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## Immigrants in Foreign Policy Making in Germany and the U.S.: Two Very Different Struggles to Embrace Diversity<sup>1</sup>

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How do differences in the German and American political systems influence immigrants' political participation?

How does the national self-conception differ in the two countries?

In a globalized world, domestic politics no longer stop at the water's edge, as transnational actors have emerged who push beyond existing borders. Some are driven by hybrid identities that reach beyond the contours of the nation-state. These ethnic interest groups represent immigrants and pursue a particular interest in foreign policy toward their country of origin. Both the United States and Germany struggle to embrace this ethnic diversity in foreign policy making, but in very different ways and to very different degrees.

In this essay, I will analyze the differences between the participation of immigrants in foreign policy making in the U.S. and in Germany and the reasons behind them: How and why does participation differ between the U.S. and Germany? I argue that political space for immigrants is defined by the political system, the national self-conception, societal attitudes toward immigration, and participation resources. These factors do not only affect political integration in general, but the foreign policy realm in particular.

### **Different Political Actors and Labels**

In the United States, immigrant participation is a regular element of the foreign policy process. Cuban-Americans, be they members of Congress, lobbyists, or simply voters, voice their interests with regard to Cuba; Taiwanese-Americans promote U.S. cooperation with Taiwan; and Jewish American voices play a prominent role in deliberations of American dealings with the Middle East. In Germany, however, immigrants are far less prominent in the foreign policy process. Foreign policy actors who emphasize their migrant background are hardly present in the German media. Moreover, while there is a vivid debate in the U.S. over the merits and legitimacy of ethnic interest groups (the controversy over the so-called Israel lobby being a case in point<sup>2</sup>), such controversy, or even debate, is largely absent in Germany.

However, is foreign policy lobbying by immigrants really absent in Germany? Our views on the subject are blurred by terminology. When dissecting the term "ethnic lobby," which is widely used with regard to the U.S., it becomes clear that the use of this very term makes it difficult to find an analogous phenomenon in Germany. The term invokes the sense that entire communities join forces to engage in lobbying. Immigrant communities, however, are very amorphous and heterogeneous entities, and membership is never formal—nor does it involve political participation or even the expression of political interest. Instead, individual members of the community who share an interest join forces and choose a particular political channel through which to pursue this interest.

In particular with regard to the controversial question of influence, it is hence crucial to differentiate between immigrant communities and political actors. By recognizing the various shades of immigrant participation, we move beyond the limits and misunderstandings of the term "ethnic lobby." If we understand immigrant involvement in foreign policy making as the pursuit of shared interests by a segment of an immigrant community through institutionalized political channels, it becomes easier to compare the situation in Germany and the United States.

In the United States, when people speak of "ethnic lobbies," they usually mean ethnic in-

terest groups. While such interest groups exist in both the United States and Germany, there are important differences. They start with the name—the German groups are commonly referred to as *Migrantenselbstorganisationen*, meaning “immigrant self (read: independent) organizations.” The emphasis on the independent thrust is striking and implies non-participation in other political channels, leaving open whether the reason is self-chosen independence or exclusion.

While most German ethnic interest groups focus on domestic issues, some occasionally do take up foreign policy issues, and others even emphasize them. One good example is the debate over the recognition of the mass killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War I as genocide. The *Zentralrat der Armenier* (Central Council of Armenians) is fighting for the recognition as genocide, whereas the *Türkische Gemeinde Deutschland* (Turkish Community Germany) protested against a documentary that advocated the same cause. Further examples include the *Verband der Vereine aus Kurdistan e.V. KOMKAR* (Confederation of Associations from Kurdistan), which calls its commitment to “lobbying for Kurdistan” an “important focus of [its] work,”<sup>3</sup> and the *Zentralrat der Serben* (Central Council of Serbs), which, according to its mission statement, seeks to “support and promote the political, economic, and cultural relations between Germany, the EU, and the Republic of Serbia.”<sup>4</sup> Unlike groups in the U.S., which commonly operate under a hyphenated name (e.g., Cuban-American) or another label indicating a migrant background, such as Latino or Hispanic, Germany-based groups tend to take on purely ethnic labels.

