

Dear Friends,

I am very happy to announce that the *European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University* is now starting a new initiative called *Germany Brief*. Dr. Peter Widmann, who is a member of the Institute, will be updating you about the recent debates in German society. These briefs will be circulated to our e-mailing list in English and Turkish, and will also be accessible online in our website (<http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr>). In this first issue, Dr. Widmann is discussing one of the most prominent debates revolving around the issues of migration and Islam in Germany. Thilo Sarrazin's latest book has brought about various discussions in a way that divided the whole German society. Dr. Widmann's remarks remind us of the fact that Sarrazin's anti-migrant and Islamophobic arguments should be evaluated on a global level.

Ayhan Kaya
Director, European Institute
Istanbul Bilgi University
<http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr>

Merchants of Fear: Sarrazin vs. Muezzin

Dr. Peter Widmann

Istanbul Bilgi University
European Institute German Studies Responsible
DAAD Fachlektor

Once again heated discussions about migrants are a dominant mass media topic in Germany, triggered by the launch of **Thilo Sarrazin's book** "Deutschland schafft sich ab" (Germany is giving up itself) at the end of August 2010. The author was a board member of the German Federal Bank (*Deutsche Bundesbank*) until he was removed from the position in early September, as his verbal attacks particularly against Muslim immigrants were seen as inappropriate for one of the bank's key representatives.

Sarrazin made his career since the mid-seventies as an economist and financial expert in key positions of several federal and *Länder* ministries. His popularity in significant parts of the German public however derives from another source: Since his time as Berlin's finance Senator he is known for public remarks about those population segments that in his eyes are work-shy and unwilling to take responsibility

for their lives. Among those he sees many immigrants, particularly those of Turkish and Arab background. Sarrazin is a member of the SPD, the German Social Democratic Party. One of the party's local divisions in Berlin already tried to formally exclude him from the party last year after an interview in which Sarrazin accused Berlin's Muslim minority in contributing hardly anything to the society besides producing more and more "Kopftuchmaedchen" (headscarf girls). At that time Sarrazin's inner party opponents failed to exclude him since the organisational barriers to withdraw a membership are high. In September 2010 the party's steering committee decided to start a new attempt, but at the same time a high number of ordinary party members expressed sympathy for Sarrazin's ideas.

A Populist Narrative

In his book Sarrazin elaborates his ideas about the future of German society. He is convinced that their religion makes Muslims alien to European culture and dangerous

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for the identity and freedom of the autochthonous German population. Moreover he predicts the decay of a Germany dominated by German culture since immigrants have a higher reproduction rate than the autochthonous population. Because of the chapters on Muslim immigrants the book quickly became a bible in those circles of the German society that see Islam as the main danger for Europe's future. As sales figures show, the book meanwhile is Germany's most successful political book since 1945.

In the passages of Islam and Muslim immigrants Sarrazin reproduces the belief system of a movement that envisions itself as "critics of Islam" ("Islamkritiker") and that succeeded to gain public space during the last years in Germany as well as in other European societies. The ideology stems from ultraconservative and right wing populist sources, but continuous campaigns made many fragments of it popular in the political mainstream. **The "critics of Islam" present themselves as protectors of Western values, freedom, democracy, women's rights and as fighters against anti-semitism that many of them see almost exclusively embodied by Muslims.**

A closer analysis of their propaganda shows a determinist cultural essentialism, a modernised form of racism that replaces the concept of race by a crude and static concept of culture. It is this ideological relaunch that became a basis of their success, since it seems to offer a clean racism. Along come chances for communication of feelings and notions that were forced to remain latent until recently under the conditions of an antiracist public consensus. Sarrazin follows their line in quoting many of the movement's representatives in his footnotes.

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“Demographically the enormous birth-rate of Muslim migrants is a threat for the balance of culture and civilisation in an aging Europe.”

In Sarrazin's eyes Muslims are the main integration problem in Germany, since a high percentage of them have no job and bigger problems in the education system than other groups, since many of them depend on welfare money. On top of that Sarrazin sees Muslims tending to violent behaviour that in his view is reflected in youth violence as well as in Islamist terrorism. Sarrazin writes: “Actually we are not in need of that.

Economically we do not need Muslim migrants in Europe. In every country Muslim migrants burden the state budget more than they bring economic advantage due to their low participation on the job market and their high share of welfare payments. For culture and civilisation their ideals of society and their values are a regression.” Furthermore he claims: **“Demographically the enormous birth-rate of Muslim migrants is a threat for the balance of culture and civilisation in an aging Europe.”**

Sarrazin sees the immigration of the 1960s and 70s to Germany as a “tremendous mistake” because it prolonged the decease of old industries with no prospect and disguised the fall of the birthrate in the German population. In his eyes Turkish and Moroccan immigration did not contribute to Germany's wealth, since the migrants brought their families with them, who Sarrazin sees as a major burden to the German welfare system.

