

The German debate on Turkey



First Quarter 2011

Panic-makers, Kulturkampf and Erdogan in Duesseldorf

Germans and Turks - Highlights of the debate first quarter 2011

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January

1 January 2011 – Turkish community criticises integration policy

The setback in German integration policy in 2010 is the focus of an article in the Berlin daily newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, which reproduces the assessment of Kenan Kolat, head of the Turkish community in Germany. Kolat reproaches the federal government for failing to address some of the most urgent questions, thereby deepening the gap between people with and without a migration background. According to him:

“The overwhelming part of people with a migration history feels they belong to this society, but are fed up with continuously having to justify themselves.”¹

Kolat also says the Turkish community in 2011 will increase its efforts to motivate volunteers in the field of education and to reinforce the involvement of parents. Moreover, the organisation will present numerous positive examples of civil participation, seeking to reinforce the solidarity and exchanges between people with and without a migratory background.

3 January 2011 – Opening of Ergenekon trials

An article in the conservative daily *Die Welt* discusses the opening of the Ergenekon trials against 196 suspects in an alleged military coup. These trials are one of the largest judicial procedures against the army in the history of Turkey and are likely to “have vast consequences for the influence of the army, the power of politics and the reputation of the judiciary.”²

“Operation Sledgehammer”, which is the object of the trials, is mentioned as part of a management game in a military theory seminar that took place in March 2003. According to *Die Welt*, the investigators believe that this management game took place in the context of the rise to power of the AK party, with the army fearing a turning away from secularism.

The power and importance of the army would be further reduced should the trials end with the condemnation of the accused, as expected by *Die Welt*. Further, the parliament and the judiciary may see their roles enhanced as long as the trials are perceived as being fair and in conformity with the rule of law.

4 January 2011 – French and Germans perceive Islam as threat

The daily *Rheinische Post* quotes a study in France and in Germany on the perception of Islam conducted by the French IFOP Institute. According to this study, 40 per cent of German and 42 per cent of French respondents consider the Muslim community in their respective country to represent a threat. Regarding the integration of Muslims, 68 per cent of French and 75 per cent of German respondents think Muslims are not well integrated into their societies. For 61 per cent of French and 67 per cent of German respondents, the reason is a lack of willingness on the side of the Muslims to integrate with their new countries. While 59 per cent of French respondents are against the full veil for Muslim women, 45 per cent of German respondents declare themselves indifferent in this regard. According to the article, an

¹ *Tagesspiegel*, Türkische Gemeinde sieht Rückschritte bei Integrationspolitik, 1 January 2011.

² *Die Welt*, Die Türkei macht ihrer Armee den Prozess, 3 January 2011

estimated five million Muslims live in France, while Germany estimates it has four million Muslims.³

Link to study: http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1365-1-study_file.pdf

5 January 2011 – Hurriyet for sale

The sale of the Turkish daily newspaper *Hurriyet* is discussed by the *Financial Times Deutschland* (FTD), speculating there are “more than economic calculations” behind the sale:

“The Dogan group [which owns *Hurriyet*] needs money to be able to pay a several billion fine. This fine is apparently politically motivated.”⁴

The Dogan group is one of the most important Turkish media companies. It is run as a family business and owns seven more daily newspapers and several TV channels in Turkey. In September 2009, the group was fined €2.4 billion for fiscal offences. According to the FTD article, a dispute erupted between the Dogan group and the AK party after several Dogan outlets reported that the governing AK party was involved in a donation scandal. The 2010 progress report issued by the European Commission makes a critical reference to the Dogan affair.⁵

7 January 2011 – Turkey’s global aspirations

Turkey’s global aspirations are the focus of an article in the German economic weekly magazine *Handelsblatt*. The title, “Turkey’s dreams of hegemony”, already hints at the position adopted by Gerd Hohler, the magazine’s correspondent for Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus. Ironically commenting on Turkey’s Foreign Minister Davutoglu’s remarks at a recent press conference on the country’s role as a ‘global player’, Hohler states “the Turkish head of diplomacy certainly does not lack a sense of mission. However, he is currently overreaching himself.”⁶

While Davutoglu professes a ‘zero-problems policy’ with Turkey’s neighbours, Hohler points out that Greece does not notice much of this new approach. Not only does Turkey frequently demonstrate its claim to the Aegean islands by flying over them with military planes, but it also has not been prepared to move in regards to the Cyprus issue. To act as a regional power in the Middle East “requires a sense of reality and a sure instinct. Both are things Turkey clearly lacks.”⁷

A report by the German radio station *Deutschlandfunk* describes Turkey as a “tiger state on the Bosphorus (...) between regional power and EU candidate.”⁸ The report emphasises the country’s economic strengths: Turkey is clearly on the winning side, with a significant economic growth that has caused it to be termed as ‘Anatolian tiger’ or even ‘Europe’s China’. Moreover, the stability of Turkey’s currency is proof of its overall economic stability, with the inflation rate last year reaching 6.4 per cent, in comparison to 120 per cent just 16 years ago.

³ *Rheinische Post*, 40 Prozent sagen: Muslime sind eine Bedrohung, 4 January 2011.

⁴ *Financial Times Deutschland*, Dogan bietet "Hürriyet" feil, 5 January 2011.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/tr_rapport_2010_en.pdf, p. 22.

⁶ *Handelsblatt*, Naher Osten: Türkische Großmachtträume, 7 January 2011.

⁷ *Handelsblatt*, Naher Osten: Türkische Großmachtträume, 7 January 2011.

⁸ *Deutschlandfunk*, Tigerstaat am Bosphorus, 7 January 2011.

According to *Deutschlandfunk*, the reasons for Turkey's economic boom lie in its decisive reform efforts during the past decade. Its economy is driven by firms located in thriving Istanbul, and several important industrial centres exist across the country. However, while Germany is Turkey's most important economic partner, business trips for Turkish businessmen are complicated by the visa requirements to enter the Schengen area in Europe.

Besides exposing Turkey's economic potential, the report also points to the country's growing political role as a mediator in the region, specifically in regards to Israeli-Syrian relations and in the ongoing negotiations with Iran. However, the lack of support from Germany for Turkey's EU bid throws a shadow on the bilateral relations and reduces the potential for a fruitful cooperation. Linking these two aspects, *Deutschlandfunk* quotes Ruprecht Polenz (CDU), head of the parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee:

“For many neighbouring countries of Turkey, it is of crucial importance that Turkey continues in a reliable manner in its reform course. For this, the negotiations with the European Union represent the guardrails that prevent Turkey from leaving the right path. And the aim of the EU accession is the light house that indicates the direction.”⁹

9 January 2011 – Integration law in Berlin

The adoption of an integration law in the federal state of Berlin is discussed in an article in the left-leaning *Tageszeitung* newspaper. Berlin is first to introduce such a “law on the regulation of participation and integration” following the initiative of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Left Party (Linke). It aims for the intercultural opening of the administration and seeks to increase the participation of immigrants and their offspring.

The law foresees that each district of Berlin name a person in charge of integration, and that any decision regarding employment or promotion in the public service takes into account the intercultural competence or particular language skills of the applicant. The aim is to thereby increase the number of migrants among public employees. However, critical assessment are voiced from different political camps: CDU delegate Kurt Wansner, the speaker for integration policy in the Berlin municipal parliament, considers the law to be “an insult for migrants” in that it privileges them over people without a migratory background. According to Wansner, this means that “one does not consider migrants capable of imposing themselves against other applicants otherwise”.¹⁰ From what the *Die Tageszeitung* qualifies as the right wing of the SPD, the main criticism concerns the overly bureaucratic approach chosen in the law, rather than clearly naming the integration deficits and proposing concrete ways to solve them. The migrant community is generally in favour of the law, even though it does not contain a concrete quota for migrants. Kenan Kolat, the head of the Turkish Community in Germany and a Social Democrat, welcomes the initiative in Berlin and hopes it will be extended to further federal states.¹¹ North Rhine-Westphalia, the most populous federal state with an SPD-Green government, is apparently planning to introduce a similar law in 2011.

10-14 January 2011 — Merkel vs. Erdogan on Cyprus

In an effort to reach out to smaller EU member states, German Chancellor Angela Merkel visits Cyprus and Malta, making the division of Cyprus one of the key issues of her visit in

⁹ *Deutschlandfunk*, Tigerstaat am Bosporus, 7 January 2011.

¹⁰ *taz*, Berlin integriert jetzt per Gesetz, 9 January 2011.

¹¹ *taz*, Berlin integriert jetzt per Gesetz, 9 January 2011.

Nicosia. She calls for increased efforts to overcome the division of the island, criticising that Cyprus' large willingness to compromise has not been mirrored by a similar attitude on the Turkish Cypriot side. Speaking to the Greek Cypriot President Demetris Christofias, Merkel states:

“You showed a large willingness to compromise that has unfortunately not been met by the other side.”¹²

Merkel offers for Germany to play a crucial role in the discussions between both parts of the island. Addressing Turkey directly, Merkel asks for a rapid implementation of the Ankara Protocol. The visit is widely reported on, and several newspapers underline that Merkel is the first German chancellor to have spent a night on the island as part of an official visit.

German commentators report widely on Merkel's support of the Greek Cypriot position.¹³ Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan reacts to her words by inviting her to consult with her (Turkey-friendly) predecessor Gerhard Schroder: “I advise you, have a cup of tea with Schroder.”¹⁴

Erdogan refers to the 2004 Annan Plan, suggesting that the origins of the current problem lie in the rejection of that plan by the Greek side. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* prints an indignant comment titled “Insolent” (“Unverschämt”), asking whether Turkey's refusal to implement the Ankara Protocol - regardless of the eight acquis chapters blocked due to this decision - might not be a sign that Turkey does not truly want to enter the EU:

“Irritable and bossy, as he often behaves, the Turkish Prime Minister advised the Chancellor to get more deeply informed about the history of the Cyprus conflict over a cup of tea with her predecessor. (...) Even the suspension of the membership negotiations on eight out of 33 chapter has not so far been able to move Ankara to many any concessions. Is one to assume from this that Turkey does not really want to enter into the EU anymore?”¹⁵

Tagesspiegel reporter Thomas Seibert comments on the clash between Erdogan and Merkel, saying “Turkish-EU relations this year have not started well”¹⁶.

12 January 2011 - Die Welt on Erdogan's Arab Union

The German newspaper *Die Welt* runs an article by Boris Kalnoky, its Istanbul-based correspondent for South East Europe, on Erdogan “dreaming about Arab-Turkish world power”. The author refers to Erdogan's trip to several Gulf countries and his suggestion that the Arab world could become a power centre if the countries manage to combine their forces in a union. *Die Welt* quotes Erdogan as claiming that a uniting element for Arab peoples is the fight against Christian aggressors:

“Turks and Arabs jointly defended these regions during the time of the crusades. [In later eras], we jointly fought against the invaders.”¹⁷

¹² *Der Spiegel*, Geteilte Insel: Merkel appelliert an die Türkei im Zypern-Streit, 10 January 2011.

¹³ See below for further reading.

¹⁴ *DIE ZEIT*, Zypern-Konflikt: Erdoğan weist Merckels Kritik zurück, 12 January 2011.

¹⁵ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Michael Martens), Unverschämt, 14 January 2011, not available online.

¹⁶ *Der Tagesspiegel* (Thomas Seibert), Erdogan erbost über Merckels Äußerungen zu Zypern, 13 January 2011

¹⁷ *Die Welt*, Erdogan träumt von arabisch-türkischer Weltmacht, 12 January 2011.

The article even includes a suggestion of a flag for the union, resembling the current EU flag but replacing the stars with half-moons as the symbol of Islam.