Another difference with regard to immigrant participation in German politics is mobilization around a religious rather than ethnic identity. For instance, part of the dialogue between the German federal government and the immigrant population over matters of integration takes place through religious political actors, such as the umbrella organizations *Islamrat* (Islamic Council) and *Zentralrat der Muslime* (Central Council of Muslims).

Some political-religious organizations entertain close ties with the government or other political actors of their country of origin. One example is *Milli Görüş*, which is close to the governing Turkish Justice and Development (AKP) party and other Islamic parties in Turkey. The organization, one of the leading Turkish migrant organizations in Europe, is under observation by the German authorities (*Verfassungsschutz*). The affiliation of Turkish-German associations with political actors in Turkey has been controversial ever since they emerged. However, they have increasingly grown independent, in particular since the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the *Zentralrat der Muslime* explicitly states on its website that it deems it important “to stay independent from foreign governments.”<sup>6</sup>

The Turkish government also seeks to connect with German politicians of Turkish descent. In 2010, for instance, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan invited Turkish-German members of the Bundestag to attend an AKP convention, and in 2007, they were invited to meet the Turkish president, along with other European politicians of Turkish origin. The reactions among the invitees differed from complete rejection and the desire to stay independent from Turkish politics to calling it a “good opportunity to build up close ties between both countries.”<sup>7</sup>

Some organizations maintain close ties not only with Turkish political parties, but also with German political parties. *Hür-Türk (Türkisch-Deutscher Freundschaftsverein*, the Turkish-German Friendship Association), most prominently, was founded with support of the German Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and the Turkish freedom party. It wants to offer a forum to the political center in both countries and “to further [...] the political, cultural, social, economic, and academic relations between Turks and Germans.”<sup>8</sup>

In sum, immigrants in Germany do organize and voice foreign policy interests, but the actors and labels widely differ from the United States.

### **Drivers and Constraints of Political Integration**

The way in which immigrants engage in politics is, of course, to a large degree determined by the political systems in which they act. While the German system focuses on political parties, the American system focuses on individual political entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurial American system is extraordinarily permeable to influence by interest groups, making them the major political vehicle for immigrant groups. This permeability is not only epitomized by political “entrepreneurship” championed by strong individual actors but also by a general weakness of political parties, a strong accessibility of the U.S. Congress, and a high turnover in Congress and the administration. With regard to foreign policy, actors also profit from the American Constitution, which does not clearly demarcate the distribution of power in the realm of foreign policy and has prominently been called “an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy.”<sup>9</sup>

The German focus on political parties results in a more static system with lower turnover and less permeability to interest groups. While anyone who runs a successful primary and then election campaign may enter the U.S. Congress, an extended party career usually determines the nomination in a certain electoral district or the placement on a party list in Germany. Party lists, which distribute seats in parliament according to a hierarchy decided prior to the election, were created in postwar Germany in order to send each candidate through a thorough vetting process by the political parties. This makes it more difficult for any political newcomer to enter parliament.

German political parties also provide less ideological room for maneuver than their American counterparts. Once elected to parliament, legislators are expected to vote and act along party lines. Party membership, regular party conventions, strong party caucuses, party platforms, and coalition treaties reinforce ideological coherence within parties. This coherence makes lobbying less attractive than in the U.S., as chances of success are comparatively small.