“Islamism and terrorism can not be distinguished”

In Sarrazins view Muslims in general are suspicious: “Muslims in Germany and elsewhere in Europe are under an alien cultural and religious influence, which we can not oversee and much less control. We allow a culturally alien minority to grow, that is insufficiently integrated in secular society, that has not our level of tolerance and that has a higher reproduction rate than the host society.” Sarrazin explicitly denies, that Islam, Islamism and terrorism can be distinguished, since he sees transitions between them blurred.

Those who followed the propaganda of the “critics of Islam” during the recent years are familiar both with the content and the aggressive language. Nevertheless two aspects are new: First, the full range of enmity is promoted by an active member of mainstream political establishment. In Thilo Sarrazin the supporters of a verbal brutalisation of integration discourse in Germany found a new idol who is not just another agitator from the political fringes.

A second new aspect of the book is Sarrazin’s genetic theory on collectively inherited intelligence that reproduces 19th century discourses on eugenics and race theories. Sarrazin believes that intelligence to a large extent is genetically inherited and that an insufficient reproduction rate in the upper layers of society and a high reproduction rate among Muslim immigrants will lower the overall level of intelligence in the society.

Not only the eugenic argumentation resembles of the 19th century German discourse, but also Sarrazin’s rhetoric of doom. He foresees Germany’s final downfall if the federal government does not take counter measures: **“I wish, that my great-grandchildren have the possibility to live in Germany in 100 years, if they want to. I wish that the country of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will not be a Muslim country to a large extent, were mostly Turkish and Arabic is spoken, women wear headscarves and the muezzin’s call to prayer structures the rhythm of the day.”** If the current development is not stopped, Muslims in Sarrazin’s scenario will conquer Europe through excessive birth rates: “Those who have the highest rate of reproduction will own Europe.” And they will in Sarrazin’s view be not the ones to carry on Germany’ cultural tradition like Goethe’s poems: “Who will know

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‘Wanderers Night Song’ in 100 years? Certainly not the student from the madrassa round the next corner.” It is not surprising that in such a worldview there can be no place for Turkey in the European Union, since it would be, as Sarrazin writes, a constant “troublemaker disturbing a peaceful coexistence” and a country culturally not fitting into Europe.

Reactions

Among many others Germany’s President Christian Wulff reacted to the broad attention for Sarrazin’s claims in his address on Germany’s national holiday in Bremen on 3 October, when the 20th anniversary of Germany’s unification was celebrated. In his speech Wulff also reacted on an open letter 14 prominent Muslim Germans wrote to him in mid-September, among them the film director Fatih Akin, the scholar and journalist Katajun Amirpur and the writer Feridun Zaimoğlu. They wrote: “We German Muslims belong to Germany as well, with the same right as all religious, ethnic or other population groups. We will not give up this country. This country is our home and you are our president.” Wulff quoted the letter in his address and answered: “Yes, of course I am your president! I am your president with the same passion and conviction that I feel as the president of all people living in Germany.” Without mentioning Sarrazin’s name he intervened in the debate and demanded, that the public should not allow a “creation of legends” and a “hardening of prejudice and discrimination”. Wulff stated that Islam has become a part of Germany.

In parts of his own party, the conservative Christian Democratic Union, CDU, Wulff’s statements evoked objections. Horst Seehofer, chairman of the Christian Social Union, CSU, the Bavarian branch of the conservatives, and governor of Bavaria, said in an interview with the “Focus” magazine: “It is clear, that immigrants from other cultural spheres find it harder then others to adjust.” Therefore, he claimed, Germany does not need additional immigration from such regions. German chancellor Angela Merkel, chairwomen of the CDU since 2000, attracted strong attention with a statement at a national convention of her party’s youth branch “Junge Union” in Potsdam on October 16. The multicultural approach, she declared, has “absolutely failed” in Germany, indicating the demand for an integration of immigrants into the

dominant culture. In the same address she supported President Wulff's statement of Islam being a part of Germany's reality.

The statement is a hint to the integration problem German parties face regarding their members. In the CDU an uneasiness is widespread that the party's ability to integrate conservatives from the right might fade. The success of right wing populists in neighboring Austria and the Netherlands has stirred additional concerns about the party's conservative profile, and some observers warn that Geert Wilders Freedom Party could be a model for parts of the German right. On the other hand there is a broad consensus that Germany's attractiveness on the international job market is of vital importance.

As the reactions on Sarrazin and Wulff show, "Islam" has become a key word that uncovers a conflict line across the major German parties. It is a conflict between liberal and conservative wings inside the parties, and a conflict between party elites and the party basis. And it shows the emotions that are current in angst-ridden segments of the German middle classes facing social change. It seems as if Muslims are increasingly seen as the personification of this change.