Erdogan's speech takes place in Kuwait City, where he addresses Islamic scholars after being awarded the "Outstanding Personality in the Muslim World" prize.¹⁸ He states there:

"On the one side, we will continue negotiations with the EU, on the other side we will not turn our backs on the regions we share centuries of common history with. (...) We determine our own foreign policy. We make our own foreign policy agenda. The Arabs are our brothers and sisters."¹⁹

12 January 2011 - Gottschlich on AKP and second wives

Gender relations in Turkey are addressed by the daily *Tageszeitung*, which runs an article on the "trend towards a second wife" observable in Turkey. According to the paper's correspondent in Turkey, Jurgen Gottschlich, a study shows almost 200,000 Turks have more than one wife, a trend "supported by the ruling AKP".²⁰ The article refers to Rize mayor Bakirci's suggestion that Turkish men should take a second, Kurdish wife and thus solve the Kurdish problem. While the article mentions an "outcry" in the AKP following Bakirci's words, it omits to say that he was already last summer referred to the AKP's disciplinary committee for expulsion, a fact both Turkish major dailies, *Hürriyet* and *Today's Zaman*, reported on in summer 2010.²¹

Moreover, while the study upon which the *Tageszeitung* article is based does indicate an estimated number of 186,000 second wives, none of the other reports on the study point to any kind of trend, as claimed by Gottschlich.²² Furthermore, although the *Tageszeitung* article claims that "the government does not do anything against the trend towards a second wife", the two academics from Hacettepe University, who conducted the study, actually submitted their findings to a Parliamentary Commission on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men and suggested concrete solutions to gender discrimination.²³ According to an article published by the online news portal *EurActiv*:

"Carried out by Ilknur Yuksel Kaptanoglu and Banu Ergocmen, academics at Hacettepe University in Ankara, the study was presented to Turkey's parliamentary committee on equal opportunities last week."²⁴

17 January 2011 – *Kulturkampf* and Islam Debate

In a long article published in the conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, German Federal Minister of Justice Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger from the FDP makes a strong statement in favour of religious freedom and a secular attitude by the state. Titled "The same chance for every religion" ("Jeder Religion die gleiche Chance"), the article criticises that

¹⁸ *BBC* (Amberin Zaman), Turkey's growing ties with Arab world, 27 January 2011.

¹⁹ *Die Welt*, Erdogan träumt von arabisch-türkischer Weltmacht, 12 January 2011.

²⁰ *taz*, Studie in der Türkei: Der Trend geht zur Zweitfrau, 12 January 2011.

²¹ *Hürriyet*, Turkish ruling party may oust Rize mayor for remarks, 7 July 2010; *Today's Zaman*, AK Party refers Rize mayor to disciplinary board for expulsion, 15 July 2010.

²² *Hürriyet*, Report sheds light on widespread polygamy in Turkey, 11 January 2011.

²³ *Hürriyet*, Report sheds light on widespread polygamy in Turkey, 11 January 2011.

²⁴ *Euractiv*, Polygamy widespread in Turkey, study shows, 21 January 2011.

debates on Islam are often shaped by prejudices and clichés. Questioning the frequent mentioning of “Judeo-Christian values”, Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger claims:

“The basis of society in Germany in the year 2011 is not shaped by any particular confession or any selected group of confessions. The basis of our coexistence is the German Basic Law and the fundamental rights guaranteed therein.”²⁵

Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger draws a parallel between the anti-Catholic arguments advanced during the *Kulturkampf* at the end of the 19th century and arguments made now against Muslims. She emphasises that Muslims cannot be understood as a homogenous group. Each person should be judged individually and not through his or her confession. She rejects the assumption that Islam in its core is not compatible with democratic society and cannot be integrated into a state governed by the rule of law. According to Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, this attitude echoes precisely the scepticism expressed back in 1871 against Catholic ‘ultras’, who were thought to be guided by a superior set of rules to those of the German Empire. The parallel thus consists not in a clash of religions, but in the struggle of a secular state against a religious group thought difficult to integrate into the national community. Hence, the Minister of Justice closes by demanding that the state be blind towards the confession of its citizens, but not blind to instances where the German Constitution is violated. According to her:

“Exclusion leads to fundamentalism and is not appropriate in our modern and open society. Rather than debates shaped by fear, we need a discussion free of prejudices about religions and their rights. It is necessary to first know a lot more about Islamic justice. Only then is it possible to criticise it from a justice perspective.”²⁶

In a reaction to Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger’s article, Necla Kelek, a Turkish-born sociologist well known for her critical views on Islam, accuses the minister of justice of cultural relativism. She claims that Islam has until today been “unwilling to separate politics and religion, because it insists on the priority of divine revelation over human laws.”²⁷ Kelek believes the minister of justice is preparing the stage for the recognition of Islamic associations as official corporations (“Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts”). This special status is the result of the Weimar church compromise of 1919, which was included in the constitution. This compromise foresees their activities in the framework of non-state official corporations (“nicht-staatliche Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts”). The described status implies the right to self-administration, for instance, such corporations may levy church taxes.

Volker Kauder, head of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, rejects Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger’s view that a “Kulturkampf” is being led against religious movements in Germany. Instead, he emphasises in a response printed in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that Muslims can freely build mosques and can worship their God, so that any comparison to the situation of Catholics at the end of the 19th century is inappropriate. Nonetheless, he underlines that it is important that certain questions concerning the entire community be addressed. Kauder stresses that “the obligation for tolerance does not discharge politics and society from the need to look at problems that might result from religious practice”, and that it is legitimate to ask how the main currents of Islam position themselves with regard to the rule of law, despite the fact that religious freedom remains a

²⁵ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Jeder Religion die gleiche Chance, 10 February 2011.

²⁶ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Jeder Religion die gleiche Chance, 10 February 2011.

²⁷ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Necla Kelek), Das ist Kulturrelativismus, 15 February 2011.

central right for all believers.²⁸

27 January 2011 – German Integration Medal

Painting a positive picture of the participation of German Turks in general social trends in Germany, the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* publishes an article titled “Oko à la Turka”, in which the emergence of a Turkish ecological movement in Germany is described. The article explains how religious references are used to argue for sustainability and a responsible handling of natural resources correspond to the message of the prophet. *Die Zeit* presents different persons of Turkish background actively promoting ecological initiatives among the immigrant population. The article mentions that Turgut Altug, a German-Turkish agrarian scientist, was awarded an “integration medal” by the German Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration.

The ‘integration medal’ was introduced in November 2010 and is awarded to citizens who have made an exceptional contribution to the integration of migrants and to a better cooperation between different cultural groups in Germany. Potential award winners are nominated by one of the five political groups in the Bundestag; the medal is then awarded by the Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration.

²⁸ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Kauder distanziert sich von Leutheusser, 16 February 2011.

February

2 February 2011 – Cologne Mosque Building

The roofing ceremony for the new mosque in Cologne is one of the highlights during its heavily contested construction. Cologne Mayor Jürgen Roters (SPD), who was present for the celebration, emphasises:

“When Muslims in Germany build big, representative mosques, this is a sign of normality. Those who build will stay.”²⁹

The mosque represents a symbol of integration rather than exclusion. According to the local newspaper *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, the decision of the German-Turkish Union (Ditib) to have the Turkish consul speak before the mayor in Turkish came by surprise to most attendees.³⁰ Ditib is an umbrella organisation, uniting some 900 Turkish communities throughout Germany. Former Cologne Mayor Fritz Schramma in his speech thanked the community and appreciated its efforts. He also calls upon Ditib to convene a meeting of the advisory board, composed of representatives of parties, churches and other groups from the part of town in which the mosque is being built, and that is supposed to meet regularly in order to ensure the transparency of the ongoing construction work.

3 February 2011 – Arab spring and Turkey

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt trigger a renewed interest in Turkey. Most German commentators point to the shortcomings of Turkish democracy and acknowledge that Turkey represents a positive example regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy. An article in *Handelsblatt*, a weekly business magazine, concludes:

“Turkish democracy may not be ideal. Nonetheless, it is exemplary in the way it shows that Islam and democracy are compatible.”³¹

Michael Martens from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* points to liberal Turks who criticise the “selective empathy” of their government. Turkey should support democracy not only in Egypt, but push for reforms also in Iran and in Syria. A *Tagesspiegel* article quotes Mehmet Sahin, a Turkish political scientist, saying the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq produced a power vacuum strengthening only Iran and Turkey. Anyone wishing to weaken Iran must consequently seek to boost Turkey. While the US already embraces this approach, the Europeans are still hesitant.

In an article for the leftist daily *Neues Deutschland*, which is associated with the left Party (Linke), Jürgen Gottschlich analyses the perception of Turkey as a “happy medium” (“goldener Mittelweg”) between Western democracy and dictatorship. According to him, it is only since the AKP came to power in 2002 that Turkey has become an inspiration to its Arab neighbours, with Erdogan limiting the political influence of the army. His critical attitude towards Israel following the Mavi Marmara incident only reinforced his popularity in the Arab world. The article also points to important differences between Turkey and other

²⁹ *Kölnische Rundschau*, Richtfest für Kölner Moschee, 2 February 2011.

³⁰ *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, Ditib-Moschee feiert Richtfest, 2 Februar 2011.

³¹ *Handelsblatt*, Die Türkei empfiehlt sich als Modell, 9 February 2011.

Muslim countries: Not only has Turkey been a NATO member for decades, it has also been a secular state since 1923.

Ruprecht Polenz, the head of the Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee and a former secretary general of the German Christian Democrats (CDU), emphasises in an interview with *Rheinische Post* that the EU should cooperate closely with Turkey. Precisely because of the model Turkey has become for the Arab world. The weekly magazine *Stern* focuses on Erdogan's call for Mubarak's resignation. Acknowledging Turkey's function as a model, *Stern* underlines that this is largely due to Turkey's perspective of joining the EU. This has enabled Erdogan to impose changes upon the state structures and the army. The EU perspective is an important aspect for investors. The centre-left *Süddeutsche Zeitung* presents a similar analysis.

An analysis in the liberal weekly *Die Zeit* also points to Erdogan's support for the demonstrators in Egypt. Internal pressure by the opposition is seen as one of the key motivations for his speech before the parliament in which he indirectly invited Mubarak to resign. In a statement, Davutoglu underlines that Turkey would support change in Egypt, but without "exporting" any kind of model to the Arab world – an allusion to the US policy in Iraq.

6 February 2011 – Naturalisation and German Turkish voters

According to an article in *Die Welt*, a total of 967,860 persons obtained German citizenship during 2002 to 2009. Of those, 309,346 are of Turkish origin, making German Turks remain by far the largest group of people to become naturalised, despite declining numbers over the years. Serbs/Montenegrins/ Kosovars come second at around 61,936 naturalisations over the period in question. The article points to the increasing role of naturalised citizens for elections. The deputy head of the CDU/CSU political group in the Bundestag, Johannes Singhammer, believes that his party should not give up its opposition to Turkish EU accession or its rejection of double citizenship in order to get German Turkish voters.

10 February 2011 – The Pinar Selek case

The trial against Pinar Selek, a Turkish sociologist living in exile in Germany, attracts very negative assessments about the rule of law in Turkey from several German newspapers. Selek was accused of an alleged bomb attack causing seven deaths on the Egyptian bazaar in Istanbul on 9 July 1998. Several different expert evaluations described it as an accident triggered by a leaking gas bottle. Nonetheless, Selek spent two-and-a-half years in a Turkish prison, where she was tortured. Two separate trials at an Istanbul court, in 2001 and 2006, resulted in her being absolved from all charges. However, the Court of Appeal interfered twice and in September 2010 referred her case back to the court in Istanbul.³² Selek has not returned to Turkey in order to avoid a possible life sentence.

