

TUSIAD-US & FRIEDRICH EBERT FOUNDATION ROUNDTABLE  
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Before I start, I would like to thank Mr. Abdullah Akyuz and Almut Wieland-Karimi for bringing us together. I hope I can contribute to a deeper understanding of Islamism in a Western context and a lively discussion.

The cover of the 15 June 1992 issue of the international edition of Time magazine displayed a photograph of a mosque in the background and in the foreground an arm holding a weapon; under the photograph appeared the title: "Islam: Should the World Be Afraid?". The front page of the 20 April 1995 issue of British Daily Today was filled with a picture of a fireman cradling a bloodstained baby under the title of "In the Name of Islam". Right after September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, I remember seeing one of the survivors on TV, he had that lost impression on his face and he was saying: "I don't understand, why?" After 7 years, unfortunately we are not less confused about Islam and Islamist movements.

The Islamist movements constitute one of the biggest political challenges facing nation states both in the Middle East and especially in West Europe. In fact, the world of Islam may do more to shape and define Europe in the twenty first century than the United States, Russia, or even the European Union. Since the Iranian Revolution, public concern and the reactionary suspicions and policies throughout Europe have turned toward the increasingly visible and vocal communities of Muslim immigrants and their descendants. The non-Muslim world conceives Islam, Islamic communities and Islamist movements in a rather monolithic way. By many scholars, policy makers and different segments of society essentialised images of Islam are now taken as a kind of common-sense explanatory factor in world affairs. Without understanding the real dynamics, Islamist movements have been considered as a natural continuation of Islamic faith and treated accordingly. Therefore the study of Islam and Islamist movements is much more important today both for the public debate and the scholarly concern than it was a decade ago.

Islamism is an ideology. It is an ideology that turns traditional Islam into a sustained and systematic program that includes political, military and economic affairs. In order to understand an ideology, you have to look at the conditions under which it emerges and exists. It is not enough to look at the doctrine but you have to understand what that doctrine means for the followers of that ideology. You might know what Karl Marx says in Das Kapital but you still might not understand the dynamics of a socialist movement. That requires understanding those who believe in and the way they perceive it. This was the belief I had when I decided to go to Germany and the Netherlands in the summer of 2004 to conduct research on the Turkish Islamist movement Milli Gorus in these two countries.

Islamic Community Milli Gorus, or as it is more generally known, Milli Gorus is an Islamist organization of Turkish immigrants in Europe. The headquarters are in Cologne, Germany but it has several regional organizations in France, Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and England. Milli Gorus is the name of an ideological current which initially materialized in Turkey as a political party in 1969 when Necmettin Erbakan, the founder of the movement and its ideological inspiration formed Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party) which had an Islamist agenda. Starting from the 1970s the movement spread among the Turkish immigrant community in Western Europe.

In time, Milli Gorus became a government identified terrorist group in Germany while its Dutch counterpart became an important actor that promotes integration and peaceful coexistence between the Dutch society and the Turkish immigrant community. While the German Milli Gorus is defined as an extremist Islamist organization whose activities pose a threat to Germany's internal security by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution and is under constant surveillance by German Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Dutch Milli Gorus cooperates with the local Dutch authorities in establishing programs that promote further integration. How do we explain this difference? Both in the literature and within the policy circles, people have provided some answers to this question. The most well known is the argument that there is something inherent in Islam that makes its followers more prone to radicalism. Some others argue that it is the socio-economic background, or the motivation for immigration. If they are asylum seekers they tend to be more radical. Or may be they were already part of an Islamist organization and they simply continued their activities in Europe. Well, none of these arguments can explain the variation in this case. Both groups came to West Europe as guestworkers. They both came from similar socio-economic backgrounds and majority of them had no prior engagement with any Islamist movement before coming to Europe. What explains the different paths taken by the same Islamist movement in different national contexts?

In order to answer this question, between the years of 2004 and 2007, I conducted field research in Germany and the Netherlands. I visited 37 Milli Gorus mosques and collected 248 surveys in total and had 23 elite interviews. In the surveys, I basically asked two sets of questions: the first set of questions was designed to measure their level of social, economic and political integration. I asked questions such as "Do you think your rights and interests are protected by the Dutch/German government, do you consider Germany or the Netherlands as your home, do you follow Dutch/German politics and so on..The second set of questions was designed to measure the level of radicalism. I asked questions that would reveal their stance on democracy, women's rights, secularism, and tolerance toward other religions. The findings were quite clear and impressive in that sense, something even I did not expect to find. The Milli Gorus members in the Netherlands were much more integrated into the Dutch society economically, socially and politically and they were more moderate than their German counterparts. So I conclude that as the level of social marginalization increases so does the level of radicalism. So, in other words, the more they are excluded from the economic, political and social structure of the society, the more radical they become. This is an argument that was made by other scholars in the past but the argument has never actually been tested.

Therefore, the findings of this study are quite important especially in terms of their policy implications.

What are the policy implications? Integration is a two-way street but the findings of my research suggest that European countries ultimately have the decisive hand in the management of Islam. Their laws, rules and regulations in regards to immigration and immigrants shape the immigration experience. What are these laws and regulations? The citizenship laws and recognition of Islam as an official religion are the two most important systemic factors that determine the place of Islam and Muslims within the European public and social space. Citizenship laws affect the immigration experience at the individual level. The legal status of Islam has effects at the organizational level.

Citizenship means membership in a community; it is not just a physical belonging but a political one. The right to citizenship implies the right to vote and thus participation in a political community. Citizenship is an exclusive status. It defines the boundaries of national belonging, regulates the level of political, social and economic participation for immigrants. So citizenship laws determine the actors of public sphere, letting some actors in, leaving some out. In this respect, the immigration process and citizenship laws are important in understanding the inter-society dynamics of a given country.

