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## **RECONSIDERING TRANSNATIONALISM AND INTEGRATION: THE ROLE OF NEW WAVE TURKISH TRANSMIGRANTS IN GERMANY<sup>1</sup>**

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As countries gradually become more integrated worldwide in terms of economic planning, market conditions and social mobilisation, national borders lose their old meanings even if they do not lose their significance. On the other hand, partnerships like the United Nations or European Union continue to play important roles in organising mobility among countries. However, either by the EU or semi-autonomous provisions of European countries, new decisions now shape the future of Europe. One of these decisions is related to the ways in which governments approach minority issues and migration processes. In other words, the future prospects of Europe are highly linked with countries' handling of immigration.

Additionally, a new perspective emerged to describe the back and forth movements of migrants. With globalisation, the idea of *transnationalism* provided migration studies with a new perspective which posits that the mobilisation of people now has different meanings than moving from one place to another. In other words, the previous definitions on migration are not sufficient anymore.<sup>2</sup> The transnational perspective emphasizes the interlinkage of different countries in terms of culture and social life. Accordingly, the diplomatic relations between countries are dominantly influenced by transnational bonds of migrants. However, it is still uncertain whether the dual belongings of transmigrants would give way to an integration continuum or, on the contrary, would impede the process. Following that concern, this essay focuses on the case of the Turkish diaspora who settled in Germany from the 1960s onwards and the new wave of Turkish migrants that have come to

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<sup>1</sup> For an ongoing research project, I conducted in-depth interviews with young professionals, academics and graduate students from Turkey about their motivations and reasons for leaving their country and settling down in Berlin, as well as their current conditions and thoughts about being a person from Turkey with ambitions to make a life in Germany or in Europe. Although that data will not appear as quotations here, I would like to remark that the ideas in this paper are shaped through that current research.

<sup>2</sup> Schiller, N. G., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 645(1), 1–24.



Germany in the past few years to consider the potential influence of transnationalism on the integration processes of migrant populations.

While speaking of migration in Germany, it is not only something to deal with; it is also an outcome of socioeconomic needs. After the Second World War, the country was in need of an economic boost. Thus, Germany encouraged industrialisation and recruited labour from other countries. As during the postwar era, Germany now needs to expand its labour force to fulfil its economic growth aspirations. But unlike in previous times, the current need is for skilled labour and young professionals in the field of technology, more specifically, software development. In this manner, Germany tries to manage the process and to decide to what extent it will open the door to foreign, skilled labour.

The relationship between Germany and Turkey has always been strongly related to transmigrants. However, as mentioned above, the present day Turkish population in Germany is not only comprised of *Gastarbeiter* (*guest workers*). Currently, a diverse group of people are arriving in German cities, predominantly to Berlin. And this new wave of immigrants from Turkey now represents a recent sociopolitical dilemma which is inevitably an issue for German-Turkish relations as well.<sup>3</sup> This skilled and young generation has basically escaped from Turkey for sociopolitical reasons and constitutes an important part of Berlin's future and Germany's political position in respect to transnational bonds. The debates on integration of the previously migrated Turkish population have an overlong history that I will not discuss here. However, the potential integration of the new wave of transmigrants from Turkey is still a quite new topic without much discussion. My question in this essay is whether this new wave of immigrants could act as intermediaries between the Turkish diaspora and the German population or not. In other words, could the long-discussed integration issue find a solution with the new transmigrants? To answer this question, two dimensions are significant. First, to remark on the historical background of Germany in terms of foreign population and migration, and second, to understand the motivations, expectations and ambitions of new wave Turkish transmigrants.

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<sup>3</sup> Since the data from the aforementioned research project comes out of qualitative research with currently about twenty-five people (still conducting), the examples definitely do not represent the whole new wave of immigrants from Turkey nor are applicable to make generalisations about the group. They are used only to provide insight about the experiences of some Turkish immigrants in Berlin. The aim is not to make definitive conclusions about new migration processes but to better understand the reflections of transnationalism.