Explanations

Anti-Muslim activists claim that the rejection against Muslim immigrants among the population was only natural and a normal reaction by the population on real problems. This is hardly convincing since the social problems many immigrants face are neither new (in fact many current issues were already described in the "Kühn-Memorandum", a federal government report from 1979), nor are these problems exclusively affecting Muslims or immigrants as such. Marginalized sections of the autochthonous German population have similar unemployment rates and problems in the education system.

In fact, anti-Muslim racism is based on a fabricated fear, mobilized by individuals and groups that act as entrepreneurs of fear and hope to gain ideological and political profit through campaigns of Muslim-bashing. On the grass-root level local and regional groups were founded during the recent years that oppose the building of mosques in their cities. Together with right wing splinter parties, organizations like "Pro Köln" or "Pax Europa" and anti-Muslim hate-pages on the internet they

established a network. Although they did not succeed in forming a unified nationwide movement they are able to influence the atmosphere on the local level – and sometimes more: Sarrazin quotes one of the pertinent hate pages, “Der Prophet des Islam” (Islam’s Prophet) as one source to proof Turkey’s alleged unwillingness to accept European values.

Simultaneously and in a more socially acceptable tone, a number of publicists, some of them being prominent commentators, carried the general suspicion against Muslims into the mass media of the main stream. Some of them made the fight against what they see as Europe’s Islamisation to their main cause and became single issue publicists. Hence their prominence and income is directly depending on keeping the debate alive. Many of the voices are labeling their ideas as “criticism of Islam” to carry ultraconservative, authoritarian and nationalist ideas of a culturally homogeneous society into mainstream discourse.

Autochthonous Germans now seem to have stepped out the shadows of the past, fighting side by side with Jews against a common threat.

The radical and the seemingly moderate voices have one feature in common: They promote as simple, bipolar worldview that offers a clear cognitive map to disoriented individuals: “We”, the western forces of modernity versus “Them”, the forces of what is seen as medieval and barbaric. It is highly probable that confirming the “We” is especially attractive to those who feel insecure about their own integration into society. On the internet this group can have the feeling of having a say, an experience many writers of hateful comments on the anti-Muslim pages might miss in the rest of their lives.

Moreover anti-Muslim racism offers a possibility of coming to terms with a German past that still overshadows the national self image. Anti-Muslim activists see Muslims as the main representatives of anti-Semitism in Germany and in the world. In this view **autochthonous Germans now seem to have stepped out the shadows of the past, fighting side by side with Jews against a common threat.** That the rhetoric of the common “Christian-Jewish Occident” and “Christian-Jewish Culture” has become so widespread in recent years can be taken as a sign of the trend. Based on historical amnesia after centuries of Christian persecution of Jews, the rhetoric amalgamates with anti-Muslim racism and becomes a new way of restoring a positive group identity of autochthonous Germans.

Immigrants start demanding

Successful integration is the blind spot of the debate. It is worth a closer look, since it can explain an important motive of the discourse. In fact, it often was ongoing integration that caused debates in recent years rather than real or imagined integration deficits. There has not been a debate on Muslim women wearing headscarfs as long as this group of the population worked as cleaners or in other low paid jobs. The discussion started when this group entered the better paid segments of the job market. A similar correlation could be observed during discussions about new mosques. **There were no debates on Muslim houses of worship as long as they consisted in prayer rooms in shabby**

backyards and old factory buildings. Heated debates broke out when Muslims wished to practice their religion not only at the periphery of German cities and German society. In fact, the outrage over immigrants daring to demand something has become a core motive of anti-Muslim discourse. In his book Sarrazin claims about Islam: “No religion in Europe appears so demanding.” It is not primarily the marginality of immigrants that frightens parts of the population. That a visible group among immigrants is successfully climbing up the social ladder and expects to be treated equally seems to be even more threatening.

Crucial for the understanding of the current debate is the fact that it is a mass media phenomenon following the logics and dynamics of the media system. As media analysis has shown in many contexts, topics that can be presented as a conflict between two easily distinguishable sides, have good chances to dominate the headlines. This explains, why a crude “Islam – pro and contra” framing dominates public debate, while arguments about the complicated reality of integration and exclusion on the ground remain in small circles. One could get the impression that parts of the German public became aware of the Muslim population in their country for the first time in 2010. Decades of intensive discussion in civil society, among practitioners of the social services and other groups seem to have never taken place. The imagined clash of cultures makes it to the talk shows, the details of everyday life lack a comparable entertainment value.

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Yet the debate shows the limits of populist agitation. Beyond stigmatizing a group of the population anti-Muslim agitators have no realistic political concept to find rules and a modus vivendi in a pluralist society. **The debate of 2010 could be a turning point. It shows how widespread new forms of racism are in the centre of European societies and how important it is for supporters of an open society to set an own agenda, to open and pursue a debate on the reality of integration that is more than just reacting on populist stereotypes.**