The entrepreneurial character of the U.S. political system, in contrast, is furthered by a party system confined to two parties. The two parties provide but loosely defined ideological vessels, which each candidate or member of parliament may fill to his or her liking (or to that of his or her constituents). Ideological variety thus occurs within parties rather than between them—although the ideological gap between the two parties in Congress is currently greater than it ever was.<sup>10</sup>

While an interest group may include members who are not citizens, the German focus on political parties limits access to political decision-making to German citizens. Despite the citizenship reform of 2000, however, German citizenship is still largely based on *ius sanguinis* (birthright) rather than *ius soli* (territoriality principle), and the naturalization rate has been on a downward slope for most of the recent decade.<sup>11</sup> One reason is the denial of dual citizenship—to which there are exceptions, but usually not for people of Turkish descent, Germany’s largest immigrant community. Moreover, citizenship gained by naturalization may be revoked under certain circumstances. In the United States, in contrast, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of dual citizenship, citizenship is awarded permanently, and naturalization rates show an upward trend.<sup>12</sup>

These different approaches toward citizenship reflect different national self-conceptions. While the United States defines itself as a country of immigration (symbolized by its motto *E pluribus Unum*), Germany has only very recently accepted this label. As a result, hyphenated identities are far less conceivable. People of Turkish origin living in Germany, for example, are commonly referred to as “Turks” rather than Turkish-Germans. Based on a more idealistic approach toward citizenship in the United States, naturalized and indigenous Americans are considered equals. This broad acceptance lends U.S. citizenship strong desirability—while naturalized U.S. citizens often proudly proclaim to be “American by Choice,” no such expression exists in Germany.

Germany focuses on religious rather than hyphenated ethnic identities. In the U.S., religion and politics are separate spheres, and religious pluralism precludes state churches, whereas religious life is strongly institutionalized in Germany. In the country where the Westphalian Peace Treaty was signed, creating a unity of territory and religion, it might just be more acceptable to organize around a religious rather than an ethnic identity. Yet, Germany still struggles to embrace the “new” religion of Islam—although tolerance has recently been growing even among conservatives, epitomized by German President Christian Wulff of the conservative CDU calling Islam an inherent part of Germany in 2010.

Finally, the national self-conception can also be linked to a different awareness of international developments. The pride to be American, though leading to a strong acceptance of naturalized citizens, contributes to a relatively low public interest in foreign policy—which makes it easier for immigrant political actors to become a prominent voice in the foreign policy debate. For instance, few Americans have a deep interest in U.S. policy toward the Dominican Republic, but Dominican-American interest groups certainly do.

The self-definition of a society thus circumscribes the political space for immigrants—and is reflected in societal attitudes toward immigration. Germany's long resistance to define itself as a country of immigration was grounded in the belief that guest workers, who arrived between the 1950s and 1970s, would eventually return to their countries of origin. As a famous statement goes, "they asked for labor and people came," many ended up staying, brought their families, raised children, and started careers. In contrast, the notion of being a country of immigration expects immigrants to stay, although in fact many current migrants move back and forth between the United States and their home countries.

Again, language reflects these different attitudes. Until recently, immigrants were framed as "foreigners" (*Ausländer*) in Germany and are now usually referred to as "people of migrant background." Another common term is *Migranten*, whose English literal translation ("migrants") connotes someone who continually moves within and between societies.

The different attitudes toward immigration affect the integration of immigrants into politics, in particular into foreign policy making. The U.S. political system with its two parties and high permeability to interest groups is based on coalition-building; each legislative project requires a coalition of different interests in order to get passed. Ethnic interests are just as much part of this as, say, business interests. In Germany, in contrast, the low acceptance of hyphenated identities makes it more difficult to express interests that relate to a country other than Germany. As Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen writes, "When Turkish and Kurdish migrants and refugees engage in politics of their homeland, they are both outsiders on the inside of German politics and insiders on the outside of Turkish politics."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the very concept of hyphenated identities makes room for a broader acceptance of foreign policy activism by immigrants.

Finally, participation resources, such as time and education, are needed to engage in politics. They are amassed through social mobility, which, in the U.S., is the instrument to integrate immigrants into American society. It is promoted through a flexible labor market, strong anti-discrimination legislation, and birthright citizenship. In Germany, in contrast, the government seeks to promote integration through integration policies. While social mobility is the very means of integration in the United States, integration is a prerequisite for social mobility in Germany. As a result, it is more difficult to amass the necessary participation resources in Germany than in the U.S.

