on January 1, 2000 grants certain foreign citizens in Germany the right to dual citizenship while this is denied the 2.7 million Turkish minority in Germany.

Students from Turkey also experience enormous legal hurdles that apply to foreigners, for example in matters relating to residency or working permits. In contrast to other foreign students, education and training and degrees are not recognized. In this way, their education is lengthened by years or they completely discontinue their studies because they become resigned to the unequal treatment and bureaucratic hurdles.

The rules in the Foreigners Act are not only discriminatory, they are even racist. The rights that are granted other foreign citizens – the number of which doesn't even represent a fraction of the 2.7 million Turks who reside in Germany – must also be applied to those Turks who have now been living in Germany for almost 50 years.

Racism and discrimination don't only manifest themselves in the legal rules but also through restricted access to services. Citizens of Turkish origin are systematically prevented access to many services. For example, in many areas they are not provided any access to the housing market. This especially encourages ghettoization in many urban areas. They receive less favorable treatment from banks and associations or are not even allowed to enter certain establishments.

Germany several times exceeded the implementation period for implementing the EU Council's Anti-discrimination Guidelines by dragging its feet for six years. The General Equal Rights Law to combat discrimination that came into force for this purpose on August 18, 2006 remains ineffective in its implementation.

5. Assimilation Attempts and Racist Attacks

Integrating the Turkish minority is often – and especially among conservative parties and groups – understood to be a unilateral adjustment; that is, as an assimilation into a majority German society. The majority German society, and especially the conservative parties, must recognize the Turkish majority as a part of society and must respect their cultural identity and values. They must give up all their attempts at assimilation. Instead, we have to create the conditions for a successful integration, that is in addition to recognizing their cultural identity, granting them equal rights and an equal share in the political and social decision-making process as well as in all areas of life.

Unfortunately, German agencies don't maintain any meaningful statistics on racial attacks against citizens of Turkish descent. We are therefore unable to present any concrete numbers on this matter.

The Turkish minority and their establishments have for many years now been exposed in their daily lives to numerous racial attacks, insults and threats (see attached photographs). There are areas in Germany where Turks no longer can feel safe and where they have to fear for their physical safety. Almost every day we hear of racial attacks and their establishments, such as residences, associations, mosques, and businesses, being subjected to arson. There were many victims in the past.

The terrorist and criminal PKK organization and its associations regularly attack Turkish establishments, spread extremist propaganda unhindered, threaten Turkish citizens, and stir up hatred against them. In addition, and unhindered throughout Germany, they are engaged in criminal activities, such as the European drug trade, human trade, extortion, and recruiting individuals for the terror camps in Iraq.

State authorities are not capable of successfully fighting these racist attacks. The perpetrators are very often not identified and the rate for solving these crimes is low.

These events are not one-time acts perpetrated by crazy people. Rather, they are the result of an enormous fear of Turks among parts of majority German society. Memorials to the victims of xenophobic and racist crimes should be created so that these events are not forgotten and that we continue to be reminded of them.

Acts of violence against Turks are not sufficiently discussed in public. While any form of racism is rejected, Turko-phobic attitudes among the general public remain unidentified. For this reason too Germany is taking no effective measures to fight Turko-phobia.

Any attempts at assimilation should be discontinued and comprehensive investments must be made in programs aimed at effectively fight the Turko-phobia. In addition, all legal and physical possibilities should be exhausted in order to prosecute racist attacks.

6. Conclusion

At the outset, I need to emphasize that my goal is not to attack state agencies. Rather, my goal is to increase awareness of existing issues and to possibly make a contribution to their solution.

The Turkish minority lives peacefully within the German Constitution and enriches the majority German population in a diverse array of ways. There is no parallel Turkish society to the majority German society. Nevertheless, the Turkish minority is exposed to multiple forms of racism and discrimination. For 50 years now, the Turkish minority has been living in Germany and has made many contributions to the country and its society. In contrast, these achievements and contributions by the Turkish minority are not sufficiently recognized in the sense that they continue to be deprived of fundamental human and minority rights.

We need a change in the paradigm. Such a change would allow us finally to take measures to fight the fear of Turks and their unfair treatment that often results. The majority German society must be willing to allow the recommended solutions and mentioned preconditions so that a successful integration can be achieved. This is also a condition to benefiting from the social and inter-cultural potential of the Turkish minority. Otherwise, prejudice could further be inflamed and mutual mistrust could continue to be created. Frustration could spread among citizens of Turkish descent and their trust in the state authorities could erode.

In the end, we should note the following: The European states, and thus especially Germany, who vehemently and often very arrogantly dedicate themselves to democracy and human rights in other countries, are losing credibility. They don't have the right to act if not all of their own citizens can share in the enjoyment of these values.

7. Attachment



