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Xenophobia and Extremism in Europe: The Turkish Minority

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Many academic studies and studies by European institutions show that xenophobia and extremism have increased in Europe over the last few years, having now reached frightening levels. Xenophobic and extremist attitudes in Europe persist across all social classes and among people of varying political ideals.

According to the study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights („European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey"), it is especially Turkish people and citizens with Turkish roots who are the ethnic group hardest hit by racism and discrimination in the EU. In particular, this bigotry expresses itself through various forms of discrimination in everyday life as well as on the job and educational market, through legal disadvantages, poor political participation, and even violent assaults. Increasingly, their cultural and religious values are being condemned. Rather than placing the emphasis on integration, politicians and the public are increasingly calling for these groups to completely assimilate as a means to adapt to the majority society – a blatant affront to all human and minority rights and thus the principles of the OSCE. In addition to Turkish people, it is especially other migrants identifying with the Muslim faith who are confronted with similar experiences.

What leads to such negative attitudes toward Turkish people or other Muslim migrants in vast parts of the population? The academic community has identified various social, economic, political, as well as specific individual root causes for this trend. We believe that the media coverage also plays a considerable role. Similar circumstances are explored in different ways among the European public – regardless of the actor’s origin or cultural and religious background. 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 European society. Thus, Turko-phobia has significantly increased in Europe.

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.

Xenophobic attitudes and prejudice in parts of the European populace are also fertile breeding grounds for the anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic propaganda of radical right-wing political parties. Radical right-wing parties have achieved considerable election success in France, Sweden, Belgium, and Bulgaria gaining seats in the respective national parliaments. Moreover, in the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, and Denmark, radical right-wing parties were even voted into the government or were tolerated. Especially alarming is also the fact that established political parties – due to tactical considerations for elections – are, to a certain extent, assuming such ideologies and thus additionally legitimizing those ideologies.

In many European countries, the increasing trend is that migrants currently make up more than 20% of the total population. For the welfare of the migrants, their integration, and a peaceful coexistence, a solution for such phenomena should be given top priority. No sure formula for solving this problem exists. However, we would like to point out the following points:

Although racism and the discrimination of migrants and their subsequent impact vary from country to country, they are nonetheless a European phenomenon and must thus be combated by a pan-European strategy. European countries must make the funds to implement anti-xenophobic and anti-discrimination strategies available. The fact that EU Member States are reducing funds on the grounds of budgetary difficulties is unacceptable. On the contrary, implementing more effective legislative measures, stronger support for social organizations, providing educational opportunities, encouraging the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialog, and creating the conditions for migrants to participate in various social areas (especially in the political arena), for example, are necessary.

The political cooperation of established political parties with radical right-wing parties greatly strengthens these radical parties and legitimizes their radical right-wing ideas. Not only does this prevent solutions for the already multifaceted problems migrants are faced with from being found, it moreover exacerbates the situation of the migrants. This is what led to aggravated policies toward foreigners in many countries. A stop must be put to this cooperation and the radical right-wing parties must be politically and socially isolated.

More effective anti-racist and anti-discrimination legislative measures must be implemented. The antiracism directive (Directive 2000/43/EC), which all EU member states agreed to in 2000, as well as other similar directives that the member states were to transfer into national law, continue to be ineffective. Although there may be an official law against discrimination

in Europe, studies conducted by EU institutions and other organizations show that there are significant shortcomings when it comes to enforcement. Many countries have for years delayed the transfer of the antiracism and antidiscrimination directives into national law. When the enforcement deadline had passed, the European Commission took agreement violation measures against a number of countries, such as Belgium, Germany, Austria, Finland, Greece, and Luxembourg. The European Court of Justice also identified what happened as an agreement violation. Also, agreement violation measures were taken against a number of EU member states due to insufficient compliance with similar directives.

It is clear that the media frequently presents an incorrect image of (Muslim) migrants, thus fueling prejudices within society. A reinforced dialog between migrants and their organizations and representatives from the media could lead to more responsible media coverage.