

40

years in Germany

# At home abroad

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When the Federal Government decided to cover Germany's shortage of labor with foreign workers after the war, Germany first signed an agreement with Italy in 1955, to bring in workers. This was followed by an agreement with Spain and Greece in 1960. But even these efforts to make up for the deficit in the labor supply were insufficient. So shortly afterwards Germany made further agreements with Turkey in 1961, Morocco in 1963 (limited to the coal-mining industry), Portugal in 1964, Tunisia in 1965 and finally with Yugoslavia in 1968.

In 1961 when Germany and Turkey discussed bringing in workers to work in the Federal Republic, the number of unemployed people in

**"Most of them  
will begin a new life  
in Germany,  
they will strike roots and  
visit their home countries  
only as guests."**

*Theodor Marquard  
Director of the German Liaison Office  
Istanbul,  
1966*

Germany was 94, 856 whereas the number of vacant jobs was 572,758. At the beginning of the German-Turkish negotiations, German bureaucrats were quite reserved towards the Turkish proposal to send workers to Germany, because in their eyes Muslim Turkey was comparable only with Arab

countries, although Turkey had a secular state. Nevertheless, the Turkish government showed particular determination and played all its trumps, most notably Turkey's membership in NATO and the agreement Bonn reached with Greece just the previous year. These were the reasons that mostly account for the opening of Germany's gates to Turks. Other events or facts like the construction of the Berlin Wall or the Turkish-German comradeship-in-arms did not figure much during the negotiations.

The Turkish government had its own reasons in wanting to sign such an agreement. First and foremost, Ankara wanted to ease the pressure of the high rate of unemployment in

Turkey. Moreover, by officially regulating the process, they sought to control and systematically deal with the recruitment of Turkish workers by German companies, that had already begun. The Turkish government also needed and counted on the foreign exchange that the workers would send home to their families for its current account balance. Beyond the foreign currency calculations the authorities had high expectations of the long-term advantage to the Turkish industry of the experience and the acquired technical knowledge the workers would bring back when they returned home.

Several German Ministries like the Federal Labor Office, the Federal Ministry for Labor and Social Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior and the Economy Ministry worked together to draft the details of the recruitment agreement. Based on the available documentation and the content of the agreement itself one can safely suggest that the Turkish government remained passive and its input on the final text was minimal. These talks resulted in the "verbal note" of October 30, 1961 which included the following three points that reflected German preferences:

1. The workers' permits could be prolonged only for three years and the labor and residence permits were limited to two years. This regulation suited the Turkish goal of benefiting Turkish industry with a well-trained work force that would be returning from Germany.

2. The medical examination at the Istanbul Liaison Office would be conducted not only to determine the suitability of the workers for their destined work place, but also to

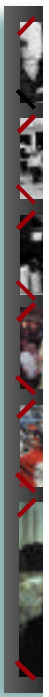
protect the German population from epidemics.

3. The possibility of family reunion for foreign workers which was included in the agreements that other countries signed was conspicuously absent from the agreement with Turkey. This was done in order to prevent long-term stays and immigration. It was stressed that Turkish officials agreed with this position.

This "verbal note" between Turkey and Germany, which regulated the recruitment of workers, took effect retroactively on September 1, 1961 and was made public only in February 1962 when it was included in the official report of the German Federal Labor Office. The date of publication of the "verbal note" in Turkey is unknown. Compared to the agreements between Germany and Italy, Spain or Greece, the agreement between Germany and Turkey is a second class agreement. Notably, the agreements between Germany and Morocco or Tunisia that came in the wake of the one with Turkey are similarly less advantageous to the workers. The agreement with Turkey was improved thanks to the efforts of a few assertive Turkish bureaucrats and diplomats on September 1964 by adding several positive changes like fairer application of family allowance.

#### **The invitation and the presentation**

A body named the German Liaison Office, comparable to the German Commission - that operated under the authority of the Federal Labor Office - that was set up in other labor exporting nations, started to work on the premises of the Turkish Labor Exchange in Istanbul on July



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nor content,  
and Germany  
became  
a land of  
immigrants  
against its will.