In a commentary note for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Turkey correspondent Michael Martens sums up:

“That the state proceeds in such a manner against a disagreeable intellectuals shows once again how far Turkey still is from the EU standards. Much further than other aspiring

³² *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Lebenslänglich? Es gibt nicht mal eine Tat, 8 February 2011.

member states such as Serbia, Bosnia, or Macedonia.”³³

16 February 2011 – Bahners and Islam critics in Germany – a controversy

Patrick Bahners, head of the feature section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, a conservative daily and one of the two most widely read newspapers in Germany, has provoked a vivid debate with the publication of his book “The Panicmongers: The German Fear of Islam,” (“Die Panikmacher: Die deutsche Angst vor dem Islam”) a portion of which was just published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The excerpt specifically addresses the Islam-critic notion that Muslims may use ‘taqiya’, a theological concept describing a form of denial or lie, to conceal their attempts to spread their religion further. Bahners likens this to the Catholic notion of ‘reservatio mentalis’ and points to situations of extreme distress when by hiding their beliefs they can avert threats to their life. This is a far more limited interpretation than the commonplace deception that several Islamic critics have suggested is allowed, even in the liberal Western states. Among others, he questions the dogmatic approach of many Islamic critics such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who fights for the right of Muslims to leave their faith behind them, while at the same time rejecting the possibility that non-believers can adhere to Islam. For Bahners, the Islam debate increasingly resembles a civil war between the religions. Critics, such as German feminist Alice Schwarzer, publicly wonder if it might already be too late to save the enlightened world from Islam domination. Henryk Broder’s parallel between the Islamic intifada and young migrants in parts of Berlin expresses an equally simplistic view of Islam. He concludes stating:

“if Islam is the problem, mosques can never be part of the solution. The security agencies count on mosque congregations to prevent potential enemies of the state from drifting off. But according to the logic of Islam critics, pious Muslims seeking to avoid any conflict with the state law in the long term are a much greater threat.”³⁴

Thomas Steinfeld, head of the feature of the liberal daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the a nationwide daily, concurred with Bahners’ analysis. In his article, he praised Bahners’ book as “a masterpiece of enlightenment”³⁵ and commended the author’s theological approach, which looked first at the logical constructions underlying Islamic critics’ arguments before confronting them with the empirical reality. He supported Bahners’ over-arching impression that a “logic of suspicion” guides the German discussion on Islam and shared his concern about a mounting hysteria in the integration debate following the publication of Sarrazin’s book.

The joining of two of the most influential voices in German political commentary triggered an intense debate in the German media. Matthias Mattusek, former head of the culture section of the influential weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, spoke of a “djihad” in the media with Bahners transforming his newspaper into a platform for a “just war against Islamic critics.”³⁶ But Mattusek struck back, ridiculing the arguments presented by Bahners and Steinfeld are supporting the points of view expressed by Hirsi Ali, Broder and Necla Kelek. Deriding Bahners’ theological discussion of ‘taqiya’, Mattusek pointed to Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Cologne in 2008 and to his call on Turks to avoid assimilation into German culture,

³³ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Michael Martens), Unter Verdacht: Wie eine Wissenschaftlerin in der Türkei um ihr Recht kämpft, 10 February 2011.

³⁴ Patrick Bahners, “Die Panikmacher“, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 February 2011.

³⁵ Thomas Steinfeld, “Aus dem Kopf“, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 February 2011.

³⁶ Matthias Mattusek, “Kritik an Islam-Kritikern: Dschihad im Feuilleton“, *Spiegel*, 19 February 2011.

which he characterised as a forced process designed to make Turks abandon their heritage.³⁷

In an interview with Bahners, *Die Zeit*, a major weekly newspaper, published Bahners' first reaction to the debate caused by his book. In the interview, Bahners pointed to parallels between the widespread criticism of Islam and a growing nationalism in Germany.³⁸ He emphasised he does not reject the right to criticise Islam in general, but instead loathes the tendency to view all Muslims as potential terrorists, which he considers a "collective delusion." Bahners moreover condemned the understanding of freedom of opinion to be a license to insult minorities, and to consider their toleration of such insults as a prerequisite for integration. Bahners referred to the widespread praise of Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and the prohibition of headscarves for state employees as indications of a "primitive society" and a lack of respect towards Islam and religion in general. He demanded a differentiation between the secularisation of the state and the secularisation of society. Given these developments, Bahners considered the creation of a xenophobic party in Germany to be likely.

Thilo Sarrazin, reviewed Bahners' book in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. In his review, titled "Erdogan's Ghostwriter" Sarrazin pointed to the frequent parallels Bahners draws to anti-Semitism at the end of the 19th century, an analogy Sarrazin described as the "nuclear bomb of German political discourse" and "maximal means of retaliation"³⁹. Sarrazin's own book, "Germany is doing away with itself," caused a stir last autumn by arguing that insufficient integration of Muslims was threatening Germany. In his review, he stoked controversy again by likening Bahners' argument to Erdogan's statement in his 2008 Cologne speech that "assimilation is a crime against humanity". Sarrazin suggested that Bahners could become Erdogan's ghostwriter. For Sarrazin, the key argument of those who Bahners refers to as "Islamic critics" lies in the primacy of secular over religious rules. However, religious rules refer to an authority that is beyond human construction, thereby implies that these rules must take primacy over man-made ones. According to Sarrazin, this dilemma should have been at the core of Bahners' book. Instead, he believes Bahners focused his anger on Islamic critics, unfairly simplifying and twisting their arguments, thereby reducing his own credibility. In Sarrazin's view, Bahner is hamstrung by political correctness and hides behind a shallow notion of decency that is little more than an exclusion of unwanted questions and discussions. Sarrazin concluded his review by claiming that Bahners, both as an author and as a human being, had truly gotten off track ("sich verrannt").

Henryk Broder, another Islamic critic attacked in Bahners' book, expressed his consternation in the conservative daily *Die Welt*. According to Broder, the main contribution of Bahners' book rested not in the content as such, but in what it revealed about its author, namely "an intellectual's fear of reality from which he seeks to flee by an escape into a world of wishful thinking"⁴⁰. Echoing Mattusek's ironic tone, Broder emphasised that it is the Islam critics, rather than the radical Islamists, whom Bahners believes to threaten the peaceful coexistence of human beings. For Broder, the turning point in this debate was 9/11, an event Bahners largely neglects in his book. Ridiculing Bahners' complicated syntax and overly intellectual approach, Broder claimed that "The Panicmongers" was "a lot of hot air, with minimal epistemological and practical added value." In sum, Broder concurred with Sarrazin in challenging Bahners' lack personal involvement in the more troublesome manifestations of

³⁷ Matthias Mattusek, "Kritik an Islam-Kritikern: Dschihad im Feuilleton", *Spiegel*, 19 February 2011.

³⁸ *DIE ZEIT*, "Lust an der Herabsetzung" (Interview with Patrick Bahners), 21 February 2011.

³⁹ Thilo Sarrazin, "Erdogans Ghostwriter", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 February 2011

⁴⁰ Henryk Broder, "Vor dem Islam Angst zu haben ist eine Tugend", *Die Welt*, 21 February 2011.

Islam, evaluating his book as

“a kamikaze enterprise of an intellectual who considers it a virtue not to be afraid. Until now however, he has not had to survive a test of courage. Islam or rather Islamism has so far avoided Patrick Bahners.”⁴¹

These sharp attacks on Bahners’ book triggered a series of supportive statements as well. *DeutschlandRadio* ran an article praising Bahners’ assessment that German society “is becoming increasingly vulgarised with regard to Islam”⁴². Similarly, Mathias Rohe, a German scholar with a background in Islamic Studies and Law, in a *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* article criticised the position adopted by Necla Kelek in the same newspaper in reaction to the German Minister for Justice’s call for more religious tolerance in Germany (see chronology for January/February 2011).⁴³ He insisted that his speech for German Minister of Justice, did not advocate an Islamic rule of law in Germany; on the contrary, he said it emphasised the primacy of German law, which leaves sufficient room for religious freedom and the exercise of religious practices. Rohe therefore differentiates between the sphere of law and the sphere of religion, claiming that it is precisely the assumption that democracy and rule of law are incompatible with Islam that fuels Islamist extremism. The fact that minority religions may be less protected in Muslim-dominated countries for Rohe is all the more a reason to emphasise human and minority rights in our own country, in order to be able to credibly criticise misgivings in other countries.⁴⁴

Several other articles acknowledged Bahners’ efforts to rationalise the debate on Islam and to critically assess the arguments advanced by its most vocal critics⁴⁵, while others criticised Bahners for a lack of personal experience with his topic⁴⁶, or reproached him for overlooking the political dimensions of Islam and downplaying the legitimate panic caused by Islamist attacks.⁴⁷ In a joint interview, the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* confronted Bahners and Necla Kelek, hoping for a debate. Bahners once again insisted on the need to distinguish between Islam in general as “the pathological forms of the Islamic systems”⁴⁸ and reproached Kelek for manipulating the public and for generalising from anecdotes instead of basing her criticism upon facts. He furthermore repeated that it was Kelek’s personal experience of a violent father that fuelled her criticism of Islam, a claim already made in his book.⁴⁹

20 February 2011 – *Almanya the Film*

The Sunday edition of the conservative weekly *Die Welt* published an interview with actress Aylin Tezel, who currently stars in the film “*Almanya – Welcome to Germany*” about a Turkish-German family and the challenges of integration. Playing ironically with the respective prejudices of Germans and Turks towards each other, the film seeks to make a humoristic contribution to the integration debate. Federal President Christian Wulff, whose

⁴¹ Henryk Broder, “Vor dem Islam Angst zu haben ist eine Tugend“, *Die Welt*, 21 February 2011.

⁴² *DeutschlandRadio*, “Selbstreinigungskräfte der Öffentlichkeit“, 21 February 2011.

⁴³ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Das ist Rechtskulturrelativismus, 22 February 2011.

⁴⁴ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Das ist Rechtskulturrelativismus, 22 February 2011.

⁴⁵ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Wider die Sarrazin-Methode“, 23 February 2011; *taz*, “Aufstand der Unanständigen“, 23 February 2011.

⁴⁶ *Die Welt*, “Der Leisetreter“, 26 February 2011.

⁴⁷ *Tagesspiegel*, “Die Panik vor der Panik“, 14 March 2011.

⁴⁸ *Spiegel*, “Competing Views on Germany's Immigrants” (Interview with Necla Kelek and Patrick Bahners), 25 February 2011.

⁴⁹ *Spiegel*, “Competing Views on Germany's Immigrants” (Interview with Necla Kelek and Patrick Bahners), 25 February 2011.

claim that Islam belongs to Germany was widely taken up in the media in the autumn of 2010, was reported to have appreciated the attempt to offer a light and funny perspective on an otherwise complicated topic.

22 February 2011 – Anticipating Erdogan’s visit

In the run-up to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Germany, the media focus on the irritation he caused at his last speech in Cologne, where he claimed that assimilation is a crime against humanity. Thomas Seibert, Turkey correspondent with the daily *Tagesspiegel*, said that visa liberalisation and the on-going dispute about Cyprus would be among the hot topics during Erdogan’s visit.⁵⁰ Moreover, Seibert believed that Erdogan would use his speech as “a piece of internal politics on German ground”⁵¹, aiming to garner the support of the 1.5 million foreign Turkish voters for the upcoming elections in June. The *Kölnische Rundschau* expected protests to accompany Erdogan’s speech, with the Dusseldorf police preparing for two announced demonstrations, one by the far-right Pro NRW party, and the other by a Kurdish movement.⁵² An article in *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* put Erdogan’s visit in an EU perspective, claiming that:

“many in Ankara meanwhile view the EU application only as a means to enhance the standards in Turkey – as a kind of distance learning course for the construction of a modern democracy, covering all kinds of fields from human rights to food safety.”⁵³

Prior to Erdogan’s visit, former Chancellor Schroder called on Angela Merkel to change German Turkey policy, and, in particular, to abandon the concept of ‘privileged partnership’.⁵⁴ Erdogan also called upon Germany to cooperate more closely with Turkey regarding integration policy. He appealed directly to Merkel, requesting that Germany leads the way for Turkey’s EU accession.⁵⁵ In an interview with the regional newspaper *Rheinische Post*, Erdogan emphasised the successful integration of German Turks could only be achieved through close cooperation between the two countries.⁵⁶ In the same interview, Erdogan also claimed that Turkey is discriminated against throughout the EU accession process, while emphasising that the country is not turning away from Europe as a result of this perceived discrimination.⁵⁷

27 February 2011 –Dusseldorf speech controversy

Erdogan’s visit to Germany triggered strong reactions in the German press. Prior to Erdogan’s speech, the Commissioner for Integration, Maria Bohmer, had encouraged Erdogan to foster the integration of German Turks, particularly in terms of their German language skills.⁵⁸

Three statements made by Erdogan in his speech in Dusseldorf attracted particular attention: first, his appeal to the German Turks that “our children must learn German, but they need to

⁵⁰ *Tagesspiegel*, “Erdogan besucht Deutschland“, 22 February 2011.

