

## Germany's policy towards immigrants – from integration to naturalization

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Over the last decade there has been a huge change in the way the German elite perceives the challenges posed by the large number of immigrants living in Germany. After decades of downplaying the problem of the increasing immigration to Germany, its economic and social consequences have made politicians realize that it is necessary to introduce mechanisms to make it easier for Germany to function as a country of immigration. The forerunner of the new approach to immigration has been the German left, however, the genuine change was made possible only after the policy of the Christian Democrats -until 2005 negatively or indifferently inclined towards people of immigrant origins in Germany – had been reviewed. In the coalition with SPD it was the Christian Democrats who outlined the policy of immigration which is currently seen as one of the guarantors of social solidarity in Germany (this is proven by the fact that the CDU/CSU/FDP government set the precedent by placing provisions in the coalition agreement on the integration of people who have an immigrant background). The new strategy of the Christian Democrats, set to be continued under this government with the participation of the Liberals, is based on the promotion of integration through naturalization. This will be facilitated by an emphasis being put on language education and the fostering of a favourable climate for adopting German citizenship. This concept seems to stand a great chance of being implemented because of the ongoing parallel processes in the circles of people of immigrant origins and in German society. These are: an increasing presence in the public sphere of people coming from an immigrant background and having German citizenship and their support for integration, as well as a growing acceptance in German society of people of immigrant origins taking prominent positions in public life.

### The evolution of the German approach to the integration of people of immigrant origins

German politicians for a long time did not see the lack of a strategy for immigrants living in Germany as a major problem either for the immigrants themselves or for society as a whole. A change in this attitude was brought about by the social and economic situation of the country. The German political class realized that further neglect of the integration of people

who have an immigrant background would only exacerbate the threat to the German welfare system as family allowances, unemployment benefits and the lack of a broader participation of foreigners in the labour market would weigh more heavily on the country's budget.

The question of the integration of people of immigrant origins was present as early as the public debate under the first SPD and Green Party government in 1998-2002. The concept of a well thought out policy of integration was, however, lacking. The debate was dominated by a dispute between the left camp and the conservative camp over fundamental issues on limits of tolerance and the place of people who have an immigrant background in German society. The SPD and the Green Party were in favour of the idea of a "multicultural society" based on a free coexistence of various nations, cultures and religions with minimum state intervention. On the other hand, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals championed the model of a new society based on assimilation with a leading culture (Leitkultur). There was no detailed strategy for a policy of integration, the issue was met with resistance from the

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parliamentary opposition, and society was not open to people of immigrant origins; this led to the coalition partners failing to introduce any significant qualitative changes in this area<sup>1</sup>.

The newly established CDU/CSU/FDP government was the first one to include a policy of integration in the coalition agreement. The issue of integration had already been raised in the agreement of the

SPD and Green Party government of 1998 but in quite general terms and to a much lesser extent. The Christian Democrats and the Liberals placed the integration of people of immigrant origins as one of key issues in the chapter on social solidarity, alongside such topics as pro-family policy, gender equality, social assistance and social welfare, the pension scheme and healthcare system. The inclusion of the policy of integration in the concept of the program of the CDU/CSU/FDP coalition indicates an important shift in the approach taken by the parties of the conservative camp regarding the place of people who have an immigrant background in German society. They have abandoned the conviction (previously widespread particularly in the Christian Democrats) that Germany is not an immigration country and the migrant influx is only temporary. There were two factors that directly influenced the breakthrough in the perception of the immigration to Germany and the recognition of the need for a concept of integration for foreigners into German society: the social one and the economic one. Firstly, the number of people with immigrant origins living in Germany form a large group (1/5 of the German population). Some of these live in parallel societies (i.e. functioning independently, alongside German society)<sup>2</sup>. In this context also feelings in society considered the lack of integration to be a source of criminality and were reluctant to see state funds being spent on unemployment benefits for people of immigrant origins. The second important factor was the problems on the German labour market, particularly the high unemployment rate among people with an immigrant background (20.3% according to the data for 2007) constituting a burden for Germany's budget. According to the research conducted by the Bertelsmann Foundation in 2008, the costs of failed immigration (among them unemployment benefits and social welfare) incurred by the German state amount to EUR 16 billion annually. Another increasingly felt problem is the growing demand for highly skilled workers in the technology and IT sectors – with the emigration of highly qualified Germans to Switzerland and Anglo-Saxon countries, a gap, estimated at approximately 70,000 vacancies (data for 2007), has been created.