1961. These two authorities were responsible for the "selection and transfer" of the workforce needed by the German industry. This jointly administered task continued till the recruitment of foreign workers was terminated in 1973 in the wake of the world oil crisis.

This is how the process of recruitment from Turkey worked:

- a) The employer in Germany passed the information about the profession and the quantity of

workers needed on to the local work offices. They forwarded these requirements to the central Federal Work Office. Such requests were collected and conveyed to the Liaison Office in Istanbul.

b) The Turkish Labor Exchange received the requests from the Liaison Office and passed them on to all of its branch offices in Turkey. That way the men and women who had already applied for a job in Germany could undergo a first selection, medical checkups and other formalities. Afterwards they received an "invitation" to "present" themselves to the German Liaison Office. From then on their fate was in the hands of the officials and doctors in the Liaison Office.

c) In Istanbul the candidates' professional skills were tested by a practical examination and they underwent a thorough health check from head to toe. Most of the people who "presented" themselves failed their physicals and left the Liaison Office to go back home again or to be trapped by the so-called "human traders". Those who were lucky received a "labor contract", were given a picnic box and were sent on an arduous journey of 50-55 hours to Munich from the Sirkeci train station.

Between 1961 and 1973, 910,500 workers arrived in Germany from Turkey. About 200,000 of them came through the so-called "second way", i.e. having been recruited by German employers who asked for them by name. Compared with other labor exporting nations Turkey sent the highest proportion of skilled workers to Germany as 30 percent of all recruits were skilled. Furthermore, 20 percent of the recruits were women.

#### Labor force - Isolation - Money

The people who arrived in Germany were sent by the Redirection Office in Munich to their places of work. They were now "guest-workers". Like other guest workers they worked in the construction industry, in the iron,

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steel and metal industry, in the mining industry, in brickfields, in the processing of synthetic material and asbestos, in the automobile and textile industry. Their places of work were noisy, hot and foul-smelling locations and the work conditions were very tough. They needed to save a large amount of money in a short period of time. This was only

possible through diligence and by working overtime. At their places of work power was concentrated on the foremen but more so on the interpreters. The consulates were also frequently contacted. The Turks worked so hard that they disturbed the carefully built balances at the workplace and risked being alienated from their fellow workers and their unions. The phrase "Do not drag the name of Turks through the mud!" and the threats that the agreement could be cancelled which meant expulsion from Germany hung above their heads like Damocles' sword. As a result, of all the "guest-workers" they were the ones who got the highest praises from their bosses.

Their accommodations were the hostels arranged by the employers. Germany already had a housing shortage and for the newly arriving foreign workers the government offered quickly improvised and temporary solutions. In addition to apartment buildings ; dormitories, barracks, old buildings, attics, basement flats or storerooms were also turned into lodgings. The hostels needed to have 6 m<sup>2</sup> of space per person, a table, a chair and a bed per person, all these in a room arranged for about four workers. Despite the existence of strict European standards and regulations, the quality of the worker hostels depended on the good will of the employers themselves. Although inspections were regularly carried out by labor offices, a survey in 1971 - ten years after the first workers from Turkey arrived- gave the following results: 10 percent of the worker hostels in North Rhine-Westphalia were uninhabitable, 25 percent consisted of barracks, 46 percent did not provide the needed space per

person, 52 percent of the hostels were erected on factory grounds and 16 percent of them were fenced in with barbed wire. 40 percent of the hostels in Hamburg were substandard. On average 20 persons shared one shower and 10 persons shared one toilette.

The toilets did not meet the religious and traditional habits of the Turks. A considerable part of the workers had difficulties in using them. They tried to use the toilets as they were accustomed to back at home. This did not work and consequently problems surfaced. The Germans tried to demonstrate the "right and hygienically safe way" of using toilets by providing humiliating drawings. Renowned professors were consulted about the issue. They gave instructions on how to use toilet paper. Except for a few employers they did not suspect that other Mediterranean countries, members of the EU, also utilized such toilets. It was difficult to accept that other cultures had other hygienic habits.

