
Politics, Symbolics and Facts: Migration Policies and Family Migration from Turkey to Germany

Can M. AYBEK*

Abstract

This paper aims to combine an overview of how in the last five decades immigration policies developed in Germany with illustrations of how regulations for family migration changed in the same period. The demographic figures presented indicate that, although many political attempts have been made to restrict family migration from Turkey to Germany, the inflow of spouses and children has continued as a normal part of migration dynamics between both countries. Based on these observations, the main argument of this paper is that the political debate concerning regulating and restricting (family) migration to Germany that took place from the 1960s until the early 2000s contained important elements of symbolic politics that were predominantly used to highlight and preserve the idea that Germany was not an immigration country. After the adoption of

the Immigration Act in 2005, this idea was replaced by a perspective that acknowledged the fact of immigration, but at the same time sought to steer and limit migration and facilitate integration processes.

Keywords

Germany, Turkey, migration, Turkish immigrants, immigration policy, policy goals, family, unification, spousal migration.

Introduction¹

The immigration of close family members of both legally resident foreigners and German citizens to Germany is regulated by law. Rights concerning family life are not only protected by international human rights conventions, but in the case of Germany are contained in the codified basic rights. According to article 6.1 of the German constitution, the *Grundgesetz*, marriage and the family enjoy the special protection of the state. This rights-based perspective, however, has been contested by political initiatives taken since the

* Dr. Can M. Aybek is with the German Federal Institute for Population Research, Wiesbaden, Germany. Can Aybek was a research associate at the Universities of Bremen and Siegen and a fellow of the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences. His research interests include integration processes of second/third generation descendants of immigrants in Western Europe and North America. Dr. Aybek is an associate member of IMISCOE (European Network of Excellence of International Migration, Integration & Social Cohesion).

beginning of the labour recruitment in the 1950s, and regulations subsequently introduced to restrict family migration.²

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The paper starts off with some remarks on the nature and functions of symbolic politics. These theoretical considerations are followed by the main parts of the paper that outline major developments in German immigration policy-making

since the 1960s, with a special focus on the debate concerning how to regulate the immigration of family members of already resident immigrants. The analyses of these political and legal developments are complemented by statistical figures that shed light on how the demographic characteristics of the Turkish immigrant community in Germany changed during this period. In the last part of the paper certain findings are recapitulated and discussed with respect to the question of whether the political debates about (family) migration to Germany contained symbolic elements and, if so, how these can be described.

Defining Symbolic Politics

The concept of ‘symbolic politics’ was introduced to political science literature by Murray J. Edelman as early as the 1960s.³ Edelman was a follower of the interpretative/interactionist school of social sciences.⁴ His work focuses on the social and psychological processes that drive the behaviour of political actors who want to influence and shape public opinion. Edelman argues that political behaviour entails adopting certain roles and communicating certain ideas through the usage of rhetorical or gestural symbols. A typical example of symbolic politics is the rhetoric developed by Barack Obama and his advisors around the phrase “yes, we can” during the 2008 presidential campaign

in the U.S. Another prime example, in gestural terms, is the genuflection of the German Chancellor Willy Brandt during his visit to Poland in 1970 in remembrance of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto during the period of Nazi occupation.

Political actors use symbols in order to condense and simplify certain messages they want to communicate. According to Edelman, most political issues are too complex for the majority of the people, i.e., a full comprehension of the matters would require expert knowledge that an average person does not possess and cannot acquire. From this viewpoint democratic elections constitute rituals during which an intense use of symbolic language is made. Elections at the same time endow political actors with the legitimacy needed for their subsequent actions. Symbolic elements in politics are hence a part of the struggle for political power.

For Edelman there is a dualism in political life that consists of a theater-like stage on which political actors perform their symbolic acts and a backstage where the 'real' bargaining processes take place. Other authors contend, however, that symbolic politics is not, as Edelman implies, about deceiving the public, but is a natural part of political communication.⁵

In this paper the latter approach is adopted and a broader definition of

symbolic politics will be preferred that refers to the strategic use of a symbolic repertoire in political communication that may fulfill different functions:⁶

- Symbols may be used in order to attract attention to a specific issue by employing certain metaphors and gestures in political interaction, hence making it worthwhile for media to report about it.
- Symbols can be important in order to reduce complexity by using a certain rhetorical figure to condense and outline the most important features of a topic.
- Symbolic politics is not just about naming a certain issue and thus place them on a political agenda, but it is also about competing with other political actors on how to frame a certain issue and define its content.
- Symbolic politics addresses issues not necessarily on a rational level, but often appeals to emotions.