<sup>1</sup> The most important reform was the amendment of the law on German citizenship in 2000. Its main provisions are: the automatic obtaining of citizenship by persons born in Germany and the obligation to relinquish one of the passports between the age of 18 and 23.

<sup>2</sup> The history of post-war immigration to Germany dates back to the 1950s and 1960s. At that time Germany ran an action of encouraging unqualified workers, mainly from Southern Europe and Turkey, to go to Germany in order to perform simple manual jobs. Both politicians and *gastarbeiter*s assumed that would be only a temporary stay. The government did not therefore ensure that the offer enabled immigrants to learn German, to increase their professional skills, have their national diplomas recognized in Germany and to gain access to the labour market. That strategy of ignoring immigrants turned out to be very short-sighted, particularly given the fact that the number of immigrants kept rising, due to the procedures of reuniting families and letting in refugees, despite the end of the enrolment, announced in the 1980s. The growing number of people of immigrant origins and worse economic circumstances, combined with unfriendly regulations granting access to the labour market, led to an increase in unemployment among people with an immigrant background that was further exacerbated by them and their children not speaking German. Unemployment benefits and family allowances generated huge costs for the country's budget.

## The Christian Democrats as the precursors of the naturalization policy

A genuine breakthrough in the approach towards the integration of people of immigrant origins was made possible due to the change in the attitude of CDU/CSU after their ascension to power in 2005. The fact that the Christian Democrats had clearly lobbied for granting German citizenship to people leaving in Germany but having citizenship of other countries proves that their goal was more about the naturalization of immigrants than enabling them to orient themselves better in German realities.

Paradoxically, it was the Christian Democrats who set the new direction for integration policy and gave a greater significance to it than politicians from parties traditionally viewed as being pro-integration. The Christian Democrats used to be rather ill-disposed to the integration of people with an immigrant background which manifested itself partially in blocking the option of double citizenship, pushing for restrictions in the procedure of reuniting families (lowering the age of children eligible to come to Germany under this procedure) and emphasizing that Germany is not an immigration country. The unfavourable attitude of the Christian Democratic parties towards foreigners living in Germany is clearly illustrated by the election campaigns for the parliaments of Hesse (in 1999 and 2007) and North Rhine-Westphalia (2000) which portrayed immigrants as a source of criminality, and politicians campaigning intensified the related negative emotions in society by using slogans such as „Kinder statt Inder“ („Children instead of Indians“). The focus of the German federal government on integration, aimed at immigrants acquiring German citizenship is visible in the dialogue established with people of immigrant origins at state and federal levels: among

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other events, at the integration summits initiated by Chancellor Merkel (which resulted in the National Integration Plan<sup>3</sup>) and at an annual conference on Islam held in 2006 and chaired by the interior minister Wolfgang Schäuble.

The aim to naturalize foreigners is also confirmed by a series of new laws that have been in force since the law on immigration was passed in 2007 (among them integration courses covering lessons in German, history, geography, the politics and culture of Germany, compulsory courses in German for spouses coming to Germany under the procedure of reuniting families and naturalization tests intended to verify whether persons applying for German citizenship have a sufficient

knowledge of Germany). The new objective of subsequent governments led by the Christian Democrats is above all visible in the open lobbying of politicians for granting German citizenship to people with an immigrant background and also symbolically, in organizing festivities during which Chancellor Merkel grants certificates of citizenship to new German citizens. This encouragement towards naturalization from politicians is a response to the flagging interest foreigners are expressing in obtaining German citizenship (according to the Bundestag's data, the number of cases of naturalization in 2008 fell by 15% in comparison to 2007). The government points to the fact that children of immigrant origins that have German citizenship fare a lot better in school education than their counterparts without citizenship. It seems that this emphasis put on the benefits derived from having citizenship, learning