⁵¹ *Tagesspiegel*, “Gestern Köln, morgen Düsseldorf“, 24 February 2011.

⁵² *Kölnische Rundschau*, “Proteste zur Erdogan-Rede erwartet“, 25 February 2011.

⁵³ *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, “Löst Erdogan wieder Krach aus?“, 25 February 2011.

⁵⁴ *Die Welt*, “Schröder und Erdogan appellieren an Merkel“, 26 February 2011.

⁵⁵ *Die Welt*, “Schröder und Erdogan appellieren an Merkel“, 26 February 2011.

⁵⁶ *RP Online*, “Erdogan: ‘Erfolgreiche Integration - nur mit uns‘“, 26 February 2011.

⁵⁷ *RP Online*, “Erdogan: ‘Erfolgreiche Integration - nur mit uns‘“, 26 February 2011.

⁵⁸ *Die Welt*, “Erdogan für ‘Doppelpass light‘ für Deutschtürken“, 27 February 2011.

learn Turkish first.”⁵⁹ Second, the attention focuses on the proposed creation of a de facto double citizenship through the upgrade of the existing “Mavi Kart” granted to former Turkish citizens, which would include all privileges apart from the right to vote.⁶⁰ With this gesture, Erdogan sought to encourage German Turks to adopt German citizenship without having to give up their Turkish identity. Third, Erdogan’s criticism of Islamophobia and xenophobia triggered a wealth of strong reactions.⁶¹

The statement about learning Turkish first provoked an outcry, particularly among conservative politicians. At her meeting with Erdogan at the CeBIT fair, Angela Merkel emphasised that German language skills were crucial to allow the Turkish population to participate in German society.⁶² Guido Westerwelle, head of the FDP, went further in his criticism, underlining that the German language should take primacy over other languages and that it represented “the key to integration”⁶³. Similar positions are voiced by CDU members. Hermann Grohe, General Secretary of the CDU, claimed that Erdogan was unnecessarily fuelling distrust and creating new fault lines between Germans and the immigrant population.⁶⁴ Ruprecht Polenz (CDU), head of the Bundestag Committee for Foreign Affairs, seconded Erdogan by claiming that many linguists considered it important for children to learn their native language before turning to a second one, and underlined that he saw “nothing worthy of criticism” in Erdogan’s demand.⁶⁵ He moreover rejected Kauder’s request to cancel accession negotiations on the grounds of lacking religious freedom, insisting that negotiations were actually the best way to help Christians in Turkey.⁶⁶

Several articles also quoted the leader of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Volker Kauder, as demanding an interruption of the EU accession negotiations with Turkey as long as the country could not ensure a full exercise of the freedom of religion.⁶⁷ This concern is echoed in a comment in the major conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which reproached Erdogan for having a double standard given the situation of Christians in Turkey.⁶⁸ Kauder’s proposal was rejected by the Social Democrats and the Greens, with the head of the SPD parliamentary group, Gernot Erler, suggesting that the CDU breached its own coalition agreement, which contained a clear commitment to the accession negotiations.⁶⁹

⁵⁹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011.

⁶⁰ *Tagesspiegel*, “Einbürgerung für Türken bald leichter“, 27 February 2011; *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, “Doppelpass-Light‘ für Deutschtürken“, 27 February 2011; *Die Welt*, “Erdogan für ‘Doppelpass light‘ für Deutschtürken“, 27 February 2011; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Erdogan: Nein zur Assimilation“, 28 February 2011.

⁶¹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011; *Spiegel*, “Erdogans vergiftete Liebe“, 27 February 2011; *Tagesspiegel*, “Erdogan warnt vor Ausländerfeindlichkeit“, 27 February 2011.

⁶² *Die Welt*, “Erdogan an Deutschland – ‘Wir lieben Sie!‘“, 28 February 2011

⁶³ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Union und FDP empört über Erdogan“, 28 February 2011; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Erdogan schürt unnötig Misstrauen“, 28 February 2011; *Die Welt*, “Westerwelle kontert Erdogan – ‘Erst Deutsch lernen‘“, 28 February 2011.

⁶⁴ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Erdogan schürt unnötig Misstrauen“, 28 February 2011.

⁶⁵ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011; *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, “CDU-Politiker verteidigt Erdogan“, 1 March 2011.

⁶⁶ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011.

⁶⁷ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Erdogan schaltet sich erneut in Integrationsdebatte ein“, 27 February 2011; *Focus*, “Die Türkei fühlt sich diskriminiert“, 26 February 2011; *Tagesspiegel*, “Kauder will Türkei nicht in der EU“, 27 February 2011.

⁶⁸ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Mit zweierlei Maß, 1 March 2011.

⁶⁹ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Erdogan schaltet sich erneut in Integrationsdebatte ein“, 27 February 2011; *Tagesspiegel*, “Kauder will Türkei nicht in der EU“, 27 February 2011.

Cem Ozdemir, the Turkish-born leader of the Green Party, in an interview with the conservative daily *Die Welt* insisted that “assimilation is an individual decision,” in which “no-one should intervene.”⁷⁰ A comment in the widely read weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* tried to calm the debate by pointing out that the most important point is that Turkish children learn both languages, regardless of the order in which they do so. The focus should therefore lie on how to enable German Turks to consider both languages as equally important and to learn both of them correctly.⁷¹

In a comment published by the left-leaning daily *taz*, Daniel Bax insisted that it is up to Germany to encourage integration through attractive incentives.⁷² He said the de facto double citizenship offered to German Turks by Erdogan might even encourage a larger number of Turkish citizens to adopt the German citizenship.

The parallel Erdogan drew between Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism, declaring both to be equal crimes against humanity also fuelled an outcry among German politicians.⁷³ CSU General Secretary Alexander Dobrindt requested the Turkish Ambassador to Germany be summoned following Erdogan’s statement that Turkey would protect threatened Turks whether they are in Libya or in Germany.⁷⁴ FDP General Secretary Christian Lindner declared himself amazed by Erdogan’s treatment of the Turkish population as a German national minority, when they actually represent immigrants that Germany is trying to integrate, a reality Erdogan is attempting to relativise⁷⁵. Former CSU head of the Land group, Hans-Peter Friedrich, who only days later became the new German Minister of Interior, considered Erdogan’s speech to be an unacceptable intervention into Germany’s internal affairs. He claimed that Erdogan should not use German immigrants of Turkish origin as lobbyists for Turkey.⁷⁶ Similarly, a comment in *Die Welt* reproached Erdogan for not actually desiring integration at all, and criticised the lack of a simultaneous German translation of Erdogan’s speech.⁷⁷ In an article co-authored by Ozlem Gezer and Anna Reimann, the influential weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* spoke of “Erdogan’s poisoned love”, pointing to the ambivalences in the Prime Minister’s speech and concluding on a critical note that:

“it was a speech, it was an orchestration that did not foster the belonging to Germany – Erdogan incessantly appealed to the Turkish national pride of those who should be at home in Germany since four generations.”⁷⁸

An article in the Cologne daily *Kolner Stadt-Anzeiger* criticised “Erdogan’s false game,” describing the Turkish Prime Minister as a demagogue and accusing him of patronising German Turks.⁷⁹ In a similar vein, the *Tagesspiegel* ran a comment by journalist Hans Monath titled “Ruling over children’s beds” emphasising that no one in Germany expects Turks to give up their culture and that the decision to do so is solely theirs, “and therefore not that of the Turkish Prime Minister’s, either.”⁸⁰ The article concluded on a moderate note insisting Germany needed Turkey for its integration policy and also as an EU member.

⁷⁰ *Die Welt*, “Ankara löst nicht die Probleme meiner Kinder“ (Interview with Cem Özdemir), 1 March 2011.

⁷¹ *DIE ZEIT*, “Zweisprachigkeit ist ein Gewinn – egal wie“, 1 March 2011.

⁷² *taz* (Daniel Bax), “Doppelte Staatsbürger“, 28 February 2011.

⁷³ *Financial Times Deutschland*, “Empörung über Erdogans Rede in Deutschland“, 28 February 2011.

⁷⁴ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Erst Türkisch oder erst Deutsch“, 28 February 2011.

⁷⁵ *Financial Times Deutschland*, “Empörung über Erdogans Rede in Deutschland“, 28 February 2011.

⁷⁶ *Financial Times Deutschland*, “Empörung über Erdogans Rede in Deutschland“, 28 February 2011.

⁷⁷ *Die Welt*, “Wie sich Erdogan den guten Deutsch-Türken vorstellt“, 28 February 2011.

⁷⁸ *Spiegel*, “Erdogans vergiftete Liebe“, 27 February 2011.

⁷⁹ *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, “Erdogans falsches Spiel“, 2 March 2011.

⁸⁰ *Tagesspiegel*, “Herrschaft über die Kinderbetten“, 1 March 2011.

Although this does not imply a softening of the required criteria for EU accession, the article sees:

“no reason to constantly rebuff Turkey in its desire to belong to Europe and to charge the technical questions regarding the fulfilment of the accession criteria for EU membership with requests that solely appeal to the fears of foreign infiltration of German voters.”⁸¹

28 February 2011 – Dusseldorf speech controversy part II

Following Erdogan’s speech in Dusseldorf, several media outlets commented on Turkey’s new self-confidence and its ability to act as a model for the Muslim world. According to the daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Turkey was increasingly filling out its role of a regional power, complementing its economic power with political aspirations.⁸² The article was sceptical about the priority Turkey rhetorically still accords to the EU accession, when the country’s presence in the Middle East is being extended. Concluding on a sceptical note, Gerd Hohler, the newspapers correspondent for Turkey, Cyprus, and Greece, summarised that:

“Erdogan’s Turkey is increasingly going its own way. And it does not look as though this way leads into the EU.”⁸³

“Turkey is no model” is also the central claim of a comment by Jürgen Gottschlich, Istanbul correspondent for *taz*.⁸⁴ While Gottschlich acknowledged that the AKP government has managed to reduce the influence of the army, he said that the Egyptian population had proven itself to be far more active in asserting itself in having successfully overthrown a dictator:

“The people leading the rebellion in the Arab world have succeed in doing something that no one worldwide would have expected to be possible, and that the Turks have never managed either: They have successfully risen against a dictator and a despotic regime.”⁸⁵

The transition to democracy does not necessitate any explicitly Muslim model, but instead represents the embrace of universal values. In Turkey however, the rise to power of the AKP has simply triggered a struggle between the new Muslim elites and the old elites. Gottschlich therefore concluded that the Egyptians deserve more than a “sugar-coated version of the Muslim brothers.”⁸⁶

An interview with Dondu Taka Cinar, the head of the “confederation of trade unions of public servants” with the newspaper *Junge Welt* echoed the position that the AKP government is no model for the Middle East.⁸⁷ Particularly regarding economic and social policy, Cinar said the AKP government has not been able to implement substantial benefits for the population. On the contrary, the right to strike was practically repealed, and the high economic growth has benefited only companies and not workers.⁸⁸

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung was also sceptical of Turkey’s ability to be a model for the Arab world. Turkey correspondent Michael Martens pointed to the series of arrests of

⁸¹ *Tagesspiegel*, “Herrschaft über die Kinderbetten“, 1 March 2011.

⁸² *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Die Türkei trumpft auf“, 28 February 2011.

⁸³ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, “Die Türkei trumpft auf“, 28 February 2011.

⁸⁴ Jürgen Gottschlich, “Die Türkei ist kein Vorbild“, *taz*, 28 February 2011.

⁸⁵ Jürgen Gottschlich, “Die Türkei ist kein Vorbild“, *taz*, 28 February 2011.

⁸⁶ Jürgen Gottschlich, “Die Türkei ist kein Vorbild“, *taz*, 28 February 2011.