### Conclusion

The struggle to embrace diversity among foreign policy makers plays out very differently on each side of the Atlantic. While the political space offered to immigrants in foreign policy making is much larger in the United States than in Germany, it still ignites controversy. The American debate centers on the question as to whether ethnic interests distort the national interest. Given the pluralist thrust of the American national self-conception, however, the answer can only be negative. Yet, there is another conflict currently looming at the horizon. The current job crisis slows down social mobility, the vehicle of integration. If the crisis cannot be solved soon, which seems unlikely in the near future, integration will become more difficult. The recent wave of anti-immigrant legislation on the state level poses a further obstacle. Immigrants are now avoiding the state of Georgia, for instance, which imposed strict controls of its immigrant population.<sup>14</sup> With integration policies lacking in the United States, the question will be what instrument of integration can replace social mobility. In Germany, however, the struggle to embrace diversity is much more complex and intense, as the analysis of political integration has demonstrated. Germany's largest immigrant community of Turkish-Germans in particular faces many barriers to participation in political processes, which will not be removed easily.

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The political participation of immigrants is a powerful means of as well as an outcome of integration. By making use of the political instruments offered by the country of settlement, immigrants demonstrate their integration on the political level. At the same time, the very choice of political instruments points toward deficiencies in integration. If political parties were more open to immigrants in Germany, maybe “self-organization” would become less attractive. At the same time, an enhanced acceptance of hyphenated identities would lend greater legitimacy to such groups, while making the label of “self-organization” obsolete.

**NOTES**

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2 Cf. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 6 (2006); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

3 Translated by HR, in: <http://www.komkar.org/selbstdar.htm> (last accessed on 21 November 2011).

4 Translated by HR, in: [http://www.zentralrat-der-serben.de/index.php?Unsere\\_Satzung](http://www.zentralrat-der-serben.de/index.php?Unsere_Satzung) (last accessed on 14 November 2011).

5 Canan Altigan, *Türkische politische Organisationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Materialien für die Arbeit vor Ort, Nr. 9, Sankt Augustin, 15. Okt. 1999.

6 Translated by HR, in: <http://zentralrat.de/2594> (last accessed on 14 November 2011).

7 Translated by HR, in: Mehmet Ata and Ferda Ataman, “Politiker im Blick der Lobby,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, 10 January 2011, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/international/politiker-im-blick-der-lobby/1656870.html> (last accessed on 14 November 2011).

8 Translated by HR, in: [http://www.hurturk.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=62&lang=de](http://www.hurturk.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=50&Itemid=62&lang=de) (last accessed on 14 November 2011).

9 Edward S. Corwin, *The President, Office and Powers: 1787-1948: History and Analysis of Practice and Opinion* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1948), 208.

10 <http://voteview.com/polarizedamerica.asp#POLITICALPOLARIZATION> (last accessed on August 25, 2011); William A. Galston, “Can a Polarized American Party System Be ‘Healthy’?,” *Issues in Governance Studies*, Nr. 34 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, April 2010).

11 The number of naturalizations decreased from 241,971 in the year 1999 to 101,570 in 2010, when it slightly increased again (Statistisches Bundesamt 2010, Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit. Einbürgerungen, Wiesbaden, p. 15).

12 James Lee and Nancy Rytina, Naturalizations in the United States: 2008, Annual Flow Report, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC, March 2009, [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/natz\\_fr\\_2008.pdf](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/natz_fr_2008.pdf) (last accessed on 16 November 2011).

13 Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics : Turks and Kurds in Germany* (London: Routledge, 2003), 123.

14 Tom Baxter, (2011), “How Georgia’s Anti-Immigration Law Could Hurt the State’s (and the Nation’s) Economy,” Center for American Progress, Washington, DC, 4 October 2011 [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/10/georgia\\_immigration.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/10/georgia_immigration.html) (last accessed on 16 November 2011).

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