

Summary

Seminar “The Next Generation of Turkish German Civil Society: New Paradigms, New Approaches”

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On 2 March 2015, the Migration Center of İstanbul Bilgi University hosted Filiz Bikmen, Richard von Weizsacker Fellow (2014) of Bosch Stiftung, to talk about her research on the ‘next generation’ of Turkish German civil society leaders. The research was conducted from November 2013 through November 2014 and continues. Meetings were conducted with a total of nearly 60 individuals from NGO and foundation leaders from the German and German Turkish civil society sector, various government officials at the local and federal level and academicians.

Initial findings (final report preparation still in progress) were presented through six main dimensions, also indicating the multidisciplinary approach that this research requires: Identity, migration, Turkish diaspora policies and programs, German policies toward migration and integration, civil society space and structure and finally, perceptions and approaches to social justice. A short summary of the presentation follows:

Identity: Neither the new comers (considered 1st generation) nor their children and grandchildren are a homogenous group; they have various religious and ethnic backgrounds. The same applies for those who are born and raised in Germany (2nd and 3rd generation); they have varying degrees of connection to their Turkish roots and schooling/upbringing in German society. Some are children of mixed marriage; some from families that are white or blue collar, from different regions in Germany- all of these factors of course affect their identities. But one thing resonates in a common voice; that they do not appreciate being referred to as ‘children with a migrant background’. And, this particular group feels less engaged in the identity politic discourse. For them, it is about issues, not identity.

Migration: There are new arrivals (immigrants) and those that were born and raised in Germany (referred to still as ‘migrants’ or as noted in the previous point, ‘children with a migrant background’). While the 2nd and 3rd generation are born and raised in Germany, many of them with German citizenship, there is still no term to convey that they are also, German. The ‘immigration and migration’ or ‘migration and integration’ labels are not those used to define themselves or the equality they are striving for.

Turkish Government Diaspora Policies: In 2010, the Turkish Government created a division for Turkish citizens living abroad, and developed new policies to enhance relations with these communities. Grant programs have been created to fund NGOs working with Turkish NGOs in Europe. The new generation still feels a cultural tie to their roots, but is increasingly less engaged with the social and political agendas of Turkey. They focus instead more on challenges facing their community in Germany and try to rally political and private sector support for this end. Turkish officials in Germany are well aware that the new generations are a great asset, and recognize that existing NGOs need to make room for youth and their voices.

German Migration-Integration Policies: In 2005, a national agenda to address migration and integration issues was announced. There is a Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Given the federative structure of Germany, there are challenges to create one uniform national policy and implement it at the local level. Also, the funding and programs have been focused more so under this heading of migration and integration- yet new generations feel they are more concerned with specific issues such as education, environment, youth, and so on. In this respect, they feel it is time also to think about migration and integration in a ‘mainstream’ manner rather than keep it as a separate track.

Civil Society Structure and Space: A majority of funding for NGOs in Germany are sourced by the government, in exchange for services (in the principle of subsidiarity). There are a handful of large charitable groups that receive a high percentage of such funds. Organizations working with Turkish German communities tend to be smaller and face challenges accessing funds. In addition, their work is not necessarily defined by them as ‘migration integration’ work; some aim to empower youth; others seek to mobilize housewives to be more environmentally aware and active. The way funds and programs are defined and allocated by the government tends to create a divide between so-called ‘migration NGOs’ and mainstream NGOs working on specific issues, thus making it difficult for new connections and collaborations to take place.

Social Justice and Civic Action: The new generation concerns itself with the pursuit of equal opportunity in all aspects of life. It is a known fact that ‘children with a migration background’ tend to have less equal opportunities in school and later in life, in the workforce. The focus is about pushing forth systemic change to address deep rooted discrimination as well as in many cases, the lack of necessary services to serve different needs in a diverse population. Rather than only to deliver services, this new generation seeks to promote changes in the way policies are devised and as such, the way in which services are delivered.