In the context of migration research the term 'symbolic politics' has previously been employed by Thomas Faist in his analyses on developments of the citizenship acquisition regime in Germany.⁷ He denotes that "symbolic politics can be defined as the shift of a problem from substantive policies to argumentative strategies and symbolic performances" and adds that this type of politics "is not directly concerned with

the problems to be solved, but rather often consists of simplistic arguments and vague allusions to means-end relationships in the proposed policies”.⁸

The aim in this paper is to broaden this perspective from the issue of citizenship acquisition to the political debate in Germany on immigration policy in general and the debate about the immigration of close family members – spouses and children in particular. In the following parts, therefore, the major developments in German policy-making and political debates in the area of immigration will be outlined in chronological succession.

1960-1989: Dominance of the “No-Immigration-Country” Paradigm

Labour migration to West Germany began after the mid 1950s when agreements were signed with Mediterranean countries that aimed for the import of workers to Germany. On 30 October 1961 the embassy of the Republic of Turkey in Bonn acknowledged having received the verbal note 505 – 83 SZV/3 – 92 42 issued by the Foreign Office of the German Federal Republic, in which the German side declared its interest in concluding an agreement that would regulate labour recruitment from Turkey. Responsible for coordinating the recruitment programs

on the German side were primarily the Ministry of Labour and, in a secondary sense, the Ministry of Trade. Responsible for accomplishing operative duties, i.e., the selection of workers and recruitment processes, was the German Office for Labour that opened up branches in the countries of origin of the workers and cooperated with the national institutions there.⁹

In the 1960s policies concerning accommodating the arriving workers in Germany were inconsistent and even contradictory.¹⁰ Initially, the overall goal was to facilitate foreign labour circulation, and no alternative perspectives existed on how to regulate immigration and integration. From the beginning, German immigration policy was characterized by a strong utilitarian perspective: labour from abroad was expected to contribute to the economy and had to be disposable if necessary.¹¹

The recruitment agreement between Turkey and Germany did not contain any regulation of family unification, as the maximum residence of hired workers was limited to two years. The only possibility for couples to immigrate and live together in Germany was when both of the partners were invited personally as potential employees or had both signed a contract with an employer in Germany.¹² In accordance with the idea of labour circulation, knowing German was not a necessary precondition for going to Germany as a ‘guestworker’, but being

physically in good shape and having vocational skills was. Between 1961 and 1973 the share of skilled persons within the recruited workforce from Turkey amounted to 30.9 %.¹³

In 1960, the German Ministry of Interior began to work on a draft of an Aliens' Act, intended to replace the existing regulations, which had been adapted from laws dating back to the Third Reich, the government being eager to present a new and modern legislation. The Act was passed in 1965 in the *Bundestag*, the lower parliamentary chamber in West

Germany. The final version of the law incorporated some liberal notions, but at the same time left ample room for interpretation by the administrative units

in charge. As a consequence, the main responsibility for determining the basic conditions for foreign workers, such as issuing work and residence permits, remained on the administrative level.¹⁴

Soon after the bill was passed, the ministers of interior on the *Länder* (federal states) came together and agreed upon the standards to be set in several areas, including the issue of family reunification. It became possible for spouses to join their partners in Germany, if this partner had been legally residing in Germany for already three years, his/her

employment contract was of long-term nature and he/she could provide for an appropriate accommodation.¹⁵

The Oil Crisis in 1973 led to a rise in unemployment in Germany and, subsequently, to a halt of all recruitment programs. During the 1970s, the attention of the government actors shifted mainly to the integration related problems of immigration. At the same time, several committees and coordination groups were established with the aim of 'consolidating' the number of foreigners in the country, a

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euphemistic term for avoiding new immigration.¹⁶

Even though the recruitment of new workers had been stopped, from 1973 to 1975, the number of family migrants,