⁸⁷ *Junge Welt*, “Die AKP-Regierung ist kein Modell für den Nahen Osten“, 2 March 2011.

⁸⁸ *Junge Welt*, “Die AKP-Regierung ist kein Modell für den Nahen Osten“, 2 March 2011.

Turkish journalists, Martens claimed that Turkey's domestic policies did not quite match the image of the modern, democratic country it propagates in its foreign policy.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Alle sind Ergenekon, 8 March 2011.

March

3 March 2011 - Friedrich, Islam, German culture

On his first day in office, the new German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich fuelled an intense debate. By stating that the claim “that Islam is part of Germany is a fact that cannot be deduced from history,” Friedrich contradicted German President Christian Wulff’s statement made at the German national holiday on 3 October 2010 (“Islam belongs to Germany”) and reopened the discussion regarding the position of Islam in German society.⁹⁰ This controversial statement triggered both supporters and opponents to speak out. Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit recommended that Friedrich:

“should first settle in his new position, become acquainted with his tasks and the political reality in Germany, and only then express himself.”⁹¹

The majority of reactions from politicians were critical of Friedrich’s statement. Greens, Social Democrats (SPD), Liberals (FDP), and also a number of Muslim representatives rejected Friedrich’s assessment.⁹² Renate Künast, leader of the Green parliamentary group, invited Friedrich to go on the streets in Berlin and see who lives there.⁹³ German Minister of Justice Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger (FDP) affirmed that “Islam of course belongs to Germany”⁹⁴ and suggested that Friedrich focus on the present rather than on history. Merkel’s speaker Steffen Seibert tried to calm the debate by claiming that he can see no contradiction between Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger’s and Friedrich’s position; while Friedrich had not rejected that Islam is part of contemporary Germany, it is indeed true that the history and culture of the country were shaped by Christianity and Judaism.⁹⁵ Wolfgang Bosbach (CDU), Chairman of the Bundestag’s Interior Committee, seconded Friedrich by emphasising that Islam may be part of the reality in Germany, but not part of its identity.⁹⁶ Other CDU/CSU politicians, among them CSU General Secretary Alexander Dobrindt, agreed with Bosbach’s assessment.⁹⁷

Besides the more abstract debate on the place of Islam in Germany, Friedrich’s words triggered a debate about the Islam Conference, an institutionalised dialogue between the German federal states and the German Muslims formed in 2006 by Wolfgang Schäuble, coordinated by the Ministry of Interior. Several members of the conference, including Kenan Kolat, head of the Turkish Community in Germany, stated that they were disappointed by Friedrich’s comment.⁹⁸ In an op-ed in *taz*, commentator Daniel Bax suggested that Merkel’s decision to leave the Ministry of Interior for the CSU might be an attempt to reign in the right

⁹⁰ *Handelsblatt*, “Neuer Innenminister vergeigt Amtsantritt“, 3 March 2011; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Friedrich widerspricht Wulff“, 3 March 2011; *Die Welt*, “Friedrich nach Anti-Islam-Aussage schon in der Kritik“, 4 March 2011; *Die Welt*, “Wirbel wegen Friedrichs Islam-Äußerung“, 4 March 2011.

⁹¹ *Handelsblatt*, “Neuer Innenminister vergeigt Amtsantritt“, 3 March 2011; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Friedrich widerspricht Wulff“, 3 March 2011.

⁹² *Die Welt*, “Friedrich nach Anti-Islam-Aussage schon in der Kritik“, 4 March 2011.

⁹³ *Die Welt*, “Friedrich nach Anti-Islam-Aussage schon in der Kritik“, 4 March 2011.

⁹⁴ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, “Streit über Islam in Deutschland“, 4 March 2011; *Die Welt*, “Justizministerin rüffelt Friedrich für Islam-Aussage“, 4 March 2011.

⁹⁵ *Die Welt*, “Für Angela Merkel gehört der Islam zu Deutschland“, 4 March 2011.

⁹⁶ *Die Welt*, “Für Angela Merkel gehört der Islam zu Deutschland“, 4 March 2011.

⁹⁷ *Die Welt*, “Für Angela Merkel gehört der Islam zu Deutschland“, 4 March 2011.

⁹⁸ *taz*, “Nehmt ihm die Islamkonferenz weg!“, 4 March 2011; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, “Innenminister redet Blödsinn“, 4 March 2011; *Die Welt*, “Türkische Gemeinde attackiert Minister Friedrich“, 7 March 2011.

wing of her party following the Sarrazin debate.⁹⁹ The comment implied that it might be most useful to transfer the oversight of the Islam Conference not, as suggested by the FDP, to the Ministry of Justice, but instead to the Ministry of Education, since one of the key issues it deals with is the introduction of Islamic classes in German schools.¹⁰⁰

Reacting to the FDP's suggestion to give up his supervision of the Islam Conference, Friedrich balked.¹⁰¹ He reiterated that while Islam may be a reality in Germany today, the German culture was shaped by Judeo-Christian values, an assessment supported both by CSU Chairman Horst Seehofer and the head of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, Volker Kauder.¹⁰² Ruprecht Polenz, Chairman of the Bundestag's Foreign Affairs Committee, distanced himself from Friedrich's words by insisting, "it is not appropriate to claim that one of the world religions does not belong to Germany"¹⁰³.

The media was divided in their assessment of Friedrich's statement. The weekly magazine *Stern* likened Friedrich's comments to Sarrazin and adopted a largely critical tone, speaking of a "gross mistake" and an "embarrassing false start."¹⁰⁴ Michael Matussek, a commentator with the major weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, loathed a renewed debate about the place of Islam in Germany, and said that so far, none of Friedrich's critics had responded to his claims on a factual basis. Instead, debates about Islam always resembled a "walk on eggshells" where any critic must take care not to provoke the opposite side into acting the way one has described.¹⁰⁵ The daily *Tagesspiegel* echoed the comment made by Merkel's spokesman in claiming that there is no contradiction between Friedrich's and Wulff's statements, describing the on-going controversy as "a storm in a tea cup"¹⁰⁶. He said that both Friedrich and Wulff made true statements – the former regarding history, the latter regarding reality – and that no normative judgment can be deduced from these claims.¹⁰⁷ In a comment for the conservative daily *Die Welt*, Aiman Mazyek, the Chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, addressed precisely this judgement, asking whether Germany is "prepared to give its Muslims a chance"¹⁰⁸.

8 March 2011 – EP report on Turkey and Die Welt

While the publication of the European Parliament's progress report on Turkey was largely neglected by the German press, conservative daily *Die Welt* ran three articles on this topic. The newspaper claimed that the assessment could "hardly be more crushing"¹⁰⁹ and that the document clearly demonstrated that negotiations between Turkey and the EU have come to a standstill. For *Die Welt*, the Cyprus issue is one of the main obstacles on Turkey's path to Europe.¹¹⁰ The *Welt* also wrote that Erdogan reacted strongly to the progress report, "there is nothing balanced in this report. I also do not believe that the authors of the report are truly balanced."¹¹¹

⁹⁹ Daniel Bax, "Wo der Islam hingehört", *taz*, 4 March 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Bax, "Wo der Islam hingehört", *taz*, 4 March 2011.

¹⁰¹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Friedrich für Dialog mit Muslimen", 6 March 2011.

¹⁰² *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Friedrich für Dialog mit Muslimen", 6 March 2011.

¹⁰³ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, "Friedrich für Dialog mit Muslimen", 6 March 2011.

¹⁰⁴ *Stern*, "Friedrich macht den Sarrazin", 6 March 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Matthias Matussek, "Warum der Minister recht hat", *Spiegel*, 6 March 2011.

¹⁰⁶ *Tagesspiegel*, "Falsch verstanden", 7 March 2011.

¹⁰⁷ *Tagesspiegel*, "Falsch verstanden", 7 March 2011.

¹⁰⁸ *Die Welt*, "Warum der Islam zu Deutschland gehört", 8 March 2011.

¹⁰⁹ *Die Welt*, "Europaparlament stellt Mängelliste der Türkei vor", 8 March 2011.

¹¹⁰ *Die Welt*, "Türkei-Beitritt in weiter Ferne", 9 March 2011.

¹¹¹ *Die Welt*, "Erdogan attackiert Autoren des Türkei-Berichts", 11 March 2011.

9 March 2011 – Seehofer's Passau Speech Controversy

In the follow-up to the debate triggered by Hans-Peter Friedrich's inauguration as new Minister of Interior, CSU Chairman Horst Seehofer (who is also Governor of the Land of Bavaria), "pulled out the patriotism club,"¹¹² said the economic magazine *Handelsblatt*. In a speech in Passau, he insisted upon Germany's Christian imprint, claiming that "a society is built on sand if it has no common identity"¹¹³. Taking up Erdogan's speech in Dusseldorf at the end of February, Seehofer emphasises that

"a country that disregards the human rights of women in such a way as Turkey, and makes life for Christians on its own territory difficult – we will not be told by such a Prime Minister how to deal with the religious minorities in our country."¹¹⁴

Moreover, Seehofer suggested introducing the German language into the Bavarian Constitution and to not only support immigrants in their integration efforts, but to also formulate concrete demands which they must fulfil.¹¹⁵ A comment in *Der Spiegel* expressed amazement at the populist turn in the CDU/CSU group.¹¹⁶ It was especially surprised by Seehofer's plan to have his constitutional amendments approved in a popular vote. The CDU/CSU's coalition partner FDP in the Bavarian government was apparently concerned by the "conservative rollback" taking place in the Christian-oriented parties,¹¹⁷ said the writers in *Der Spiegel*. Thus, Minister of Justice Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger (FDP) emphasised that "Mr. Seehofer's idea will not become a proposal of the conservative-liberal coalition in Munich"¹¹⁸, the capital of Bavaria and seat of its regional government.

Seehofer's words did not only have political, but also judicial repercussions. His assertion that "we will lean up against immigration into the German social systems until the last bullet" provoked a series of formal complaints filed against the CSU Chairman and Bavarian President.¹¹⁹

Indeed, several politicians compared Seehofer's speech to a statement made by Hitler, where he, back in 1945 on the same 9 March, used the expression "until the last bullet" to call upon the Germans to continue to fight.¹²⁰ Former SPD State Secretary Ulrich Kasparick and former SPD delegate Jorg Tausch therefore accused Seehofer of breaching paragraph 130 of the penal code, which prohibited incitement of the people ("Volksverhetzung").¹²¹ The Greens also strongly condemned Seehofer's words.¹²² Daniel Bax, commentator with the liberal daily *taz*, spoke out strongly against a toughening of the German law on aliens, which constituted the background to Seehofer's speech. According to him, it was wrong to pretend that the main integration problems lie with the immigrants themselves, whereas the German state is making strong efforts to encourage their integration, a position Bax dismissed as "fairytale."¹²³

¹¹² *Handelsblatt*, "Seehofer holt die Patriotismus-Keule raus", 9 March 2011.

¹¹³ *Handelsblatt*, "Seehofer holt die Patriotismus-Keule raus", 9 March 2011.

¹¹⁴ *Handelsblatt*, "Seehofer holt die Patriotismus-Keule raus", 9 March 2011.

¹¹⁵ *Die Welt*, "Seehofer will Integration in Verfassung aufnehmen", 9 March 2011.

¹¹⁶ *Spiegel*, "Union macht auf Sarrazin", 10 March 2011.

¹¹⁷ *Spiegel*, "Union macht auf Sarrazin", 10 March 2011.

¹¹⁸ *Spiegel*, "Union macht auf Sarrazin", 10 March 2011.

¹¹⁹ *Spiegel*, "Union macht auf Sarrazin", 10 March 2011.

¹²⁰ *Die Welt*, Politiker vergleicht Seehofer-Rede mit Hitler-Befehl, 10 March 2011.

¹²¹ *Tagesspiegel*, "Anzeigen gegen Horst Seehofer", 10 March 2011; *Die Welt*, "Politiker vergleicht Seehofer-Rede mit Hitler-Befehl", 10 March 2011.