<sup>3</sup> The National Integration Plan was adopted at the integration summit in 2007 and includes over 400 tasks for the government, federal states and immigrant circles, that are intended to create education opportunities for immigrants, increase the offer of courses in the German language, facilitate access to the labour market, etc.

the German language from pre-school and an increased knowledge of German culture and history are a modification of the Christian Democratic model of assimilation to the leading culture. In terms of rhetoric, politicians are avoiding calling the new policy of integration an action leading to the largest figures possible. Officially, the aim of the new policy is to establish a society open to people of immigrant origins ready to integrate with Germans and to harmonize the rights of Germans with the rights of people of immigrant origins. In reality this harmonization (which needs to also include participation in civil society and therefore – voting in elections) is not possible without the harmonized status of the two groups and *de facto* – without people with an immigrant background obtaining German citizenship.

### Immigrant groups are opening to integration

In parallel to the political changes, immigrant circles are also evolving. The examples of naturalized persons that have been successful in Germany point to a strong link between their chances of full participation in social and political life and the fact that they have German citizenship. A diversification among people of immigrant origins is particularly important in the case of people born and brought up in Germany or naturalized, and those people of immigrant origins without German citizenship. Whereas the first group is becoming more and more active in the social and political life of Germany, the second one integrates with German society more seldom and more often remains excluded from active participation in the labour market. These differences are visible even at the level of pre-school or early school

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education – children without German citizenship more often have problems while learning than their counterparts who have citizenship; consequently, they drop out of school more often and more seldom find employment and obtain a degree in higher education (according to the report on the extent to which immigrants are integrated, published by the German government in 2009, 16% of immigrants have a certificate of having finished a school, only 11%

have passed the secondary school leaving exams and only 23.9% of young people with an immigrant background have completed vocational training – in comparison to the respective figures for Germans – 6.5%, 30% and 57.6%). This problem is passed on from generation to generation – parents not participating in Germany's social life do not give their children any positive models to follow. Poorer results in school are usually the result of an insufficient command of German and lead to the exclusion of subsequent generations of young people of immigrant origins from active participation in the social life of Germany. On the other hand, people of immigrant origins are becoming increasingly active and do not want to be perceived any longer as a workforce or exclusively as representatives of immigrants. They want to take part in politics and the public sphere in Germany on equal terms with Germans. Good examples of such an attitude are two politicians – Cem Özdemir from the Green Party and Philipp Rösler from FDP, pursuing political careers at the federal level. Özdemir, a politician of Turkish origin born in Germany, was elected as one of the two presidents of the Green Party in November 2008. Rösler, of Vietnamese origin and adopted as a baby by Germans, is the health minister in the CDU/CSU/FDP government. Apart from politics, representatives of people of immigrant origins are also visible in the media, culture and scientific institutions, although, as in other spheres of life, their number is definitely small compared to the scale of immigration in Germany. Many prominent representatives

of immigrants (e.g. a sociologist of Turkish origin Necla Kelek and a lawyer Seyran Ates participating in the work of the German Conference on Islam) are involved in the debate over integration, criticizing mistakes committed by both the German state and people with an immigrant background themselves. It is worth noticing that these people are against the model of a multicultural society, seeing in it reasons for the creation of parallel societies. It can therefore be assumed that they will be receptive to the arguments of the government and will contribute to a better understanding of the premises of the new policy of immigration in immigrant circles.