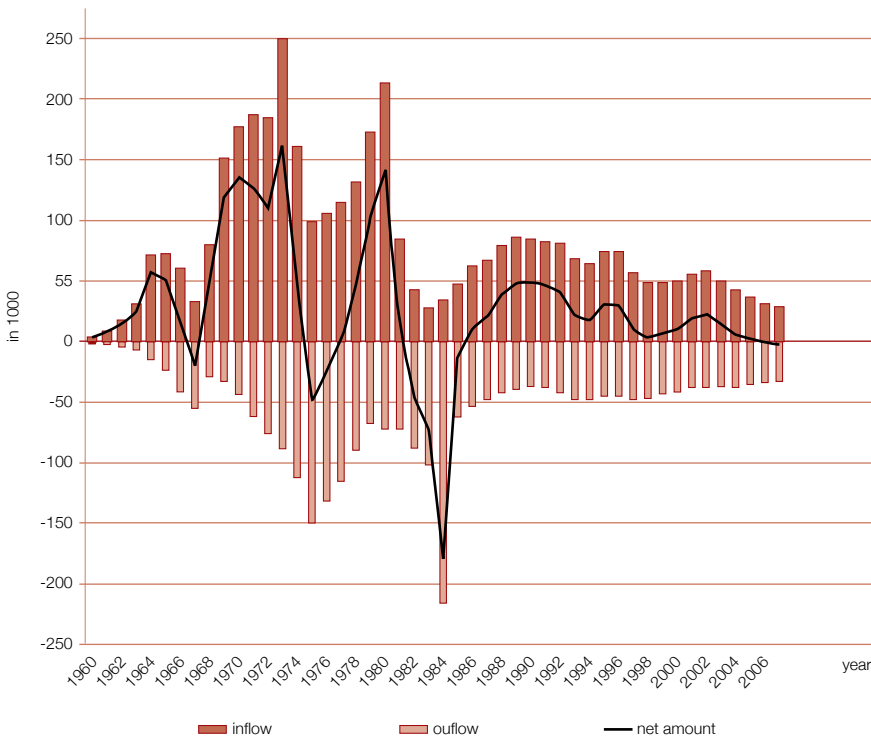
i.e., spouses and children, increased considerably and made up 31 % of the total immigration in this period.¹⁷

In 1978, for the first time in West Germany, the position of a Commissioner for the Integration of Foreign Employees and Their Family Members was created. This Commissioner, Hans Kühn, was expected to gather information on immigration and integration related issues and formulate recommendations for the government. Kühn fulfilled this duty, but maybe not quite in the way many had expected; in a memorandum

he published in 1979 he invited the decision-makers to say farewell to the idea that foreigners were living temporarily in the country and were going to return to their countries of origin soon.¹⁸ Based on this idea of permanency, he urged the decision-makers to take integration policies more seriously and made several suggestions for improving them, especially in the area of education and vocational training for immigrant youth. His recommendations

were on the federal level, however, and were not taken into account, as they had no backing in government circles. Nevertheless, on the state and local levels, immigrant families and children were clearly an issue, therefore authorities on the sub-national level adopted pragmatic approaches and, for instance, introduced educational programs in the mother tongues of immigrant children as well as counselling services in various languages.

Figure 1: In- and Outflow of Turkish Citizens to Germany (1960-2007)

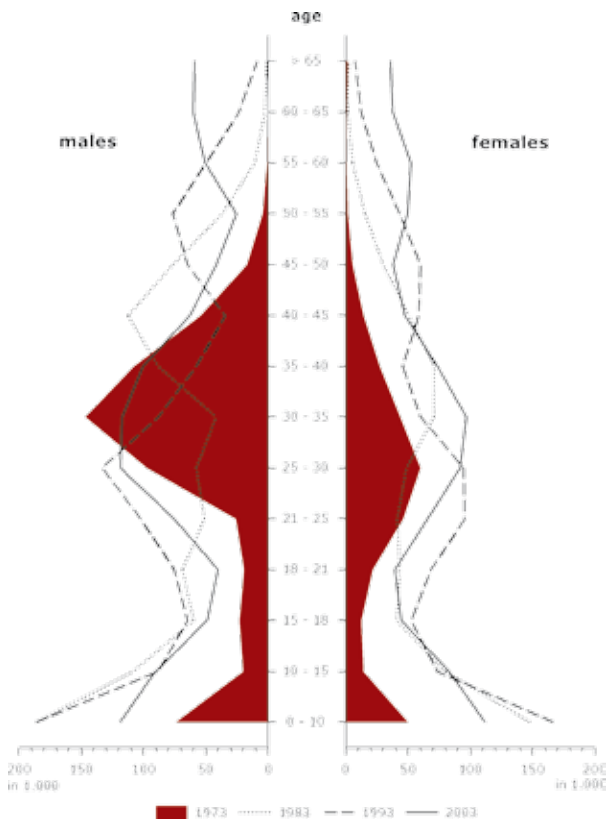


Source: Official data; Federal Statistical Office; illustration: own

The annual entry and exit figures of Turkish citizens to Germany between 1960 and 2007 (cf. figure 1) illustrate the simultaneity of movement in both directions as an important feature of migration dynamics between the two countries. It thereby underscores the fact that for some immigrants and their families immigration to Germany has been a temporary project; for others

it turned out to be a permanent one. At the same time the chart illustrates that, after the recruitment program had been stopped, the migration of family members to Germany continued – at least until the end of the 1970s – on a high level. This led, among other things, to changes in the demographic structure of the Turkish immigrant community.

