

THE GERMAN TURKEY DEBATE UNDER THE GRAND COALITION

STATE OF THE DEBATE – October 2006

1. One year after the arrival of the Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD one can say that official German policy on Turkey's EU accession has not changed.

Before 1998, the coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP under Chancellor Helmut Kohl had opposed Turkey's EU aspirations. In 2004 Angela Merkel, still lobbied for her party's preference of a privileged partnership for Turkey. Since autumn 2005 Germany has been governed by a Grand Coalition of Christian Democratic Union (CDU/CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

There were some expectations that the departure of the SPD/Green coalition under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer would yet again change German policy on Turkey. So far, however, this has not happened.

There are three reasons for this:

- a. By far the most sceptical senior Christian Democrat, CSU party leader Edmund Stoiber decided at the last moment in October 2005 not to take up an influential ministry in Berlin. Thus he remained minister-president of the state of Bavaria. Stoiber has since become even more out-spoken in his opposition to Turkish accession, but he has had little influence on government policy in Berlin. Nor has Angela Merkel been willing to follow his line of turning Turkey into a populist issue before. In fact, following elections in autumn 2005 Stoiber noted at a presentation to the youth wing of the CDU that Angela Merkel had not agreed with his suggestions to conduct an emotional (i.e. polemical) election campaign against Turkish accession.
- b. Angela Merkel's position on Turkey - and on enlargement in general - has been consistent, summed up in her defence of *pacta sunt servanda*. Thus, in September 2006 she noted:

“Turkey has been promised EU accession negotiations by a former German government, and that is why these accession negotiations are now being continued. ... Negotiations are open-ended, but are being led in a fair manner. While the CDU and I personally prefer a privileged partnership of Turkey to membership, we are still reliable partners.”¹

¹ Angela Merkel on ZDF TV, 28 September 2006

“There should not be new promises on EU accession beyond the Balkans. This is a tough statement. However, we have to primarily focus on better EU integration in the face of recent enlargement rounds now... Regarding negotiations with Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Turkey, it is key the criteria are being complied with.”²

- c. The weight of the SPD has remained strong within the government, and so far there has been continuity in the SPD’s position on Turkey. Although the party had four party leaders since 2005 (Gerhard Schröder, Franz Müntefering, Matthias Platzeck and Kurt Beck) the pro-Turkish position adopted by Schröder in 1998 has remained official party policy.

In September 2006 SPD party leader Kurt Beck warned:

“It would be a capital mistake to now close the door to Turkish EU membership. Membership of a lesser quality would not be an adequate offer.”³

German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD), for a long period Schröder’s most trusted advisor, has defined government policy also as one of continuity. He argued most recently:

“Turkey has a right to fair accession negotiations... It is a key question whether Turkey, in the long run, commits itself to European values. Turkey struggles with itself, but Turkey is on the way towards Europe. .. In the long-run, an EU with, say, 30 member states remains a possibility”⁴

2. While German government policy has not changed, neither has the deep scepticism expressed in popular opinion polls dissipated. The German population remains, according to the most recent Eurobarometer surveys, among the most sceptical in Europe.

In the bi-annual *Eurobarometer* polls scepticism in Germany towards Turkey remains high. In spring 2006, 69 percent of those polled in Germany said they opposed Turkey joining the union. This put Germany on an equal level with Luxembourg and second only to Austria (81 percent opposed).⁵ Interestingly, however, German opposition to Turkish accession perspectives has *fallen* by 6 percent since the January 2006 survey.⁶

² 10th International Bertelsmann Forum, 22 September 2006

³ Stuttgarter Zeitung, 26 September 2006. Beck spoke at the Europe seminar of the SPD parliamentary faction.

⁴ Stuttgarter Zeitung, 26 September 2006; Die Welt, 30 September 2006

⁵ Attitudes Towards European Union Enlargement, Special Eurobarometer, July 2006

⁶ Standard Eurobarometer 64, German National Report, January 2006

3. Instead of debates on European history and borders, other debates – on Islam in Germany and on the position of Turkish women – have moved to the top of the German national agenda and shape public perceptions of Turkey.

