

On why we need a German-Turkish Youth Office - and what that actually is¹

(by Malte Koppe, Berlin, June 2010)

Whilst German-Turkish governmental cooperation is developing well, mutual relations in the broader public sphere are still underdeveloped. Mistrust and a lack of knowledge characterize the relationship between Germans and Turks within Germany's German-Turkish community. Based on research about and practical experience with the German-Polish Youth Office, this case study proposes to establish a German-Turkish counterpart. In doing so this would develop existing forms of governmental cooperation between Berlin and Ankara even further. Such a Youth Office could eventually improve civil society cooperation.

Do you know your neighbors?

Many German-Turks grow up and live their lives without ever making friends with their German peers. This is the conclusion of a survey conducted in 2008 by the renowned *Emnid* public opinion monitoring agency. The study, carried out for the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, found that for almost 60 percent of the migrant interviewees only a minority of their friends are Germans.² Another 60 percent strongly believed that German society should make more of an effort to take the habits of Turkish migrants into consideration.³

These findings are in sharp contrast to the popularity Turkey enjoys as a tourist destination for Germans, and the high reputation education in Germany holds among Turkish exchange students⁴. With 3.1 million tourists travelling to Turkey in 2009 alone, the country ranks as the second most popular tourist destination in medium-range distance from Germany for the German population.⁵ According to expert estimations, soon more than 250,000 young Turks will be learning German as a second language. This is still not the complete picture however.

When it comes to politics, stereotypical thinking about the German-Turkish community and scepticism regarding Turkey's aspirations for EU membership still dominate German public discourse. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan time and again demonstrates his strong commitment to the German-Turkish community. He continues to encourage its members not to "lose their identity". His comments have proved however to irritate the German public.⁶

1 This paper has been submitted to the German-Turkish Future Workshop III "Rethinking the Future of the German-Turkish Nexus" by the Goethe Institute Ankara. See: <http://www.goethe.de/ins/tr/lp/prj/zuw/ank/zu/deindex.htm>, page accessed June 16th 2010, 10 am. For the purposes of this case study, the paper has been edited and modified.

2 <http://zelos.zeit.de/2008/12/Bevoelkerung-Migration-2008.pdf>, page 13, page accessed June 9th 2010, 13 am.

3 Ibid., page 8.

4 <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Infoservice/Presse/Interviews/2007/070308-DtTrUniversitaet.html>, page accessed June 9th 2010, 11 am.

5 Fakten und Zahlen zum deutschen Reisemarkt 2009 - Eine Übersicht des deutschen Reiseverbandes (DRV), page 2 (2010). Check: http://www.driv.de/fileadmin/user_upload/fachbereiche/DRV_Zahlen_Fakten2009_01.pdf, page accessed May 25th 2010, 9 am.

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<http://www.faz.net/s/RubDDBDABB9457A437BAA85A49C26FB23A0/Doc~E0E0EE4939C984C928812D5FD9FB2EE37~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html>, page accessed June 14th 2010, 10 am.

Although one should be careful not to overlook the positives, such findings highlight the distrust and lack of knowledge between Germany and Turkey and their societies. Arguing from an institutionalist viewpoint, this case study will demonstrate how joint efforts between the Turkish and German governments could lead to an improvement in the mutual perception of young Germans and Turks. This proposal is founded on the basis of the success of such an institution in the equally difficult German-Polish relationship.

What a youth office can do

Reviewing existing forms of German-Turkish government-sponsored and civil society cooperation, mixed conclusions can be drawn. Existing co-operative government initiatives such as the Ernst Reuter Initiative within both Foreign Ministries, the embedded German-Turkish Masters Program in Social Sciences, and the German-Turkish University in Istanbul⁷ seem to be developing well. However, speaking metaphorically, this roof needs a solid base.

Although the Turkish youth, like its German counterpart, may take part in multilateral youth exchange programs offered within EU programs⁸, or use other German exchange services and take advantage of further Turkish opportunities, bilateral youth initiatives are still a rare thing. The broader public in Germany and Turkey has no access to common exchange opportunities. A German-Turkish Youth Office could fill this crucial gap.

Politicians of different statuses have repeatedly promised to pursue the idea of such a 'Jugendwerk', the German equivalent to a youth office.⁹ The first steps have already been taken to realise the idea. Interministerial consultations have been held since the 1994 agreement on youth policy cooperation between the Federal Ministry for Women and Youth, and the Directorate General for Sport and Youth to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey.¹⁰ Both sides coordinate their efforts in the field of youth exchange on a regular basis.