## German society and immigrants

It seems that the Christian Democratic and Liberal government may count on German society to support its integration policy. The ever-increasing presence of naturalized persons of immigrant origins in the public sphere of Germany is commonly accepted by the majority of society; Germans are however not ready yet for outsiders to hold the highest national positions. At the same time, the negative attitude of Germans to non-integrated immigrants remains stable. Despite the growing acceptance of immigrants in the public sphere, the number of people who would allow a person of foreign origin to take the post of Chancellor is still significantly lower than the number of persons excluding such an option<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the choice of Cem Özdemir as the leader of the Green Party and later the nomination of Philipp Rösler as health minister were met with a positive reaction from both politicians and citizens. A similar dualism in the approach to outsiders can be observed in the attitudes of the political parties towards the role of immigrants in their structures. While it is common to meet politicians of non-German origin at the communal and state levels, their presence at the federal and European level still remains rather insignificant<sup>5</sup>.

Despite the neutral or positive attitude of most Germans to foreigners, immigrants are still the target of attacks from radical rightist parties and organizations<sup>6</sup>. In the east of Germany, neo-Nazi groups and parties point to foreigners as the main reason for unemployment among Germans. While it is true that support for such movements nationwide is marginal (in the elections to the Bundestag of 27 September the neo-Nazi parties NPD and DVU gained 1.5% and 0.1% of the votes respectively in the whole country), representatives of the NPD sit in two state parliaments and representatives of the DVU in one state parliament. The negative attitude of Germans is felt mainly by people of immigrant origins with the lowest qualifications who perform simple manual jobs or are jobless, who do not speak German and live in hermetic societies (Turks make up a large proportion of them), and also people of different skin colour. The research, commissioned by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Office and carried out by Sinus Sociovision in 2008, revealed that 84% of Germans surveyed believe that people who cannot adjust to life in Germany should leave the country; 50% would not like to live in a block of flats with Turkish people. The scale of these attitudes was visible during the debate that swept across the German media in October 2009 and concerned the degree of the ability of Turkish people and Arabs living in Germany to integrate. The discussion was initiated by the interview given by Thilo Sarrazin, the former Social-Democratic finance minister of Berlin, now sitting on the management board of the Bundesbank. In his interview for the quarterly *Lettre International* he stated that the majority of Turks and Arabs living in Germany were unable to integrate. A survey commissioned by the weekly *Bild am Sonntag* reveals that this view is shared by 51% of Germans. The degree of acceptance of people of immigrant origins seems to grow with the level of their education and their social status – for this reason there are no controversies concerning politicians coming from immigrant families and holding prominent positions in the country. The policy of integration leading to naturalization appears to be a reflection of the attitudes and expectations of German society.

<sup>4</sup> Surveys commissioned by the German TV channel RTL from November 2008 indicate that 58% of the interviewees agree with the statement that Germany is not ready for an outsider to take the office of Chancellor.

<sup>5</sup> As of the recent elections to Bundestag (September 2009) there are only fifteen politicians with an immigrant background in the Parliament (in the previous term there were eleven), and in the European Parliament only three (in the previous term – seven). Also, differences in parties' openness to people of immigrant origins are distinct. The greatest number of people with an immigrant background are active in left-wing parties – first of all in Alliance '90/The Green Party, in The Left Party and the SPD; the fewest such cases can be noted in the Christian-Democratic CDU and CSU and in the FDP. This reflects the observed voting preferences of people of immigrant origins and the long-term approach of such parties towards foreigners.

<sup>6</sup> Emphatic examples are: the "Pro Köln" and "Pro NRW" movements active in Western Germany, who propagate combat against the Islamization of Germany; attacks on a black CDU politician in Thuringia and the anti-Polish voting campaign in Saxony organized by the local neo-Nazi NDP bodies before parliamentary elections in those states.