In 2018, Germany was among the top twenty countries in terms of GDP per capita with 50,842 dollars.<sup>4</sup> This is a significant figure in consideration of the recovery during the postwar period. By intensifying industrialisation through an expanded migrant labour force coming from countries like Turkey, Greece and Italy, Germany rebuilt its economy and re-established its sociopolitical stability. While the economy of Germany gradually grew and the country gained political power in the international arena, its capital city remained buried in the wreckage of the National Socialist past. There was a need to develop and even reconstruct Berlin as an outstanding socioeconomic centre of Europe. However, Berlin was not industrialised like the Ruhr in the west, Munich in the south or Hanover, Salzgitter in the regional centre.<sup>5</sup> In time, Berlin has followed a different path and started to become a centre for informatics, technology and scientific knowledge. Today, it aims to play a leading role in the information technology (IT) marketplace. For this reason, Germany once again demands labour to generate employment in the IT sector. Scientific research is another important aspect of Berlin's cultural position in both Germany and Europe. According to the Berlin Partner for Business and Technology, "four universities and the Charité- Universitätsmedizin Berlin, seven universities of applied sciences, four arts academies and over 30 private universities make Berlin one of the largest hubs for the sciences in Europe."<sup>6</sup> To elevate Berlin as a centre for information and science while integrating it into a globalised system, it was first necessary to bring a skilled labour force into the city. To achieve this, Germany opened up borders for foreign, skilled young professionals and academics in the IT sector, applied sciences and social sciences. In addition to the skilled labour migration, Berlin increasingly became a place that attracted migrants for various other reasons as well, and in 2016, 628,000 foreigners had been registered as living in Berlin, of which, 55,000 had arrived during that year.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, 18.4% of the population in Berlin was born outside Germany, mostly coming from Turkey, Poland and Syria.<sup>8</sup> In view of these statistics, it is in no way an exaggeration to describe Berlin as a uniquely international and multicultural centre. It follows to ask:

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<sup>4</sup> According to the source [International Monetary Fund World Economic Outlook \(April - 2018\)](https://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-capita-ranking.php) Retrieved from <https://statisticstimes.com/economy/projected-world-gdp-capita-ranking.php> on 10.12.2018

<sup>5</sup> For more information see <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Europe/Germany-INDUSTRY.html>

<sup>6</sup> The brochure of *Berlin Partner für Wirtschaft und Technologie* can be found in PDF format at:

[https://www.berlin-partner.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/01\\_chefredaktion/02\\_pdf/publikationen/Wissenschaftsstandort-Berlin\\_en.pdf](https://www.berlin-partner.de/fileadmin/user_upload/01_chefredaktion/02_pdf/publikationen/Wissenschaftsstandort-Berlin_en.pdf) For more information, see <https://braincity.berlin/en/>

<sup>7</sup> The statistics are from the data of *Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg* 2017, giving the information of 2016.

<sup>8</sup> The information was found on the website of *Berlin Partner für Wirtschaft und Technologie* based on the statistical data of *Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg* 2017.



What are the implications of Berlin's position as a transnational setting on Turkey's European integration? This is not to say that by welcoming skilled, foreign professionals, Germany is taking the initiative in Turkey's integration process. The debate over the integration of Turkey in Europe involves many other issues and unresolved problems than this paper aims to present. This paper seeks instead to understand how Berlin functions as a site of transnational migration, as it seems important to acknowledge that German-Turkish relations have always been and still are largely built upon the mobility of people.

On the other side of the coin, there is a new wave of transmigrants. In recent years, Turkey's sociopolitical conjuncture has not only affected the social order in Turkey but also that of European countries as host lands of increasing numbers of people with Turkish origin fleeing political conflicts and social polarisation at home. Turkey is experiencing an insecure social environment that commenced with increasing divides among people with divergent lifestyles<sup>9</sup> and worsened through growing anxieties stemming from terror attacks in 2015 and 2016. After further events that fed fears and anxieties among people in Turkey, an economic crisis broke out in 2018. In addition, sociopolitical polarisation has increased tremendously, marking a sharper distinction between the AKP supporters<sup>10</sup> and the others. The disconnection among social groups has also been increased in terms of culture, lifestyle, religion and so on.