Figure 2: Age and Sex Distribution of Turkish Citizen Population Living in Germany (1973, 1983, 1993, 2003)



Source: Microcensus data (weighted), Federal Statistical Office; illustration: BIB

Looking at the composition of Turkish citizens living in Germany in 1973 along the dimensions of age and sex (cf. figure 2) it becomes clear that the Turkish community consisted then mainly of individuals aged between 25 and 45. Two thirds of the population (66.4 %) was male. At this time the share of children below 15 was 17.7 %, whereas already ten years later, in 1983, this share had risen to 33.7 %.¹⁹ Also, the share of females gradually changed from 33.6 % in 1973, to 41.8 in 1983, 44.9 in 1993 and 46.2 % in 2003. In addition to the in- and outflow statistics, these figures indicate that already in the early 1980s a big part of the Turkish immigrant population had established their family life in Germany. The increased family migration during the 1970s has been seen by some experts as an unintended consequence of the halting of recruitment that had been declared in 1974, as it prevented a re-entry once individuals had returned to their home country.²⁰ In addition to that, changes in social policy might have triggered an increase, as in 1975 the federal government drastically decreased the benefits for children of immigrants who live in the country of origin in comparison with the benefits received by children resident in Germany.²¹

The political atmosphere from the beginning of the 1980s was clearly not a liberal one, but public life was marked by incidents of latent and open racism.²²

The election of a new government in 1982 led by the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) did not ease the situation for actors who were lobbying for regulations favourable to the resident immigrant population. In November 1981, i.e., already before the conservatives, took over government responsibility, a CDU politician, Heinrich Lummer, had started as Senator of Interior Affairs in West-Berlin to implement limitation of the number of additional immigrants and, among other things, had introduced more restrictive regulations for spousal migration to the state of Berlin. Before a foreigner had the right to bring his/her spouse along – he demanded – this person had to have been legally residing in Germany for at least eight years. If such a person married a foreign citizen, the couple had to wait for one year before the spouse living abroad was able to join.²³ Even though the ‘waiting period’ regulation was not adopted, the other suggestions Lummer had put forward soon were adopted also by other *Länder*.

In 1983 the new federal government introduced policies that officially pursued the goal of making a return to ‘home’ more attractive to immigrants through creating financial incentives.²⁴ As illustrated in figure 1, the return program resulted in a clear rise in numbers of Turkish citizens who left Germany. Throughout the 1980s the role of the courts as a corrective power has to

be emphasized as well, as sometimes the government was successfully hindered by the courts from introducing restrictions. Courts even established new rights for immigrants through applying equal treatment criteria.²⁵

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Symbolic politics in this time period was characterized by politicians upholding the rhetoric that Germany is not an immigration country and that therefore policies should be directed towards preventing immigration. The return program initiated in the same period added an additional dimension to the official doctrine that, beyond avoiding new immigration, a further goal was to reduce the number of resident immigrants. In terms of symbolic messages the return incentives may be interpreted from two perspectives: from the perspective of the immigrants the impression might have been created that they were basically obsolete. From the viewpoint of parts of the German population the (false) impression was created that tax money was being spent on immigrants in order to persuade them to return. In fact, only the contributions that migrants themselves had made to the pension fund were paid out, not the

employers' contributions that had been made as part of the wage. Empirical analyses have shown that the return programs affected only the timing of a move, not the intention²⁶ - in other words, those who were planning anyway to return did that earlier than envisaged.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the main political parties, the conservatives as well as the social democrats, preferred to adopt a defensive position instead of developing proactively integration programs to deal with the actual situation. As the figures presented above should have made it clear, the demographic composition of, for instance, the Turkish immigrant community had changed; family migration had taken place which ideally should have made it necessary to develop and implement policies in such areas as housing, education, vocational training and the labour market. Nevertheless, already during this period a political landscape had gradually developed in which different actors, representatives of political associations as well as welfare organizations, churches and NGOs, propagated views that challenged government policy.

1990-1997: The Accumulation of Anomalies and Strategies of Adaptation

Due to the criticism received in connection with public and political

pressures, a new law in 1990 replaced the Aliens Act of 1965. Important civil society representatives had been consulted before the bill was finalized, but all in all the debate and voting in parliament did not attract much attention, as it coincided with the turbulent period of German reunification. The Aliens Act of 1990 aimed to install, in contrast to its predecessor, a legal regime that provided more clarity in migration matters and more security for the immigrant population. A right to naturalization was established, for instance, and the rules for family migration had to be applied throughout the republic in a more standardized manner. The new Aliens Act referred explicitly to the initially mentioned constitutional article 6, putting marriage and family under state protection, but required at the same time “the sponsor [i.e., the spouse who regularly resided in Germany; C.M.A.] to fulfil certain economic conditions to have resided lawfully for eight years in the Federal territory and to be an adult”.²⁷ The law, however, was still named “Aliens” and not “Immigration Law”, which implicitly made clear the undesirable nature of immigration for German policy-makers.²⁸

