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ANDREY BELINSKY. “AT HOME AMONG STRANGERS”*
MIGRANTS IN GERMAN POLITICS.

*Keywords: Germany, migrants,
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Abstract. The article examines the participation of various groups of migrants in the political life of Germany. It is noted that initially the authorities and politicians of Germany, which judged from the temporality of foreign workers' stay in the country, were not interested in their social and political integration. However, the growth of the migrant community and the liberalization of legislation on citizenship made political parties change their position gradually. First, the Union 90/Greens, and then the rest of the political parties, began to work actively with various groups of migrants. Nevertheless, the number of citizens of Germany with migrant roots among the deputies of the Bundestag or in*

* “At Home among Strangers, a Stranger among his own” c.

senior positions in the government machine is still relatively small, which is explained by a number of factors (isolation of the migrant community, prejudice in society, miscalculations of the party leadership).

“Not a Country of Migrants”

The formation of migrant community of Germany dates back to the late 1950s – early 1960s, when the West German government concluded agreements on hiring of labor with Italy (1955), Spain, Greece (both in 1960), Turkey (1961) to maintain high rate of economic growth. Numerous migrants, most of whom represented young people from poor southern regions, were supposed to put fresh impetus into the ThiessenKrupp factories, the Ruhr coal mines, the shipyards of Bremen and Hamburg.

At the same time, initially for the German authorities (as, however, for most foreign workers), that entailed only short-term labor hiring, followed by the return of guest workers to their historical homeland. Unlike England, France or Belgium, which had a rich colonial history and maintained close economic, political and cultural ties with the former colonies,¹ German politicians considered their agreements with southern European countries exclusively through the prism of business interests.

Meanwhile, contrary to the initial calculations and plans of West German politicians and officials, the migrant community was growing gradually, which was due to both the needs of the economy and the attractiveness of Germany for immigrants from southern Europe. At the turn of the 1970–1980s migrant community in West Germany was several million people, vast majority of which was from Turkey (about 1.5 million people). Meanwhile, the country’s authorities still considered migrants exclusively as a “driver” of the economy, but not potential citizens and compatriots. “It was a mistake – admitted Chancellor Helmut Schmidt – to accept so many migrants. However, now we must ensure that migrants do not take advantage of this mistake.”² The conservative-liberal coalition of the CDU/CSU and

FDP, which came to power in the autumn of 1982, fully adhered to the course of its predecessors. "Germany is not a country of migrants" (Deutschland ist kein Migrationsland) – declared publicly the Federal Chancellor G. Kohl. And in 2013, the British government published secret minutes of the Chancellor's negotiations with British Prime Minister M. Thatcher. In a conversation with his colleague, the Chancellor announced his radical plan to solve the migration problem. "Chancellor Kohl declared... [...] Over the next four years, it is necessary to reduce the number of Turks by 50%. However, he cannot speak openly about it."³ The reduction of the Turkish community was planned through the allocation of a large amount of money in exchange for return to their homeland. At the same time, anti-migrant sentiments and prejudices (especially against immigrants from Muslim countries) were quite strong in German society in the 1980s.

Even in the early 1990s descendants of migrants who successfully integrated into society and managed to make a successful political career, which in those days was very rare, were still perceived as "strangers." D. Ozdemir, one of the first deputies of the Bundestag who had migrant roots, and later the leader of the Union 90/Greens party described his conversation with the Secretary of State, representing the conservative Christian Social Union. "The Secretary of State declares:" Mr. Ozdemir, you must explain to your compatriots... And then I say: "Are you my compatriot, tell me what I have to explain to you?" And he stared at me so foolishly, and then it came to him that we both have the same citizenship."⁴

Fall of the Wall

The process of migrants' integration into German society essentially began in the late 1990s when the Social Democrats and the Greens came to power. Notably the children and heirs of 1968 ("green") at that time were one of the few forces in the country

(along with the Party of Democratic Socialism and various human rights organizations) that consistently advocated the integration of migrants. In 2000, the “red-green” coalition, despite the resistance of its opponents from the conservative camp, adopted a law on citizenship, which gave migrant children the opportunity to become citizens of the country in accordance with the “Jus soli” (soil principle – lat.) A. In 2005, the law on migration went into effect (Einwanderungsgesetz – German), which organized the process of moving foreigners to Germany.

However, in the near future it turned out that the concept of multiculturalism, which is very reminiscent of the theory of the “melting pot,” did not lead to the formation of a single civil nation based on common values, but to the division of society and the appearance of peculiar national-religious ghettos in the quarters of large cities. The reasons for the failure of this policy were quite diverse, but two of them can be emphasized, which, in our opinion, were crucial. First, by granting citizenship to migrants and their offspring, the authorities did not take care of their social, cultural and political integration. Secondly, when implementing their course, they did not take into account the factor of the presence among migrants of ethnic or religious groups with their culture and values, which were not always correlated with the standards adopted in Germany. This primarily concerned representatives of the Turkish, Kurdish and Arab diasporas.