¹²² *Tagesspiegel*, "Anzeigen gegen Horst Seehofer", 10 March 2011.

¹²³ Daniel Bax, "Union statt Integration", *taz*, 10 March 2011.

11 March 2011 - Polling Intolerance

An article in conservative daily *Die Welt* discussed a study published by the Social Democratic Friedrich Ebert Foundation, according to which around half of the respondents considered Islam to be “a religion of intolerance.”¹²⁴ Almost 80 per cent agreed that Islam’s attitude towards women contradicted their own values. The study was conducted in Germany, Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, and Hungary. Besides their critical attitude towards Islam, around half the respondents in Germany agreed with an Anti-Semitic statement proposed in the survey.

Link to study: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/do/07905-20110311.pdf>

15 March 2011 - IFO survey among German Turks

The opinion survey institute IFO published the results of a representative survey among German Turks. According to the results, not even half of the German Turks considered their own German language skills to be good or very good.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, 70 per cent affirm their desire to integrate into German society, while almost half of the respondents were in contact with Germans less than once a week. Every second respondent moreover claimed to feel unwanted in Germany, and roughly the same number was planning to return to Turkey at some point in time. 85 per cent had taken part in a state-organised integration course, two thirds successfully.

15 March 2011 German critic on Turkish nuclear power plants

In the aftermath of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami in Japan, several German media turned to other potentially high-risk areas where nuclear power plants are planned or already operating. Before the backdrop of the German government’s decision to introduce a moratorium on nuclear safety and to temporarily shut down seven of the oldest nuclear power plants throughout the country, the Turkish decision to hold onto plans to construct such power plants in the earthquake-prone Istanbul area raised some eyebrows.

17 March 2011 - Malatya trials

The conservative daily *Die Welt* reports on a series of detentions in the context of the Malatya trials. The article briefly sketches the 2007 murders and mentions possible links to the Ergenekon trial.

17 March 2011 - Immigration law to prevent forced marriages and support integration

Several media cover the federal parliament’s adoption of a law to tighten the current immigration laws. The measure was backed by the coalition parties but rejected by the opposition. Most of the media coverage focuses on increased protection against forced marriages.¹²⁶ While the maximum sentence for forced marriage has not been increased from the current five years, it has become a criminal offence. Immigrants forced to return to their home country for the sole purpose of marriage have received the right to return to Germany,

¹²⁴ *Die Welt*, “Europäer halten Islam für Religion der Intoleranz“, 11 March 2011.

¹²⁵ *Der Westen*, “Die Hälfte der Türken will zurück in die Heimat“, 15 March 2011.

¹²⁶ *Main Post*, „Bundestag gegen Zwangsehen“, 17 March 2011; *Focus*, „Beschluss – Zwangsheirat wird hart bestraft“, 17 March 2011.

provided that they were well integrated in the country before their departure. Moreover, the minimum period required for a marriage partner to obtain an individual right of residence was raised from two to three years after marriage. This provision was widely criticised by the opposition, which believes that the new legal framework does not contribute to the integration of immigrants.¹²⁷

As the widely read weekly *Die Zeit* reports, immigrants will only be granted an unlimited residency permit if they successfully complete an integration course.¹²⁸ These courses – consisting of a combination of language classes and an introduction to German legal rules, history, and culture – seek to foster the integration of German immigrants. They can be made mandatory for those who are not regularly employed or who fail to pass a language test within two months of their arrival in Germany. In practice, this mostly concerns women who move to Germany for the purpose of marriage.

The new German Minister of Interior, Hans-Peter Friedrich, commented on the revision of the immigration law, insisting that “we want a real cooperation (“Miteinander”), not mere coexistence (“Nebeneinander”) and certainly no confrontation (“Gegeneinander”).”¹²⁹

20 March 2011 - Minister of Interior and the Islam conference

Following Interior Minister Friedrich’s controversial remarks concerning the place of Islam in Germany at the beginning of March, the approaching Islam Conference on 29 March once again triggered a large debate. In an interview with the regional newspaper *Der Westen*, Guntram Schneider (SPD), the Minister for Integration of the largest federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia, considers Friedrich to be unqualified to head a forum for dialogue between state institutions and German Muslims.¹³⁰ Friedrich himself tries to appease his critics.¹³¹ In an extensive interview with the leading conservative daily *FAZ*, Friedrich emphasises that Muslims living and wanting to remain in Germany naturally have their place in society. Nonetheless, in his view this does not change the fact that the cultural identity of the country is shaped by Christian and Western elements.¹³² Regarding the Islam Conference, Friedrich claims that the topics treated in this forum will at some point become so advanced and relations so well established that no separate conferences would be necessary in the future.¹³³ Moreover, Friedrich regrets some of the statements made by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan in his speech in Dusseldorf at the end of February, claiming these were “not exactly helpful”.¹³⁴ Finance Minister and former Interior Minister Schauble echoes this view with regard to Erdogan’s comments. At the same time, Schauble warns against marginalisation of Muslims living in Germany.¹³⁵

22 March 2011 - Turkey’s international role in Libya and the Middle East

Turkey’s position on the NATO intervention in Libya is the focus of attention shortly after the

¹²⁷ *DIE ZEIT*, „Schwarz-Gelb erhöht Druck auf Einwanderer“, 17 March 2011.

¹²⁸ *DIE ZEIT*, „Schwarz-Gelb erhöht Druck auf Einwanderer“, 17 March 2011.

¹²⁹ *DIE ZEIT*, „Schwarz-Gelb erhöht Druck auf Einwanderer“, 17 March 2011.

¹³⁰ *Der Westen*, „Friedrich als Chef der Islamkonferenz untragbar“, 25 March 2011.

¹³¹ *Focus*, Friedrich fühlt sich missverstanden, 27 March 2011; *FAZ*, Friedrich: Muslime sind Teil unserer Gesellschaft, 28 March 2011.

¹³² *FAZ*, „Wer hier bleiben will, der gehört dazu“ (Interview with Interior Minister Friedrich), 20 March.

¹³³ *FAZ*, „Wer hier bleiben will, der gehört dazu“ (Interview with Interior Minister Friedrich), 20 March.

¹³⁴ *Die Welt*, Friedrich rügt Erdogan-Rede als "nicht förderlich", 21 March 2011.

¹³⁵ *Hamburger Abendblatt*, Schäuble: „Der Islam ist Teil unseres Landes“, 22 March 2011.

air strikes begin. The daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* quotes Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu as saying that “Turkey will never point a finger at its Libyan brothers” and rejecting any form of fully-fledged intervention against the country.¹³⁶ Michael Martens, Turkey correspondent of the most widely read conservative daily, *FAZ*, considers Turkey to be caught in a dilemma: on the one side, the country wants to be consulted and to take part in decisions taken by NATO; on the other, it is afraid to face the reality of a military intervention.¹³⁷ Two articles in the conservative daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the widely read weekly magazine *Der Spiegel* echo this assessment.¹³⁸ In an opinion piece for *Der Spiegel* and *taz* Turkey correspondent Jurgen Gottschlich esteems that while Erdogan – having not been invited to the military negotiations in Paris – is in the comfortable position of being able to complain without having to propose his own solutions, this might not be the case in the next crisis. Gottschlich expects the mounting tension in Syria to become a test case for Turkey’s foreign policy, where Erdogan will have to choose his camp.¹³⁹ *Die Zeit* Turkey correspondent Michael Thumann sees economic interests as the main reason for Turkey’s “slalom course” regarding the NATO intervention in Libya.¹⁴⁰ Since Turkey has \$15 billion worth of contracts in Libya, Erdogan feels obliged to keep a low profile and to speak out against external intervention in the country. Moreover, Thumann considers that the pre-electoral campaign is having an impact on Erdogan’s position, with Turks traditionally sceptical of Western interventions. Erdogan has been in close contact with several Western leaders, notably US President Obama, and has taken care not to isolate himself. According to Thumann, this explains his modest approval of the intervention “if Libya belongs to the Libyans.”¹⁴¹

The impact of Turkey’s position on its reputation in the Middle East is assessed by two different articles in the *taz* and the *FAZ*. Jurgen Gottschlich, *taz* Turkey correspondent, considers Erdogan’s see-saw policy towards Libya to have failed, since Turkey proposed a peace plan for the country only to see it rejected by the provisional government in Benghazi.¹⁴² Turkey’s opposition to the NATO bombardments have been first and foremost understood as an attempt to protect the country’s economic interests, thereby discrediting the country’s attempts to present itself as a mediator between the West and the Arab world.¹⁴³ The assessment by leading conservative daily *FAZ* is similarly critical. Davutoglu’s “new, diversified foreign policy is obviously reaching its limits” in Libya, as Turkey has failed to realise the extent to which Gaddafi is despised by large parts of the Libyan population.¹⁴⁴

28 March 2011 Islam classes in German schools

The obstacles to classes on Islam in public schools in Germany are discussed in an article in the weekly magazine *Focus*. Although around 700,000 school children in Germany are Muslims and religious education is mentioned in the German Basic Law, this right has not yet been put into practice for Muslims. The precondition to religious education is that the religious community in question be able to name clear contact persons and ensure that the

¹³⁶ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Report: Türkei will nicht auf «Brüder» schießen, 22 March 2011.

¹³⁷ *FAZ*, Erste Liga, mit Doppelmoral, 23 March 2011.

¹³⁸ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Erdogan in der Zwickmühle, 23 March 2011; *Der Spiegel*, Erdogan trickst sich aus der Libyen-Falle 23 March 2011.

¹³⁹ *Der Spiegel*, Erdogan trickst sich aus der Libyen-Falle 23 March 2011.

¹⁴⁰ *DIE ZEIT*, Erdoğan’s Schlingerkurs, 24 March 2011.

¹⁴¹ *DIE ZEIT*, Erdoğan’s Schlingerkurs, 24 March 2011.

¹⁴² *taz*, Ankara scheitert als Vermittler, 8 April 2011.

¹⁴³ *taz*, Ankara scheitert als Vermittler, 8 April 2011.

¹⁴⁴ *FAZ*, Ohne Erfolg, 9 April 2011.

classes are in compliance with basic constitutional principles such as democracy and the rule of law. It is the clause regarding organisation that for now constitutes the main stumbling block for Muslim religious education. Firstly, there is no central contact person who could be responsible for the content of the classes; secondly, the existence of different beliefs and sects within Islam makes it difficult to determine a consistent curriculum within each Bundesland. Moreover, it is proving difficult to find suitable teachers, since classes are to be taught by Muslims in German and only few German universities train teachers for Islam classes.¹⁴⁵ The *Islamische Zeitung*, a German-language newspaper for Muslims in Germany, quotes the federal Minister for Education, Annette Schavan, who considers the introduction of classes on Islam to be an “important factor for integration”.¹⁴⁶ The article mentions that North Rhine Westphalia is planning to become the first Bundesland to offer such classes from the start of the 2012/13 school year. Nonetheless, the education of Islam teachers in German universities remains a sensitive topic, notably because – given the lack of a coherent and unified belief system – the recognition of Islam as a religious community remains disputed.¹⁴⁷ Another article in the *Islamische Zeitung* assumes that the temporary solution of having Muslim advisory boards (“Beiräte”) oversee the education of future Islam teachers at universities will most likely become permanent.

29 March 2011 - Gesture of respect towards former guest workers from Turkey

An article in the conservative daily *Die Welt* comments on a speech given by David McAllister, the Minister President of Lower Saxony, in which the minister tries to defuse the negative comments made by members of his party regarding the failure of multiculturalism in Germany.¹⁴⁸ McAllister thanks Turkish guest workers for having come to Germany and stayed. By 1973, when a halt to immigration was imposed following the oil crisis, 900,000 Turks had migrated to Germany to work, of which 70,000 went to Lower Saxony.