In the first half of the 1990s, the breakdown of regimes in eastern and south-eastern Europe, and the fundamental social and political changes that followed, led to increased migration from those areas. For historical reasons Germany’s asylum regulations until the

end of 1992 had been more generous than the standards formulated on the European level. Due to this, the number of refugees entering Germany sharply increased in the late 1980s and early 1990s, evoking not only political debates on the federal level, but also creating serious financial burdens for authorities on both state and local levels.²⁹

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Within the same period, in addition to refugees and asylum seekers, a second strand of immigration grew in importance: ethnic Germans who had been living in Eastern Europe, partially since the time of Catherine the Great in the 18th century, sought to resettle in Germany. With rising xenophobic attitudes in the regions they inhabited, the practical opportunity to travel, and the possibility of legal immigration, between 1988 and 1993 about 1.6 million of them decided to emigrate to Germany.³⁰

German politics reacted to these developments very quickly. In December 1992 the asylum regulations

were reformulated to conform to the stricter European-level standards.³¹ As a constitutional change was required to accomplish this, heavy political debates and bargaining between the ruling conservative government and the Social Democrat opposition took place before a compromise between the parties could be reached. In addition, some of the rights that had been accorded to ethnic Germans upon their arrival were restricted. Their numbers were increasing so abruptly that in 1990 quotas were introduced that “limited [their immigration] to maximum 220,000 per year”.³² In the meantime parliamentary debates about the moral obligations the German state had with respect to the Jewish Diaspora led to the introduction of a separate quota for the immigration of Jews who had been living in the Former Soviet Republics.

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In the second half of the 1990s again the issue of limiting the number of foreign workers became part of the agenda in political debates. One appropriate way of doing this seemed to be the tightening of obligations concerning family unification. The then Federal Minister

of Internal Affairs, Manfred Kanther, introduced at the end of 1996/beginning of 1997 a new rule which stipulated that immigrant children below the age 16 from countries such Turkey, Yugoslavia, Morocco and Tunisia could enter the country only with visas. In order to obtain a visa, in turn, the inviting person in Germany had to provide the German authorities with a tenancy and health agreement as well as payslips.³³

On the level of symbolic repertoires the political debates in this period were marked by slogans such as ‘the boat is full’, ‘Germany is flooded by refugees’³⁴ and other terms implying the country had reached its capacities to accommodate immigrants and that immigrants were a social and economic burden.³⁵ Analyzing these developments some experts conclude that the heavy politicization of immigration during this period led to inconsistent outcomes:³⁶ on the one hand, with the aim of preserving the idea of being a “non-immigration” country, limitations were introduced. On the other hand, immigration regimes for specific groups were created. During the 1990s the fear of uncontrolled and unwanted immigration led to a reluctance to open the labour market even to highly skilled immigrants or workers who would serve seasonal economic purposes. In terms of acknowledging immigration realities and developing adequate policies, the period under the conservative rule of Chancellor Helmut Kohl (1982-1998) was marked

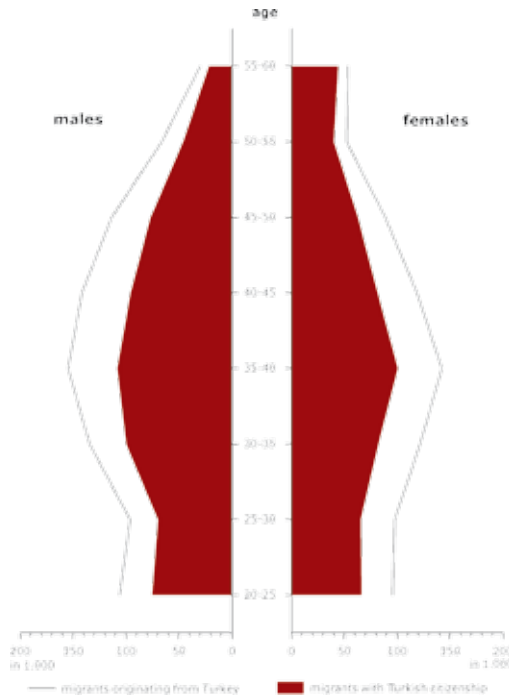
by contradictive developments such as increased international mobility as a result of political and social upheavals, and at the same time resistance on behalf of the ruling political elites and a preference for restrictive solutions.³⁷