Surprisingly few people had studied contemporary Turkey in Germany before 2004. As Heinz Kramer, one of the leading German experts on Turkey, pointed out to ESI, a mere handful of people in Germany today actually follow developments in Turkey closely.⁷

In Germany during the summer 2002 the debate on Turkey was dominated not by experts on the country but by prominent German *historians* (Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Heinrich-August Winkler) arguing that Turkey was a different civilisation and for that reason could not be integrated. They were both widely quoted and discussed, and dominated the public debates.

Interest in Turkey has since then increased and a number of new books have appeared in recent years (Peter Raddatz: *Die türkische Gefahr. Risiken und Chancen*, 2004; Jürgen Gottschlich: *Die Türkei auf dem Weg nach Europa. Ein Land im Aufbruch*, 2004; Claus Leggewie: *Die Türkei und Europa. Die Positionen. Juli 2004*; Bassam Tibi: *Mit dem Kopftuch nach Europa, Die Türkei auf dem Weg in die Europäische Union*, 2006; Andreas Goldberg, Dirk Halm, Faruk Sen: *Die deutschen Türken*, 2005; Dilek Zaptcioglu: *Türken und Deutsche: Nachdenken über eine Freundschaft*, 2005; Eberhard Seidel, Claudia Dantschke, Ali Yildirim: *Politik im Namen Allahs – Der Islamismus. Eine Herausforderung für Europa*; just to name a few...). Internet platforms and newsletters on Islam and summaries from the Turkish media have multiplied (www.islamedia.de, issued by Mathias Rohe at Erlangen University; www.oezdemir.de, issued by German-Turkish MEP Cem Özdemir; etc ...).

Since the start of accession negotiations with Turkey in October 2005, the German government co-organized an Integration Summit (Berlin, July 2006) and an *Islam Conference* (September 2006). Events on migration and Islam are no longer handed over to lower administration officials, but involve the chancellor, the leaders of the large parties, the interior minister and state governors.

A debate on the borders of Europe has been replaced by a much larger debate of stake holders in politics and civil society on integration, Islam and European values, and the position of Turkish women. Germans now ask: How can we make a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society work? What are universal human rights and where is there a conflict between German law and arguments for “cultural peculiarities”? What can a host society demand from immigrants, and are Turkish immigrants willing to respond?

With the beginning of accession negotiations in 2005 arguments to define the borders of Europe historically to exclude Turkey have largely ended. Instead, the public debate on (Turkish and European) values is today dominated by *women's rights activists* and discussions about the integration of migrants in Germany.

⁷ ESI Interview with Heinz Kramer, 7 July 2006. Leaving aside the correspondents of German media in Turkey he noted Udo Steinbach, Faruk Sen, Christian Rumpf and Bekim Agai.

4. The debate on Islam in Germany has reached a new stage with the start of the *Islam Conference* in September 2006, chaired by Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU).

Most people ESI interviewed stressed the importance of the position and perception of the large Turkish minority in Germany to the wider debate on Turkey.

In this respect a very important development took place recently as the *Islam Conference* was launched on 27 September in Berlin. The whole process was initiated and moderated by Wolfgang Schäuble, Minister of Interior.

It involves 30 people, 15 Muslims (of which 10 of Turkish descent) and 15 non-Muslims representing different public institutions. So-called *Kulturmuslime* (secular Muslims) are represented together with representatives of traditional Islamic organisations. Participants of Turkish origin who represent German Muslims include *Ali Kizilkaya* (Islam Council of Germany), *Mehmet Yilmaz* (Association of Islamic Cultural Centres), *Bekir Alboga* (DITIB), *Ali Ertan Toprak* (general secretary of the Alevi Community in Germany), *Necla Kelek*, *Feridun Zaimoglu* (author of "Kanak Sprak" und "Leyla"), *Seyran Ates* (Berlin lawyer), *Kenan Kolat* (Turkish Community in Germany), *Ezhar Cezairli* (Secular and Laic citizens from Muslim countries in Hessen), *Havva Yakkar* (teacher).