29 March 2011 Islam Conference - more criticism of Friedrich

The Islam Conference, a forum for dialogue between German Muslims and state institutions held annually since 2006, became the focus of the German media not least because of the controversial remarks uttered by Interior Minister Friedrich in the weeks leading up to the conference. This year’s conference was composed of 16 representatives of state institutions and 15 Muslim representatives, of which 10 were individuals and five were representatives of umbrella organisations.¹⁴⁹ According to the centre-left daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, under Friedrich the Conference has become “unclear, uninspired and laden with clichés,” thus contributing more to confusion than to dialogue.¹⁵⁰ According to the most popular daily, *Bild*, the Islam Conference was a “scandal”.¹⁵¹ The “security partnership” proposed by Friedrich (to combat Muslim extremism) triggers a wealth of reactions. The initiative foresees increased collaboration between security authorities and Muslim communities with a view to identifying potential jihadists. The proposal comes shortly after a Muslim extremist killed several U.S. soldiers at Frankfurt airport. Friedrich suggests winning over “idols and role

¹⁴⁵ *Focus*, Allah in der Warteschleife, 28 March 2011.

¹⁴⁶ *Islamische Zeitung*, "Wichtiger Faktor für Integration", 28 March 2011.

¹⁴⁷ *Islamische Zeitung*, "Wichtiger Faktor für Integration", 28 March 2011.

¹⁴⁸ *Die Welt*, CDU dankt Türken dafür, dass sie geblieben sind, 29 March 2011.

¹⁴⁹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Verpatzte Chancen, 31 March 2011; *Spiegel*, Eklat überschattet Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵⁰ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Beitrag zur Verunsicherung, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵¹ *Bild*, Eklat auf Islam-Konferenz, 29 March 2011.

models as partners” to warn young Muslims about the dangers of Islamism.¹⁵² The fact that these proposals were made in the framework of the Islam Conference triggered some resentment on the side of the Muslim participants. While the conference was initiated as a means of fostering confidence in the relationship between the state and German Muslims, Armina Omerika, a scholar of Bosnian origin, accused Friedrich of fostering a culture of denunciation among Muslims.¹⁵³ Following the Conference, nine of the ten individual Muslim participants signed a communiqué in which they declared the security partnership to be “in contradiction with the ideal of a liberal and democratic society.”¹⁵⁴ Friedrich foresees holding a “Prevention Summit” in the spring to tackle the prevention of extremism in a forum separate from the Islam Conference.¹⁵⁵

In a comment in the left-leaning daily *taz*, Deputy Editor-in-chief Sabine am Order finds that Friedrich’s attitude towards Muslims has made the entire Islam Conference superfluous.¹⁵⁶ An article in the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel* echoes this assessment. Friedrich’s comments have resulted in “nothing but trouble”, it says, with the four-hour dialogue between Friedrich and the Muslim representative having been highly controversial and possibly indicating a shift of the Conference “from a solution to a problem in itself.”¹⁵⁷ In an unsigned comment, the *Tagesspiegel* goes so far as to call for the Islam Conference to be abolished, claiming that “Islam in Germany obviously represents an ideal projection screen for our identity troubles.”¹⁵⁸ Centre-left daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* comments that under Friedrich there is little chance that the Islam Conference could help foster the idea that Islam is a part of Germany and result in constructive dialogue. Moreover, the article points to the composition of the Conference as one of the main problems. With no liberal Islamic voice at the table, the conference does not ensure an adequate representation of Islam in Germany.¹⁵⁹

The Central Muslim Council (Zentralrat der Muslime) questions the nature of the Islam Conference even before the meeting. Its President Aiman Mazyek points out that rather than focusing solely on security issues, the exchange should concentrate on the integration of Islam into the German state system.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Ihsan Unlu, General Secretary of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religion (Ditib), considers Friedrich’s suggestions to have been “not very helpful for the Conference.”¹⁶¹ In an interview with the widely read weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, Kenan Kolat, representative of the Turkish Community, also voices his dissatisfaction with Friedrich’s performance.¹⁶² Nonetheless, he believes the Islam Conference should be maintained as a forum for dialogue and thinks it may still achieve some improvements, despite the current criticisms.¹⁶³ In an interview with the weekly magazine *Focus*, Ali Toprak, the Vice head of the Alevites in Germany, strikes a similar cord. In his view, Friedrich should be given more time to learn from his mistakes and to adjust to his new

¹⁵² *taz*, Minister verschreckt Muslime, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵³ *FAZ*, Unmut über Friedrichs „Sicherheitspartnerschaft“, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵⁴ *FAZ*, Unmut über Friedrichs „Sicherheitspartnerschaft“, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵⁵ *taz*, Minister verschreckt Muslime, 29 March 2011; *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Beitrag zur Verunsicherung, 29 March 2011; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Friedrich legt sich mit Muslimen und Leutheusser an, 29 March 2011; *FAZ*, Friedrich: Mehr Sicherheit, 30 March 2011.

¹⁵⁶ *taz*, Schluss damit!, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵⁷ *Tagesspiegel*, Nichts als Ärger, 29 March 2011.

¹⁵⁸ *Tagesspiegel*, Schafft sie ab!, 30 March 2011.

¹⁵⁹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Verpatzte Chancen, 31 March 2011.

¹⁶⁰ *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, Kritik an Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011; *Die Welt*, Friedrich verursacht Eklat auf Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011.

¹⁶¹ *Die Welt*, Friedrich verursacht Eklat auf Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011.

¹⁶² *ZEIT Online*, “Friedrich stößt Muslime vor den Kopf” (Interview with Kenan Kolat), 29 March 2011.

¹⁶³ *ZEIT Online*, “Friedrich stößt Muslime vor den Kopf” (Interview with Kenan Kolat), 29 March 2011.

position.¹⁶⁴ Instead of scrutinising each of the minister's political statements, the focus should be on content, since the Islam Conference has a great responsibility regarding the integration of Muslims in Germany. Practical questions are now in the centre, and it is up to the Muslim associations to make constructive proposals and also to question their own positions and accept criticism.¹⁶⁵

The progressive *Süddeutsche Zeitung* claims that Friedrich has not only caused uproar among the Muslims, but also sparked controversy within the government. Liberal Justice Minister Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger accuses him of harming the integration of foreigners.¹⁶⁶ Education Minister Annette Schavan, who was present during the first part of the Conference, pleads in favour of Islam being a part of Germany.¹⁶⁷ The head of the Green Party faction in the Bundestag, Renate Kunast, criticises Friedrich's words as an "effrontery", believing that the conference is no longer capable of making a contribution to integration.¹⁶⁸ The Social Democratic Party even calls upon Muslims to boycott the Islam Conference in the future to protest against Friedrich's attitude. Aydan Ozoguz, responsible for integration in the SPD faction in the Bundestag, thinks that Friedrich abused the Islam Conference to discuss security issues; Muslims, he says, should refuse to participate in this forum until he is replaced.¹⁶⁹ The CSU General Secretary Alexander Dobrindt in turn accuses the SPD of "shamelessly instigating the Muslims."¹⁷⁰ Several Muslim associations similarly reject Ozoguz's appeal, with the Deputy head of the Alevites, Ali Toprak, considering the proposal to be "nonsense".¹⁷¹ The Integration Minister for North Rhine Westphalia, Guntram Schneider, demands a re-orientation of the conference and a disentanglement of integration and security questions.¹⁷² Berlin Mayor Klaus Wowereit calls upon Chancellor Merkel to remove the Islam Conference from Friedrich's competences and to transfer its organisation to the Chancellery.¹⁷³ Federal President Christian Wulff, who in autumn 2010 claimed that "Islam is part of Germany," demands that religion should play a less important role in the debate on Islam, suggesting the United States as a model. Instead of focusing on religion, more attention should be devoted to the people themselves.¹⁷⁴

29 March 2011 - Turkish Ministry considers Germany biased

An article in the conservative daily *Die Welt* reports the Turkish government has called upon Germany to do more in the fight against racism. In the opinion of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, German politics and media foster a "negative and prejudiced" attitude towards immigrants.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁴ *Focus*, „Ganz unrecht hat Friedrich nicht“ (Interview with Ali Toprak), 28 March 2011.

¹⁶⁵ *Focus*, „Ganz unrecht hat Friedrich nicht“ (Interview with Ali Toprak), 28 March 2011.

¹⁶⁶ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Friedrich legt sich mit Muslimen und Leutheusser an, 29 March 2011.

¹⁶⁷ *Spiegel*, Eklat überschattet Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011.

¹⁶⁸ *Die Welt*, Friedrich verursacht Eklat auf Islamkonferenz, 29 March 2011.

¹⁶⁹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, SPD fordert Muslime nach Eklat zum Boykott auf, 29 March 2011; *FAZ*, Opposition attackiert Friedrich, 30 March 2011.

¹⁷⁰ *FAZ*, Opposition attackiert Friedrich, 30 March 2011.

¹⁷¹ *taz*, Islamkonferenz ohne Islam, 30 March 2011.

¹⁷² *Frankfurter Rundschau*, SPD fordert Muslime nach Eklat zum Boykott auf, 29 March 2011.

¹⁷³ *FAZ*, Opposition attackiert Friedrich, 30 March 2011.

¹⁷⁴ *Die Welt*, Wulff fordert weniger Religion in der Islam-Debatte, 30 March 2011.

¹⁷⁵ *Die Welt*, Türkei wirft Deutschland Schüren von Vorurteilen vor, 29 March 2011.

April

2 April 2011 - Germany in need of a broader integration approach

In an interview with the leading conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, the Federal Integration Commissioner Maria Bohmer shares her views on the current Islam debate in Germany and on the attitude of Turkey towards German Turks. According to Bohmer, the more practical orientation of the Islam Conference is useful and can make an important contribution to resolving problems regarding the integration of Muslims in Germany. She also favours the creation of a Ministry for Integration and believes the presence of four million Muslims in Germany to be a sign that Islam is part of the country. Asked about the desirability of a more selective immigration policy, she claims that “integration policy should do more than repair damage.”¹⁷⁶ Regarding Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan’s controversial speech in Dusseldorf at the end of February, Bohmer insists that the Turkish state must let go of its former citizens in order to allow them to fully integrate in Germany. Moreover, she considers that the mandatory integration courses must be more closely monitored in order to ensure their success.

6 April 2011 - Turkish ideology

The orientation of the Turkish AK Party is at the centre of two articles published by the renowned conservative daily *FAZ*. The starting point is the publication of a study by Charlotte Joppien, a Turkish studies expert. According to Joppien, by avoiding clear positions and resorting to political manoeuvring the AKP is concealing its intention to “Islamicise” Turkey.¹⁷⁷ Although the AKP tries to present itself as having broken with Islamism, Joppien considers its political line to be in continuity with that of its Islamist predecessor, the Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan.¹⁷⁸ Joppien warns that the AKP’s human rights discourse essentially seeks to further cement Sunni Islam as the religion of the state at the expense of other religious groups such as Christians and Jews. In the author’s view, this is all the more worrisome as Yalcin Akdogan, who in 2004 wrote a book commissioned by the AKP on “The AKP and Conservative Democracy”, which insisted heavily on the importance of religion in both the everyday life of Turks and their election decisions, will most likely become one of the party’s leading officials following the June parliamentary elections.¹⁷⁹

In a comment titled “Infiltration from above”, published in the same issue of the *FAZ*, editor Karen Kruger assesses the impact of the Ergenekon trials on Turkish society, offering a very critical assessment of the Turkish judicial system. She considers that “Turks are not educated in the spirit of free thinking, but rather of immaturity.”¹⁸⁰ In her view, secularism and unconditional love for the state founder Ataturk are the key principles of state education, which she experienced personally while completing her A-levels in Istanbul. In other fields, the AKP is making use of the acquired immaturity of the citizens in order to suppress any kind of opposition to the propagated religious, conservative way of life. This is particularly visible in the media, with Turkey falling to 138th place in the index of press freedom, behind Egypt and Zimbabwe. According to Kruger, the intolerance of the Turkish judicial system has reached new heights in the run-up to the parliamentary election, with the Ergenekon trials

¹⁷⁶ *FAZ*, “Der türkische Staat muss die Menschen loslassen” (Interview with Maria Böhmer), 2 April 2011.

¹⁷⁷ *FAZ*, Islamisierung durch vage Programmatik, 6 April 2011.