1998 - 2007: Towards a New Framework? - Modernizing German Immigration Regulations

In the general elections of 1998 the conservatives lost and a coalition of the Social Democratic Party, SPD, and the Green Party was formed. This red-green coalition under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was eager to reform the outdated legal framework for naturalization, still based on the 1913 imperial citizenship law (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*). Earlier, in 1993, the SPD's parliamentary group had proposed a bill for such a reform and this issue was again highlighted in the coalition agreement with the Green Party. The proposed law was intended to introduce three substantial novelties: first, a *ius soli* (naturalization through birthplace) mode of citizenship acquisition; second, full acknowledgment of dual or multiple citizenship; and third, a reduced period of legal residence—from 15 to 8 years – required for immigrants to be eligible for naturalization.³⁸

Naturalization was regarded as an important step toward full integration of immigrants into German society.

The issue most contested and criticized by the conservative side in this proposal was the toleration of dual/multiple citizenship. Nevertheless, the political conditions to carry through these reforms at first seemed to be favourable, as the coalition government held a majority in both chambers of the German parliament. However, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party CSU had in the meantime initiated political campaigns against dual citizenship and were successful in the February 1999 elections that took place in the state of Hesse. As a consequence, the coalition government lost its majority in the *Bundesrat*, the upper chamber, and had to search for compromises.³⁹ This led to the regulation that a dual/multiple citizenship status through naturalization was only accepted in exceptional situations. The reform of citizenship law nevertheless brought about changes that clearly transmitted the message that Germany welcomed the naturalization of immigrants who had been living in the country for a long time. Naturalization was regarded as an important step toward full integration of immigrants into German society.

Figure 3: Turkish Citizens and Immigrants of Turkish Origin Living in Germany, 2010⁴⁰

Source: Microcensus data (weighted), Federal Statistical Office; illustration: BIB

Some of the immigrants originating from Turkey who were eligible for the acquisition of the German citizenship since the adoption of the new law applied for and received the German citizenship. As can be seen in the population pyramid (cf. figure 3), Turkish citizens represent meanwhile only a part of this immigrant community. In addition to that, many of the children born to parents of Turkish origin fulfill the requirements for German citizenship based on the *ius soli* regulations mentioned earlier. The above

figures from the German microcensus (2010) indicate that in the age groups from 20 to 55 the naturalization rate is around 30 %. This obviously has connotations to political circumstances and the perception and strategies of political actors as well, if one keeps in mind that the total population above the age of 20 with German citizenship makes up approx. 560,000 and possesses passive and active voting rights.

A different topic of political controversy in this time period was the

immigration of highly skilled persons to Germany. On the occasion of opening the IT fair CEBIT in 2000, Chancellor Schröder announced that a “Green Card Program” was going to be launched by the government with the aim of attracting specialists from all over the world, and specifically from India, to work in the expanding German IT sector. The Green Card Initiative marked a turning point in terms of moving from a generalized anti-immigration policy in favour of a more differentiated position.

Such a position also better reflected public opinion, as the re-election campaign of the CDU Prime Minister Jürgen Rüttgers in North-Rhine Westphalia made clear. Rüttgers, as a central strategy in his campaign, criticized the federal programs introduced by the red-green government that favoured controlled immigration of highly skilled IT specialists. This counter position was condensed for campaign purposes to the formula “*Kinder statt Inder*” (Children instead of Indians) implying that it is better to invest in the education of the children living in the country than to import foreign labour. The employers’ associations criticized the CDU for opposing the Green Card Initiative and hence failing to act according to

the needs of the economy. The CDU lost the elections in North-Rhine Westphalia, partly due to the positions its representatives had formulated in matters of immigration.

The CDU revised its position soon afterward, but the party’s image in terms of competence in economic matters had been harmed. To correct for this damage, in June 2001 the CDU developed a policy paper that for the first time shifted to a more moderate motto of “Steering and Limiting Immigration”.⁴¹

The joint federal committee of the CDU argued in this paper for a more coherent immigration policy that balances protecting national interests including allowing selective immigration of highly skilled workers for economic purposes, fulfilling humanitarian obligations with regard to refugees and asylum seekers, and integrating immigrants into mainstream German society.

The red-green government, in turn, signalled its wish to further solidify its expertise in the area of immigration when in September 2000 the Minister of Interior, Otto Schily, established an Independent Migration Commission chaired by the former president of the parliament

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and CDU politician Rita Süßmuth. The commission members represented a wide range of domains, including politics, employers' associations, trade unions, religious organizations, NGOs, etc., and had the task of formulating recommendations on new policies. In July 2001 it fulfilled its mission and published a report entitled 'Facilitating Migration, Fostering Integration'.⁴² In this report the commission appealed to all parties to acknowledge that Germany was an immigration country and needed not only for economic but also for demographic reasons a modern immigration framework.