Not speaking the language was one of their most significant handicaps. Communication was therefore a problem not only at work but also in all matters of daily life. Among most of the "guest-workers" this resulted in psychological disorders. Neither the German nor the Turkish side thought through the human aspects of this migration. Quite a few firms and social service organizations offered language courses but this could not be expected to deliver the expected results. For after working very hard it was almost impossible to participate in a language course. Moreover since these people just came to work and earn money, most of them were unmotivated, uneducated and just did not have the



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time to learn a foreign language.

Carrying out one's religious duties in a thoroughly Christian country proved to be an almost insurmountable challenge. Again, only a few big companies supplied prayer corners in their worker hostels or factories. In particular, fasting during Ramadan and sacrificing animals during the feast of sacrifice caused serious problems. For the first time in living memory German society was encountering Islam through the Turks. Historically embedded prejudices kept the society from acknowledging and accepting this religion. However, in a country where everything was foreign, religion was a means to protect cultural identities. Food was also a serious problem until the German supermarkets took note of the demand and ordered Mediterranean fruits and vegetables and until the first Turkish groceries opened in the 1970s. Pork was avoided, veal was expensive and lamb was not available. As a result of being uninformed and with the desire to save more money they had an unbalanced diet.

They had been offered an isolated life, apart from German society. The relatives could only be visited once a year, during the annual holidays. WDR Radio Cologne did not start broadcasting in Turkish till 1964, which meant no news from home until then. Turkish papers started their German editions in 1969-1970. Some specialists -although there is no scientific study on this topic- suggest that Turkish workers spent 8 to 10 years of their lives on average away from their families. All of these exertions led to additional problems for family members in both countries and even to lasting illnesses.

### Towards permanence

The two year contract got extended. Contrary to the general belief this extension was sought not by the Turks but by the Germans. A letter from the Federal German Employers' Association on 12.12.1962 stressed the disadvantages of the rotation principle and reiterated their "satisfaction with the Turkish workers". With this note the gates of permanence and along with it the process of becoming migrants opened. The people from Turkey made money in a country which did not want them; they became migrants despite their intentions in a land where they were neither happy nor content, and Germany became a land of immigrants against its will.

Every year the return was postponed once again. As the German government decided to stop bringing in new workers in 1973 a state of restlessness began. Although some of the "guest-workers" had already brought in their families, a considerable part of the family members, mainly children, still lived in Turkey. The new regulation on family allowance, which came into effect in 1975, provided less money for the children in Turkey. The economic situation in Turkey was not attractive for a return. Moreover, the investments of the "workers' corporations" turned out to be unprofitable, and the majority of them went broke. Another important factor was the increasingly violent political conflict between the leftist and rightist groups in Turkey. As if prearranged, from 1975 on the migration for 'family reunification' from Turkey increased. Following the military putsch of 1980 political refugees and Kurds also joined this migratory movement. It should also



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be mentioned that between 1974 and 1983 1,150,000 persons came to Germany from Turkey and 986,000 left to return.

The Turkish workers started to move from hostels into their own homes. The houses were mainly furnished with furniture collected from all sorts of places. The predominant thought in the back of their minds was to 'bear with this life for few more years and then return'. Generally, in the 1980s only 10 percent still lived in the hostels whereas 80 percent lived in apartment buildings. In those years the number of housing loan accounts rapidly increased. The use of advanced technology, restructuring and the closing of mines in Germany resulted in increasing unemployment. The social problems that women and children brought along with them increased the hostility towards foreigners. When in November 1983 the "return support law" came into force the political climate almost favored expulsion. In the media this was presented as a profitable way to cash in on the return and as a result 156,000 workers gave up their rights in Germany and returned to Turkey. Only 13,000 of them could get the financial supports promised to the returnees. The remaining 143,000 left their annuity payment premiums and other social rights in Germany.