The objective is ambitious: to address the domestic relation between the majority population and Islam in Germany and to eventually set up an official representation for German Muslims. In the coming two years three working groups – on “German social order and consensus on values”, “Questions of Religion in a constitutional understanding” and “Economy and media as a bridge” – will address delicate issues such as headscarves in schools or mandatory attendance of swimming classes for Muslim girls. Curricula for Islamic religious education in public schools, rules for the education of imams and a debate on how to ensure that imams are familiar with Germany (and ideally speak German) will also be discussed.

The overarching goal is to define an equal status for Islam to other religions, such as Christian Churches or Judaism. The process is meant to lead to a new *Social Contract* between 3.5 million German Muslims (80 percent of whom are of Turkish origin) and the German state.

Wolfgang Schäuble defined the goal: “We want enlightened Muslims in an enlightened country.”⁸ Badr Mohammed, General Secretary of the European Centre for Integration, noted that with this conference “The Federal government has reached out to us. Now it is up to us Muslims to make something of this.”

This process launched at the highest level and widely discussed also creates opportunities for DITIB (and thus Diyanet) to play a constructive role. While the whole process is above all a domestic German debate, it offers concrete possibilities for Turkey to highlight its own efforts and successes in establishing an enlightened and European Muslim society, and how it can support this effort in Germany.

The *Islam Conference* followed the equally high-level *Integration Summit* chaired by Chancellor Merkel on 14 July 2006 in Berlin. As one member of the German government noted, this too was “an almost historic day” for Germany, as it seeks to come to terms with its multi-religious and multi-ethnic reality.⁹

⁸ Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 26 September 2006.

⁹ Sueddeutsche Zeitung, 15 July 2006.

5. Today one public debate in particular overshadows other discussions related to Turkey society and its contribution to and compatibility with European values: the debate on violence against (Turkish) women in Germany.

The immediate trigger of this new debate was a particularly spectacular and widely discussed honor killing in Berlin on 7 February 2005, the murder of Hatin Sürücü. This led to a wide debate in the media. It was pointed out that no less than 45 people had fallen victims to similar crimes in Germany since 1996. One daily noted in February 2005:

“During the last five years the number of Germans who believe that Islam is hostile and aggressive to women has multiplied by five and today stands at 93 percent. German women are especially strongly convinced about this.”¹⁰

There were debates why “so many Imams are silent”.¹¹ There were long articles in all national papers, plenary discussions organised across Germany, and demonstrations by women’s organisations across the country. The debate quickly shifted to the debate on Turkey as well. As one author noted:

“In the East of Turkey there are social structures in which individuals do not count.”¹²

Another author noted that as a result of this national debate “the Muslim, Turkish and Kurdish family appears to the German public increasingly like a criminal association.”¹³ At the heart of this perception was the role of women:

“Muslims must begin to at least discuss their antiquated image of women. It is not enough to argue that Islam does not legitimise forced marriages or honor killings. The traditional Muslim image of a woman is incompatible with gender equality.”¹⁴

Numerous books on this issue climbed up national bestseller lists. These included Serap Cileli’s *Wir sind eure Tochter, nicht eure Ehre* (We are your daughters, not your honor) which argues that many Turkish women in Germany are “educated as slaves in the middle of a free society.”¹⁵ Another book is the biography of Sonja Fatma Blaeser, *Hennamond*.

The most prominent author is Necla Kelek, following the publication of her book *Die Fremde Braut* in 2005. Berlin lawyer Seyran Ates also became very visible through her fights for women’s rights and was awarded the title “Woman of the Year 2005” by the German Female Citizen’s Association.

There are ongoing efforts to join forces to fight violence against women and exchange information and experience between Turkey and Germany: visits by Fatma Sahin (from the Grand National Assembly) to Germany in spring 2006 received good coverage. However, in this area a much larger effort needs to and can be made to present a broader image of the situation of Turkish women. Arguably, given the current debate in Germany, few other areas have the same symbolic value in terms of improving public perceptions of Turkish culture and society.

¹⁰ Die Welt, 20 February 2005.

¹¹ Die Welt, 21 February 2005.

¹² Hamburger Abendblatt, 16 September 2005.

¹³ Die Welt, 18 April 2006.

¹⁴ Zafer Senocak, 18 April 2006.

¹⁵ Hamburger Abendblatt, 8 July 2006.