In Germany, only 35 percent of those Milli Gorus members who were interviewed had German citizenship while in the Netherlands 88 percent of them were Dutch citizens. This is mainly because despite the ongoing attempts and policy initiatives by the Social Democrats, German citizenship is still defined in ethnic terms and the right to dual citizenship is limited. An important change came with the new Citizenship Law of 2000, which granted access to citizenship to second and third generation immigrants. With the introduction of this law, the principle of ethnic descent (*jus sanguinis*) was combined with the territorial principle (*jus soli*) so that children born in Germany could become German citizens. One condition was that they had chose between German nationality and their first nationality between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three since the state would not accept dual citizenship for adults.

The naturalization figures of Germany are the lowest in Western Europe. One of the reasons for the low figure is the lengthy, complicated procedure that takes on average twelve months. But the most important reason is the exclusion of dual nationality in all but exceptional cases. The majority of the respondents that were interviewed for this study mentioned that they did not want to apply for German citizenship because they did not want to give up their Turkish nationality since it would mean giving up their inheritance rights and right to buy property in Turkey. Adherence to their Turkish nationality is a practical and psychological necessity.

So the result is a group of people who has been living in Germany for more than 40 years but still lack the right to participate in the decision making process. Excluded from political participation and lacking a legitimate way to raise their concerns and frustrations, they turn to Milli Gorus. It not only provides them a positive identity, a sense of belongingness but also an alternative way for claims-making in a modern society.

In the Netherlands, on the other hand, relatively easy naturalization process, voting rights in local elections, and right to dual citizenship have provided the immigrants an environment where they can be integrated into the host society yet preserve their ethnic/religious identity. The identity-affirming multicultural policies are channeled through Dutch “pillarisation” and minority policies. 88 percent of the Milli Gorus members that I interviewed had Dutch citizenship. 78 percent said they considered the Netherlands as their home. 73 percent said that despite its problems democracy was the best system of government. They were socially, politically and economically more integrated than Milli Gorus members in Germany. I would like to read you a quote from an interview that I conducted with a 42 year old Turkish lady, a Milli Gorus member, on May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2005. When I asked her whether she followed Dutch politics she said:

“I am a Dutch citizen. Of course I follow Dutch politics more than Turkish politics. It is the decisions of the Dutch government, not Turkish, that affect my and my family’s life. I vote and I tell my Turkish friends to do the same. This is our home, this is a country that opened its arms to us and treated us as if we had always been here” (Interview with Nurdan, 22 May 2005).

So far I have talked about the effects of host country policies at the individual level. At the organizational level, the legal status of Islam plays an important role. The legal status of Islam is shaped by the relationship between the state and the religious institutions in the host country. In Germany, the state is regarded not as being laicist in the French or Dutch form, rather it is religionsneutral, meaning that it does not take a position on religious affairs. The distinction is important because in Germany the state and religious institutions are not rigidly separated. The Jewish community, the Catholic and Protestant churches all have the status of a recognized religious community which provides them with rights and privileges in important sectors of society such as education. Being recognized religious communities, they have access to public schools, hospitals and other welfare institutions. Islam, lacking this kind of status, is confined to its own borders outside the institutional structure of the host society. The institutional exclusion has two important consequences. First, it creates a sense of discrimination and thus alienation leading to social and institutional arrangements that close the Muslim immigrant community to outside intervention. Second, it leads to the intervention of the Turkish state in the religious life of the immigrant community. Excluded from participation in the democratic structure of German society, Islamic organizations’ institutionalization is unregulated. Concerned about this lack of control in the institutionalization of Islam in Germany, Turkey plays an active role in the religious organizational life of Turkish immigrants. Turkey’s presence leads to reactions from more conservative segments of the immigrant community resulting in their joining to movements that are not in line with Turkish Islam.

The Netherlands, on the other hand, adopted the principle of strict separation between church and the state. The Dutch state is considered to have equal distance to all religions including Islam, which satisfies the sense of justice and equality on the part of the Muslim organizations. The traditional Dutch “pillarization system” grants all religions

the right to establish their own institutions including schools, creating a social space for Islam to institutionalize under democratic norms. The Dutch government's active involvement in the institutionalization process of Islam and the existence of formal and informal channels of communication between the government and the Islamic organizations abolish Turkish state's incentives for intervening in the religious life of immigrants. This creates more locally oriented Islamic organizations that function as a bridge between the immigrant and the host society.

Laws, rules and regulations of host countries do more than just organizing the public life of immigrants. By defining members and non-members of the political community and the nature of the relationship between them, they not only determine who gets what but also who is what. They shape perceptions and identities and thus the destinies of generations of immigrants and their own communities.

In May 2006, I had an interview with Oguz Ucuncu, who is the secretary general of Milli Gorus in Germany. I went to his office in Cologne. I was carrying the November 2005 issue of the Milli Gorus Perspektiv, which is the official monthly journal of Milli Gorus. On the front page it displayed the picture of the Muslim immigrants burning down cars in Paris. I asked him: "What do they want? What do you want?" He said "They want to exist, so do we!"

They want to exist politically, economically, socially; they want to exist on equal terms. This can be achieved through easier naturalization processes, granting dual citizenship rights, allowing Islam to enter public schools and be taught by Muslim teachers, providing them legitimate ways of expressing their frustrations and letting them be part of the society that they have been living in more than four decades.

Especially after the murder of Theo Van Gogh, scholars, policy-makers, human rights activists have been talking about the death of multi-culturalism. The findings of my research, however, are giving me hope to believe that we can actually coexist peacefully, we just have to try harder..