Following these events, Turkey increasingly became a blind alley, particularly for young people.<sup>11</sup> Migration has accelerated as a result,<sup>12</sup> leading to a dangerous brain drain in Turkish society.<sup>13</sup> In the last two years, this issue has become a broader topic of public discussion beyond academia. In 2016, Gülse Birsal, a Turkish actress, scenarist and columnist wrote a newspaper article that pointedly questioned Turkish politicians: Do you realise how many people see their future abroad? Do you know how many parents with fear [are] making plans to send their children abroad for their education? Do you know how many valuable people living or studying abroad refuse to return here

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<sup>9</sup> During the Gezi Park movement in 2013, current president of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a speech and said that they have a large group of supporters which is composed of 50% of Turkish society and also claimed that this group strongly opposed the Gezi movement.

<sup>10</sup> As mentioned in the previous note as well, society has been divided according to their support or opposition to the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and more specifically to the Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

<sup>11</sup> Currently, large scale quantitative research on this issue is not available to make generalisations, but in the micro level analysis of my ongoing research, these main issues appear as reasons for leaving Turkey.

<sup>12</sup> I describe the current flow of emigration of young and skilled professionals and academics from Turkey as a new wave of exodus.

<sup>13</sup> Kara, G., & Yörükoğlu, C. (2017). "Almanya'da Yaşayan Yüksek Nitelikli Türk Göçmenler-Beyin Göçünün



even for good offers?<sup>14</sup> Therefore, people who choose to leave Turkey have an apparent escape from an insecure and restrictive public arena, which is very important to keep in mind in order to understand their presence in Germany.

In this paper, I asked if transnationalism will be a positive outcome for the inclusion of the Turkish diaspora in Germany. Considering the political polarisation of society in Turkey, new wave Turkish transmigrants are likely to have biases about conservative, traditional Turkish groups and communities in Germany. As these two groups are not very much engaged in Turkey, they are socially distant and disconnected. Although, I do not claim that the generations of guest workers and newcomers are completely polarised, I argue that their disconnection prevents any possibility of being close and together.<sup>15</sup> Aside from the effects of polarisation, the new wave transmigrants, as skilled professionals, academics and graduate students, enjoy considerable mobility among Western countries, which appears to preclude their own integration. And if they are not willing to integrate into German society because of their international mobility, how can we expect them to be mediators for the integration processes of anyone else? In short, the fluidity of their movements and miscellaneous ambitions decrease their likelihood of integration.

To sum up, the future of European countries, and more specifically, Germany, is highly influenced by transnational migration. In the case of Germany, Turkish diaspora still has an important role in defining the migration agenda of the country. However, the Turkish population is not only composed of guest workers and their families anymore as a result of the collective migration of skilled labourers in the last five to six years seeking a kind of escape from the insecure environment in Turkey. I question whether it is possible to consider this new group as a potential actor in the integration process of the Turkish diaspora. The question is highly relevant because of the long standing debates on the integration of the Turkish population in Germany. However, in light of some of the preliminary findings, it is very unlikely that they would be more than a intermediary in Germany due to reflections of the social polarisation in Turkey and the positioning of this new wave. Germany's agenda on inclusion should be to better understand identity and community constructions, and urban practices, while Turkey should reconsider the current polarisation in the

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/gulse-birsel/insanlar-neden-korkuyor-40265748> for the original version.

<sup>15</sup> In the aforementioned research, twenty-two interview partners out of twenty-five mentioned that they have either little or no connection with the previously settled Turkish population. On the other hand, the same research revealed that all interview partners have strong ties with other newcomer Turkish people and even they all have closest friends from Turkey –either from their university or as friends of friends.

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sociopolitical arena and its negative impacts on the economy and international standing. I intentionally chose this topic to rethink German-Turkish relations from a current perspective, as I believe that discussions on the Turkish diaspora without consideration of the newcomers would be outdated. Moreover, this topic is directly linked with Turkey's European integration – though not necessarily through official membership in the EU as such – because this new wave of skilled labour has the potential to be a future actor in relations between the EU and Turkey even if they do not function as a mediator for integration processes today.

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