The commission suggested four principal ways to satisfy the need for skilled labour:⁴³ first, a points system should be installed based on qualifications and other characteristics of immigrants, as is the case in New Zealand and Canada. Long-term residence permits would then be granted to those who met the standards, that is, who had enough points. Second, permits in specific business branches for a period of up to five years could be issued, with the option to transform the temporary status into a long-term permit through applying the criteria of the points system. Third, the commission proposed to offer students from abroad who had completed their studies in Germany the opportunity to remain in the country to start a job career. In addition to these paths for labour immigration,

the Süßmuth-Commission also set out suggestions for how to improve legal regulations by, for example, combining the employment and residence permits and reducing them to two main titles – temporary and permanent ones.

The government adopted many of these suggestions in the draft for the new Immigration Act, which was intended to be the first comprehensive law encompassing a variety of issues related to the entrance, residence, work, and integration of foreigners. The Minister of Interior, Otto Schily, had been very careful to establish a broad political support for this bill early on, when he appointed the chair and the members of the commission.⁴⁴ Preserving this cautiousness, the government refrained from incorporating a points-based immigration scheme into the bill.

Minister Schily was trying to balance the demands formulated by the junior partner of the government coalition, the Green Party, and the conservative opposition.⁴⁵ The CDU/CSU, however, maintained its critical stance toward the proposed law and urged the government to be more restrictive in the areas of asylum, family migration, and integration policies. Taking into account developments after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, Schily had introduced already security measures and tried to separate this area from immigration.

The government made concessions to reach a consensus across the political parties and in March 2002 the bill passed with a majority of just one vote in the upper chamber, but as this vote was not cast unanimously by the representatives of the state of Brandenburg the opposing parties took the matter to court.⁴⁶ The work on the Immigration Act came to a halt during the general elections in the autumn of 2002. Only after the Constitutional Court had annulled the law in January 2003 for procedural reasons did the newly formed red-green government decide to re-initiate the legislation process for the immigration bill. After a lengthy and complicated bargaining process took place mainly in working groups and high-level meetings among key politicians from the parties in government and opposition, at the end of June 2004 a compromise was reached. The compromise bill included a further tightening of asylum rules and was passed into law.⁴⁷

A new government, a grand coalition between the CDU/CSU and the SPD, was formed in November 2005, and the immigration law was amended again in July 2007 – this time coordinated by the conservative Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble – in order to incorporate EU directives into domestic legislation and introduce more restrictive rules in domains such as family reunification. New rules were put into practices that were binding on all third country

nationals⁴⁸ who wanted to apply for family unification with their partners in Germany. The most important of the newly introduced provisions required that both of the spouses be at least of the age of 18, have sufficient income and that living space be provided by the resident spouse (in the case of third country nationals residing in Germany), and as a rule that evidence be provided that the immigrating partner knows German at least at the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. In the parliamentary debates before these amendments to the existing legislation were passed, the politicians in favour of these rules argued that these conditions were (also) formulated in order to prevent forced marriages. In-depth analyses conducted on this topic lead to the conclusion that

“[t]he striking discursive focus of the government on forced marriages when legitimizing these restrictive instruments is, just as the new income requirement, [...] exemplary of a strong preoccupation with spousal migration among (Muslim) ethnic minorities, as this is the societal group commonly associated with the practice of forced marriages.”⁴⁹

The new government did not, however, rely only on regulation by law with respect to steering immigration and integration processes, but initiated under the guidance of Chancellor Angela Merkel a series of dialogues that were deemed to be necessary in a post-9/11 world. In 2006, for the first time, representatives of immigrant organizations were invited

to participate alongside mainstream German institutions in discussions of immigration regulations. They took part in an Integration Summit organized by Chancellor Merkel and the Federal Commissioner for Foreigners, Refugees and Integration, Maria Böhmer. Following the Summit, six working groups worked out a “National Integration Plan (NIP)” that was presented to the public in 2007 on the occasion of a second summit. Similarly, the Ministry of Interior organized two “German Islam conferences”, in September 2006 and in May 2007, with representatives of all federal levels and of Muslim organizations present. The principal aims were to create a dialogue between the government and Muslim organizations and to establish a single representation for the various Islamic organizations and Muslim confessional groups in Germany. The possibility to enhance the steering capacity of the government remained limited in both of the initiatives: The Integration Summits led to no binding policy goals, and in the German Islam conferences it turned out to be very difficult to create a positive dialogue because of the different interests of the government and the various participating organizations.