And already in 2010, Chancellor A. Merkel was forced to admit that the old concept of integration failed. It was quite obvious that genuine social, cultural, and most importantly political integration was needed, since a migrant can only feel like a full citizen when he is actively involved in politics, has the opportunity not only to vote, but also to act as a political actor, be it a member of the Bundestag or the land parliament.

Who Chooses Whom?

How are migrants and their descendants involved in German politics today? Which political parties and forces do they prefer? How widely are they represented in land parliaments, Bundestag and ministries?

Today, about a quarter of German citizens have migrant roots, while half of them have German citizenship. However, their political activity remains significantly lower than that of the indigenous population. According to the report of the Minor Kontor research group, during the Bundestag elections in 2013, 87.2% of indigenous Germans took part in the vote, while among migrants this figure was only 79.2%.⁵

The model of electoral behavior among different ethnic groups is of sufficient interest to the researcher. The above-mentioned Minor Kontor report presents the following data.

Table No. 1

Participation of various ethnic groups in the Bundestag elections in 2013 (%)

Ethnic group	Percentage of voters in the elections
Former eastern provinces of the German Empire	86,9%
Eastern Europe	81%
Former republics of the Soviet Union	58,5%
Turkey	67,5%
Rest of Europe	53,8%
Other countries	66,7%

As we can see, the political activity of representatives of migrant communities can vary significantly, which is determined by both socio-cultural and specific economic conditions. The high proportion of the Poles and people from Eastern European countries who voted in parliamentary elections is explained both

by similar political attitudes and by the better integration of these groups into German society. As for rather low political activity of former residents of the USSR and immigrants from Muslim countries, this is most likely due either to the lack of democratic traditions (immigrants from the former republics of the Soviet Union) or to an orientation towards their community, which was still considered as the main defender and expression of the interests of a particular ethnic group (Turks, Kurds, Arabs).

The political preferences of various migrant communities are also very interesting. If immigrants from the post-Soviet space and Poles traditionally voted for the CDU/CSU, then representatives of the Turkish community preferred the SPD, the Greens or the Left, who presented themselves as defenders of their interests.⁶

Overhead

And what about representatives of migrant communities in party and state positions, in various ministries and departments. Until the early 1990s citizens of Germany, whose parents had moved in search of a better life in West Germany, were quite an unusual occurrence in the political beaumont. The “pioneers” in this area were D. Ozdemir, already mentioned above, who in the early 1990s became deputy from the Union 90/Greens party. However, even after entering big politics, they were largely perceived as “strangers,” not Germans. I remember running for the administration of the party's land branch, delivering a speech in the everyday Swabian dialect and saying something about glacial plants, about protecting migratory falcons, in short about everything possible that I was interested in then. [...] But everyone wanted to know: What is the situation with migration, with co-residence, Turkey, human rights, Kurds?”⁷

Qualitative changes began in the mid-2000s, when political parties began to deal with the migration issue seriously. Seeking the support of the migrant community, which has already

become a significant factor in the country's domestic policy. In addition, by this time, a small middle-class layer had formed within migrant communities, whose representatives, as a rule, had a university education, were well integrated into society and sought social or political activity. To date, many representatives of migrant communities have been able to take a worthy place in the party and state hierarchy. CDU Secretary General Paul Cymiak (Poland), Bundestag deputy from the SPD Karamba Diabu, Commissioner of the Federal Government for Integration Aidan Ozoguz (Turkey), Chairman of the FDP Philippe Rösler (Vietnam) – are the most striking examples of migrants or their descendants who managed to achieve impressive success on the political field. However, behind the magnificent showcase there is a more complex picture, which does not always correlate with the statements of politicians. According to sociological studies, only 58 of the 709 deputies of the Bundestag have migrant roots.⁸ Their number is not too large in leadership positions in parties.

The reasons for this imbalance between the number of citizens of Germany with migrant roots and their representation in the political sphere can have completely different reasons, from low political activity and poor integration into the social structure of society to the inability of party structures to work effectively with citizens with migrant roots.⁹

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6. Here probably it is referred to Poles born in Silesia, Poznan and other regions that were previously part of Prussia, and then the German Empire.
7. However, recently there have been certain changes in the electoral behavior of various groups of migrants. Migration crisis 2015-2016 led to the fact that immigrants from the post-Soviet space (Ukraine, Belarus, Russia) and Eastern European countries began to increasingly prefer the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany. And Turks living in Germany under the influence of the liberalization of CDU policy increasingly began to vote in the elections for conservatives.
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9. An example of such inefficiency is the desire of parties to use politicians of foreign origin mainly to attract the votes of migrants and their descendants. To some extent, this repels representatives of the migrant community who seek to participate in solving problems of self-government, finance, etc.