## Conclusions

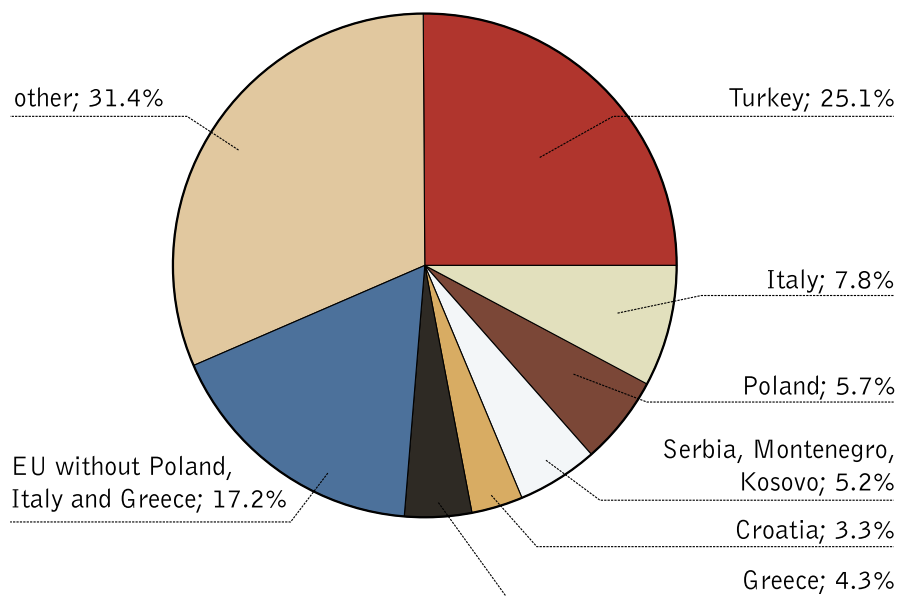
1. Economic factors, including a forecasted increase in unemployment and the unused intellectual and professional capacities of people with an immigrant background living in Germany, have led the CDU/CSU/FDP government to recognize the question of the integration of immigrant origins as one of the priority challenges of the current government. The coalition partners are seeking to improve the level of education among immigrants by using the following measures: more hours of courses in German and for knowledge about Germany, an emphasis put on linguistic education as early as in pre-school, easier access to offers of vocational training planned for young people, and simplified regulations concerning the recognition of foreign diplomas in Germany. They are also supporting the continued creation of a policy of integration in agreement with immigrant circles and are planning to introduce integration agreements between new immigrants and the German state.
2. The ongoing evolution in immigrant circles is exerting an important influence on the shift of the approach of politicians to people with an immigrant background. Representatives of the naturalized descendants of former *gastarbeiters* seem to be allies of the new line of the German policy of integration; they oppose in public debate a wrongly interpreted tolerance which is leading to parallel societies. Furthermore, the careers of representatives of the second and third generation of immigrants possessing German citizenship show that successful integration is dependent on a good command of the German language as the key to obtaining a better education and job.

The model of integration focused on naturalization and promoted by the German government seems to respond to the expectations prevalent in German society. Such circumstances increase the CDU/CSU/FDP government's chances of making changes that will be beneficial both to the German state and to people of immigrant origins (increased educational opportunities, a reduced scale of the social exclusion of foreigners).

3. The increased interest in the integration of foreigners may prove extremely beneficial for the Christian Democrats and Liberals. The circles of immigrants not possessing German citizenship form a sizable group of prospective voters. With the traditional electorates breaking down they constitute an attractive new electorate not yet linked to any party. It is above all the Christian Democrats who could benefit from the new German citizen vote as its conservative profile stands close to values declared by people with an immigrant background.
4. The unresolved issues, which the government of the Christian Democrats and the Liberals did not take into account during the development of the strategy for integration are: problems of immigrants with an undetermined status, i.e. tolerated immigrants and foreigners living in Germany illegally, and the introduction of a harmonized instrument for managing the migration of labour. The professional reintegration into the labour market of people of immigrant origins living in Germany can turn out to be insufficient in order to meet the demand. It seems that German politicians are consciously putting this issue aside, possibly fearing the reaction of society, and making the development of a long-term strategy conditional on the success of the new policy of integration.

## APPENDIX

### People of immigrant origins living in Germany, data from 31 December 2008



Source: Federal Statistical Office, register of immigrants



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