Through the Immigration Act of 2005 the Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees (BAFl) was changed to the Federal Office for Immigration and

Refugees (BAMF) with the function of coordinating the implementation of the new law. Among its main responsibilities are to administer the integration programs throughout the country and to inform the public about immigration- and integration- related processes.

To sum up, beginning with the government under the leadership of Chancellor Schröder the once so powerful symbolic reference condensed in the formula that “Germany is not a country of immigration” started to crumble. The red-green coalition government through the green card initiative could claim to have foresight and innovative talent. Indeed, the name ‘green card’ itself can be considered to be an example of symbolic politics, as in reality the card did not carry the generous status of a green card in the U.S., from which the term is borrowed. Instead, the German ‘green card’ differed little from the working permits already available if the demand for an expert could not be satisfied in the national labour market.⁵⁰ The political campaign of introducing a ‘green card’ is a prime example for ‘issue relabeling’,⁵¹ serving the purpose of altering the view on what a certain policy is about – in this case creating the image of a progressive government that is aware of the dynamics of the global competition for the ‘best and brightest’ and acts in favour of the national economy.⁵²

Conclusion

The main conclusion drawn from the above discussion of the political developments since the 1960s is that the debate on immigration can be divided basically into two major time periods: The first one, lasting from the 1960s until the early 2000s, on restricting migration to Germany, including temporary initiatives to decrease the number of immigrants. In terms of symbolic politics, this period is marked by a political communication that served the purpose of highlighting and preserving the idea that Germany was not a country of immigration. The second era, beginning already in 2000 with the green card initiative and the amendment of citizenship law and clearly being established through the adoption of the Immigration Act in 2005, is marked by different symbolic figures; whether or not Germany is an immigration country is not an issue anymore and this debate is replaced by a political language that acknowledges the fact of immigration, but at the same time urges effective steering and limiting of migration and integration processes. This is attempted mainly through the re-distribution of institutional responsibilities, first and foremost by a strengthened role for the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

By installing such a bureaucracy, a new kind of state centralism has been

established that in its integration policies focuses especially on the acquisition of German language knowledge.⁵³ This is combined with an eagerness by political actors to collect data, as this is perceived to be the precondition for evidence-based policy-formulation, and is presented as one of the important issues highlighted in the recent debate on integration policy-making in Germany. The Commissioner for Migration, Böhmer, for instance, declared in June 2008 that “the federal government aims for the scientific measurement of integration achievements” and presented the concept of ‘Promoting Integration - Measuring Successes - Designing Futures’ to the government, in which she announced that data in 14 different domains along 100 indicators were going to be collected to allow for better policy-making.⁵⁴

The above developments should not (yet) be interpreted as clear signs for a major change in policy orientation, but more as change of the discursive frame. The shift in frames, however, will not lead necessarily to policies that are characterized by a more liberal spirit, as has been illustrated by the new regulations concerning spousal migration, but are characterized, as indicated above, by a more centralized structure and a stronger wish of governmental actors to steer and control immigration and integration processes.

These trends - at least in terms of the debate in politics and media - seem

also to be related to the concerns about the societal integration of the second/third generation of Turkish/Muslim immigrants. The public discourse on this issue focuses regularly on specific issues, such as violent/criminal behaviour, a lack of will to perform in the educational system and labour market. Also, the marriage behaviour of the second generation is critically commented upon, pointing out the low number of interethnic marriages that are concluded within this group. Transnational marriages and family unification, in this sense, represent an immigration channel that should be controlled sufficiently by state authorities in order to prevent also the immigration of low skilled individuals and the reproduction of social structures that are detrimental to the societal integration of immigrants.⁵⁵

Looking at immigration policies in general from a more critical viewpoint some observers contend that, although there were some changes in how

governmental bodies perceive the challenges related to the integration of immigrants, the coalition of Social Democrats and Greens was not able to introduce a substantial change in matters of immigration, as there has been only a marginal opening for labour immigration.⁵⁶ The above-mentioned federal integration program with the language and civic education

Germany has been indeed moving on a track towards a new framework that can be characterized by its preference for skilled labour migration and higher benchmarks for entry and mandatory integration programs in the post-migration period.

courses can be seen plainly as “tasks that beforehand had been delegated to non-governmental organisations [and] were suddenly considered as core businesses of the state”.⁵⁷ If, however, a broader time frame is taken for analysis, as has been done

above, the sequence of events indicates that Germany has been indeed moving on a track towards a new framework that can be characterized by its preference for skilled labour migration and, in the case of not-so-skilled immigrants, higher benchmarks for entry and mandatory integration programs in the post-migration period.

Endnotes

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