¹⁷⁸ *FAZ*, Islamisierung durch vage Programmatik, 6 April 2011.

¹⁷⁹ *FAZ*, Islamisierung durch vage Programmatik, 6 April 2011.

¹⁸⁰ *FAZ*, Unterwanderung von oben, 6 April 2011.

having become a means of suppressing free-minded journalists and authors.¹⁸¹ Moreover, the private Gulen schools, which propagate a Turkish-Islamic synthesis and are present not only in Turkey, but in many other countries, are becoming increasingly influential, with their graduates occupying important positions in politics and business. The author concludes that:

“Many Turks believed that the uncovering of Ergenekon served the destruction of power structures that until now prevented their country from becoming a real democracy. They have been bitterly disappointed. Ergenekon has turned into a free pass (“Persilschein”) to silence all those who oppose the government’s ideology. The sphere of democracy has narrowed. (...) In real democracies, the judicial system protects the freedom of opinion and thought. In Turkey, which Erdogan likes to praise as a model for the Middle East, it is currently making both impossible.”¹⁸²

11 April 2011 - Visa regulations for Turkish citizens

An article published by the media outlet *WDR* discusses the issue of visa liberalisation with Turkey. Apparently, a 2009 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights confirmed that a treaty signed back in 1973 between Turkey and Germany already allows visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to Germany. Following the military coup in Turkey in 1980 and the ensuing increase in Turkish asylum applications in Germany, the Federal Republic decided to introduce a visa requirement. According to Turkey, this requirement was introduced unilaterally and is therefore in contradiction with the binding treaty of 1973.¹⁸³ In view of the German state, however, the treaty relates to a specific constellation and therefore is not applicable to tourists. Apparently, the strict attitude of the German Embassy in Ankara has led to numerous Turks applying for visas in neighbouring countries, such as the Netherlands, in order to enter Germany. This is risky, however, as the visas are not valid throughout the Schengen zone: Turks travelling to Germany in this way are doing so illegally and can risk being refused travel permits throughout the EU. While the EU is focusing on a readmission agreement with Turkey as a precondition for a vague visa dialogue, Turkey wants to accept nothing less than visa liberalisation.¹⁸⁴

11 April 2011 - Former Turkish judge’s harsh criticism

In an article for the leading conservative daily *FAZ*, Emine Ulker Tarhan, a former judge in the Turkish High Court, strongly criticises the influence exerted by the Erdogan government on the Turkish judicial system. Comparing the current situation in Turkey to Orwell’s “1984”, Tarhan sees today’s Turkey as a police state where courts are targeted as never before and the government attempts to undermine society’s confidence in the judicial system.¹⁸⁵ According to her, the AKP government uses illegal wiretaps, forges evidence, and is using the Ergenekon trials to incarcerate its critics. For Tarhan, there can be “no doubt that the government with the help of its accomplices is trying to create a deep state.”¹⁸⁶ Moreover, religious freedom is a right only for Sunnis, while members of other religious groups are freely discriminated. According to Tarhan, the regime-friendly media act as Big Brother and support the government in creating an “empire of fear.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ *FAZ*, Unterwanderung von oben, 6 April 2011.

¹⁸² *FAZ*, Unterwanderung von oben, 6 April 2011.

¹⁸³ *WDR*, Streit um Visafreiheit für Türken, 11 April 2011.

¹⁸⁴ *WDR*, Streit um Visafreiheit für Türken, 11 April 2011.

¹⁸⁵ *FAZ*, Ich möchte keine Marionette der Regierung sein, 11 April 2011.

¹⁸⁶ *FAZ*, Ich möchte keine Marionette der Regierung sein, 11 April 2011.

¹⁸⁷ *FAZ*, Ich möchte keine Marionette der Regierung sein, 11 April 2011.

12 April 2011 - Erdogan rejects all accusations on lack of press freedom

Erdogan's speech before the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg was followed closely by conservative daily *Die Welt*. The Turkish Prime Minister had been invited to comment on the democratic deficit in his country, and more specifically on the repeated restrictions on press freedom.¹⁸⁸ According to the German-language monthly *Islamische Zeitung*, Erdogan rejected such criticism and claimed the arrested journalists had been detained because of their links to the Ergenekon trials. He also added that Turkey might need the EU, "but the EU also needs Turkey."¹⁸⁹ Erdogan demonstrated his "contempt of the EU", says *Die Welt*.¹⁹⁰ Rejecting all accusations regarding restrictions of press freedom, Erdogan criticised that the negotiations with the EU were blocked for "wrong and populist reasons."¹⁹¹

14 April 2011 - Comparing the Islam debate with NS propaganda

In a comment in the conservative daily *Die Welt*, journalist and film director Guner Yasemin Balci critically reports on the publication of the "Manifest of the many," a book written by 29 authors who decry discrimination against Muslims in Germany. All 29 authors apparently compare the current debate on Islam with the propaganda under National Socialism. In an ironic tone, Balci criticises the lack of examples in the book and the authors' tendency to blame German integration policy for all the immigrants' problems. Instead of blaming the freedom of expression for its negative effects, it is suggested, the authors should appreciate that even their comparisons between the persecution of Jews during the Second World War and the current debate on Islam can be published in Germany.

17 April 2011 - Nationalists' campaign quotes Sarrazin

Two articles in the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel* comment on the far-right National-Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) using a quote from Thilo Sarrazin's book – "I do not want us to become foreigners in our own country" – on postcards distributed as part of the party's election campaign.¹⁹² According to the book's publisher, judicial consequences are being considered. In case of a successful injunction, the party would have to destroy hundreds of thousands of postcards that have already been printed.¹⁹³

18 April 2011 - Educated German-Turks in search for better options

The widely read weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* reports on a growing number of Germans of Turkish origin who leave Germany following graduation in order to search for better jobs elsewhere. Two thirds of graduates with Turkish roots are considering moving to Turkey, in what amounts to a considerable brain drain. It is particularly the lack of job prospects in Germany that causes many graduates of Turkish origin to consider possible alternatives. In Germany, they need an average of two to three years to successfully enter the job market, while career prospects for highly qualified, bilingual graduates are generally much more favourable in Turkey.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ *Die Welt*, Erdogan zu Kreuzverhör nach Straßburg geladen, 12 April 2011.

¹⁸⁹ *Islamische Zeitung*, "Türkei braucht Europa", 13 April 2011.

¹⁹⁰ *Die Welt*, Wie Erdogan seine Verachtung vor der EU artikuliert, 14 April 2011.

¹⁹¹ *Die Welt*, Erdogan attackiert EU wegen Türkei-Beitritt, 14 April 2011.

¹⁹² *Tagesspiegel*, Sarrazins Buchverlag prüft juristische Schritte gegen NPD-Kampagne, 17 April 2011.

¹⁹³ *Tagesspiegel*, Sarrazins Verlag will NPD verklagen, 18 April 2011.

¹⁹⁴ *DIE ZEIT*, Ausbildung in Deutschland, Karriere in der Türkei, 18 April 2011.

19 April 2011 - EU spoils Turkey

The conservative daily *Die Welt* criticises the fact that a large part of EU funding is channelled to “wealthy Turkey”, rather than benefiting “countries that are really poor.”¹⁹⁵ According to a study by the Eurosceptic organisation Open Europe, Turkey received more than half a billion Euros in EU aid in 2009.¹⁹⁶

25 April 2011 - Turkish-Armenian relations

Turkish-Armenian relations are covered by several German media in late April, as the decision to destroy a monument to Turkish-Armenian friendship erected by Turkish artist Mehmet Aksoy is hotly debated in Turkey. The monument, located in the town of Kars, close to the Armenian border, represents two figures made of concrete, which appear as a single person cut in two. In a comment for left-leaning daily *taz*, Istanbul correspondent Jurgen Gottschlich speaks of “contradictory signals” coming from Turkey. With almost no international pressure on Turkey regarding reconciliation with Armenia, Gottschlich considers that – with the dismantling of the reconciliation monument – Erdogan has moved from attempts at rapprochement to “open provocation. He calls the decision to destroy the monument “a barbarian action, which mocks all [of Erdogan’s] earlier affirmations of wanting to heal old wounds between Turkey and Armenia.”¹⁹⁷ With initiatives at the governmental level having come to a standstill, Gottschlich praises the numerous civil society initiatives seeking to foster reconciliation between the neighbouring countries. According to Gottschlich, the mourning rallies that took place on the 96th anniversary of the Armenian genocide not only in Istanbul, but also in five other Turkish cities, show that “the society is no fixated on the denial of the genocide.”¹⁹⁸

An article in Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel* takes up the internal debate in Turkey about the monument, which Prime Minister Erdogan described as “freakish”. The debate further intensified when an artist critical of Erdogan was severely stabbed during a demonstration. However, according to the article, “in the heat of the debate some things are being badly mixed up.” While Erdogan is now being criticised for undermining Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, it was actually his government that signed an agreement with Armenia on the improvement of relations two years ago.¹⁹⁹ The *Tagesspiegel* omits the fact, that no concrete steps have followed since. The following day, an article by freelance Istanbul correspondent Susanne Gusten in the *Tagesspiegel* points to the fact that regardless of the earlier rapprochement the fact that the “monument of humanity” is being dismantled just two days after the anniversary of the genocide can only be perceived as a negative signal in Armenia.²⁰⁰

27 April 2011 – Turkish-Syrian relations

As the situation in Syria deteriorates, several German newspapers take a deeper look at the long-standing friendship between Turkey and Syria. Conservative daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* considers that Erdogan’s condemnation of the violence in Syria

¹⁹⁵ *Die Welt*, EU pumpt Hunderte Millionen in wohlhabende Türkei, 19 April 2011.

¹⁹⁶ *Die Welt*, EU pumpt Hunderte Millionen in wohlhabende Türkei, 19 April 2011.

¹⁹⁷ *taz*, Die Türkei ist weiter als Erdogan, 25 April 2011.

¹⁹⁸ *taz*, Die Türkei ist weiter als Erdogan, 25 April 2011.

¹⁹⁹ *Tagesspiegel*, Streit um Kulturdenkmal eskaliert, 25 April 2011

²⁰⁰ *Tagesspiegel*, Die Hand am Denkmal, 26 April 2011.

came “in a remarkably hesitant and late manner.”²⁰¹ According to the *FAZ*, the improvement of Turkey’s relations with Syria began at the same time as the deterioration of its relations with Israel. The rapprochement with Damascus takes place not only at the political but also at the economic level, albeit with an unfavourable trade balance for Syria. The long-standing dispute on water rights is supposed to be settled by the joint construction of a “friendship dam”.

The conservative daily *Die Welt* reports on “Turkey’s fear of a Syrian nightmare”: a Syrian civil war could lead to a huge wave of refugees into Turkey.²⁰² A massive exodus from Syria would be made even more dramatic by the fact that the border was mined in the course of the Kurdish conflict in the 1990s. The re-ignition of the Kurdish conflict would represent the worst-case scenario for Turkey. With Syria destabilised, Syrian Kurds might claim autonomy (similar to that enjoyed by Kurds in Northern Iraq), reviving the dream of a united Kurdish state that includes parts of Turkey. Although Turkey’s official position is to oppose regime change in Syria, the meeting of the Syrian opposition group “National Initiative for Change” in Istanbul indicates that Turkey might have a plan B.

An article in the weekly magazine *Stern* underlines that Turkey seems to be considering the possibility of calling for the resignation of Syrian head of state Bashar al Assad.²⁰³ Syria was the most important topic discussed at the seven-hour meeting of the Turkish National Security Council, which ended with a declaration calling on Syria to implement promised reforms and for security officials to use “maximum sensitivity”. Turkey has also sent a delegation to Damascus to persuade Assad to implement reforms and introduce a multi-party system.

²⁰¹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Ankaras Sorge um die neue Freundschaft, 28 April 2011

²⁰² *Die Welt*, Die Angst der Türkei vor dem syrischen Albtraum, 27 April 2011.

²⁰³ *Der Stern*, Türkei plant offenbar für eine Zukunft ohne Assad, 29 April 2011.

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