The second generation, also called "black headed" or "Kanacken", began to draw attention in the schools. Like their parents this generation was caught between two cultures. In addition to the problems of language, adaptation and discrimination, the second generation was also deprived of education and support from their own families. As a result their achievements were

modest. Most of them could not enroll in higher education. Only a few of them could finish their professional training. For instance: in 1991 just about 1,8 million migrants from Turkey lived in Germany, 138,000 of them were between the ages of 18-21. The number of university students -including the students who came from Turkey to study in Germany- was around 14,500. This corresponded only to 10 percent of the university age population and there was no noticeable rise in the following years.

The discussion on the new "law of foreigners" in 1991 and the "law of asylum" in 1992 again turned the attention of the general public towards the foreigners. Xenophobic discourse started to rise. Then, in November 1992 three Turkish people were killed in Möln and shortly thereafter, in May 1993, five people in Solingen were killed in arson attacks by the neo-Nazis. These horrible incidents caused a shock wave among the Turkish population. They lived in fear and panic for a long time.

#### 40 years later

The number of people who came from Turkey has reached 2.5 millions. According to the latest information, 470,000 of them obtained German citizenship. Of all the foreigners in Germany, some 7,319,000 persons or 9 percent of the German population, 28,5 percent are migrants from the Republic of Turkey. 40 years ago they came as workers from Turkey -mostly as a homogenous group- and now they are present in all parts of German society. Their social status has changed: from worker to self-employed to employer. Today they

constitute a heterogeneous society. In 1997 Turkish employers created 47,000 jobs in Germany -this number rises by the day. The workers' associations of the past and the political associations, which lost power, are replaced by citizen, sports and professional associations. The religious associations have the highest number of members and command the greatest financial resources. There are approximately 2,200 mosques and praying houses in Germany. The people build a Turkey-based world of their own with their press, television stations, mosques, discotheques and the rest. The rate of unemployment among Turkish people is 21.7 percent whereas the rate of unemployment among all foreigners in Germany is much lower. In the first place, young people are without work. The results of a survey conducted in 1998 show that 8 percent of the German youngsters, 33 percent of all foreign youth and 40 percent of the Turkish origin youth do not even start vocational training. In 1999 the number of Turkish origin pupils in Germany was 503,000. About 91,000 of them attended trade schools. 194,000 of them attended kindergarten and primary schools. While 22,400 pupils attended grammar schools, more than 25,500 pupils enrolled in special schools (for the handicapped). The number of children who attended intermediate schools, where the pupils have no chance to gain a higher education, reached 85,000. The remaining pupils enrolled in secondary schools and comprehensive schools. Furthermore, 19,000 studied in the same year at a university.

The ones who earn little money, who are unemployed or depend on

social security - as Germans from the same class- live in poorer quarters. At this point sociologists talk about "ghettoization" and "parallel societies". In the year 2000 143,000 Turkish migrants over 60 years of age lived in Germany. The first generation has retired but they can not receive the same benefits that a German pensioner receives. Despite the inexperience and the futile investments of the first generation up to 1980, the second generation could not even reach their standard of living. The social structure of the families, where the habit of fetching brides and bridegrooms from Turkey grew in the last decade, presents a further problem. The prospect of success for the children of such families -the third generation- remains low and the standard of life they may attain is likely to be below the average of the living standard of the last 40 years.

The Turkish migrants cannot participate in German political life. They are not even allowed to join in the local elections. The efficiency of the integration project that has been carried out for years remains doubtful as hostility becomes part of everyday life. At the same time, the presence of successful businessmen with high annual incomes is felt in some areas. Successful examples can also be mentioned in culture, arts and sports. The number of those who obtain German citizenship and who join politics, rises as well as the number of investments, purchases of apartments and houses in Germany. In short, forty years on the Turks built a society in Germany. In fact they built a home abroad.

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