It has to be acknowledged that a Frankfurt/Main-based youth exchange initiative does already bear the name Deutsch-Türkisches Jugendwerk (DTJW), or German-Turkish Youth Office.¹¹ It even shares part of the functions such an institution typically fulfills, although it operates mainly in and around Frankfurt. This case study and the proposal in favour of the creation of a youth office therefore should not be understood as an assault on existing merited youth exchange structures.¹² However, German-Turkish youth exchange should be extended across the Bosphorus, and it should be better promoted and funded in

7 "Countdown for the German-Turkish University (DTU)": <http://www.daad-magazin.de/10936/index.html>, page accessed June 9th 2010, 10 am.

8 http://www.dija.de/downloads/downloads/Tuerkei_Download.pdf, page 39, accessed June 10th 2010, 1 pm.

9 As an example may serve the 2005 coalition agreement by the CDU/FDP government in Nordrhein-Westfalen: <http://www.im.nrw.de/vm/doks/Koalitionsvereinbarung.pdf>, page 54, accessed June 7th 2010, 9 pm. Although I could not find proof, chancellor Merkel uttered the same intentions in a press interview in 2006 or 2007.

10 <http://www.ijab.de/cgi-bin/showcontent.asp?ThemaID=270>, page accessed June 10th 2010, 1 pm.

11 As we learn from the association's Mission Statement, it is a voluntary and membership-based association (*Verein*).

12 A youth office can empower civil society to develop as the example of German-Polish cooperation after the founding of the German-Polish Youth Office shows. Having started with bilateral office-funded youth exchanges, many Polish NGOs later turned to civic education and other community service programs. The European Meeting Center - Nowy Staw Foundation Lublin (Poland) is a good example: <http://www.eds-fundacja.pl/index-en.php>

order to reach a larger target audience.¹³

A German-Turkish Youth Office, as understood in this case study, would be an agency responsible for the large-scale financial support of youth exchange initiatives evolving from civil society in Germany and Turkey. A youth office is a government financed organization, which retains its independence through an international treaty. Equipped with resources, such an office may promote showcase projects, invest in intercultural education research, organize networking events, and promote the idea of exchange through public relations. Only to a very limited extent would a youth office initiate its own exchanges; this is civil society's task.

A well-functioning youth office is much more than a simple cash cow or a closed circle of experts. Individuals committing themselves to the youth office, and the expertise gathered in the organization, contribute to establishing an ever closer network of German-Turkish cooperation. The experience of the German-Polish Youth Office shows that even in a difficult relationship a well functioning youth office quickly becomes a self-expanding organism, and the focal point for a network of people of good will. It goes without saying that employees for the office must be carefully chosen on the basis of previous experience and language competency. Having worked in an equitable team for a sustained period of time, employees might then be offered the opportunity to become further- committed ambassadors for the German-Turkish case, and qualify for higher responsibilities. If possible, the office should consist of premises based in both Germany and Turkey.

The Office and the German-Turkish community in Germany

As described previously, a youth office would not have to be established from scratch as, fortunately, similar networks and institutions already exist. In contrast to the cases of the German-French and German-Polish Youth Offices, the newly founded organization would be built upon the experience and knowledge of roughly 2.5 million ambassadors¹⁴ with knowledge of both Turkish and German: the German-Turkish community. In the German-Polish case, the second generation of Polish immigrants from the early 1980's continue to play a key role in breaking the ice at youth exchange programs. They are perfect candidates for aiding the project's expansion.

However, barriers between the German-Turkish community and young Germans still exist, as the survey cited on page 1 indicates. A "Meet your Neighbors" program within the office seems a necessary first step to tackle this challenge. In the framework for this program, funding for "get-to-know-initiatives" for young Germans and young Turks living in major German cities could be provided. However, the Office's programs and funding schemes should be worked out in close cooperation with civil society in both countries, and therefore, will not be discussed further here.

¹³ As for 2008, only 283 participants took part in eleven exchanges reported by the interministerial committee mentioned above:

http://www.ijab.de/downloads/l%C3%A4nderfachprogramme/t%C3%BCrkei/Protokoll_D_TUR_FA_2008.pdf, page accessed June 10th 2010, 1 pm.

¹⁴ According to the association *Turkish Community in Germany (Türkische Gemeinde in Deutschland)*, their number is about 2,3 million: <http://www.tgd.de/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=184>, page accessed June 7th 2010, 10 pm. See as well: http://www.spiegel.de/thema/tuerken_in_deutschland/, page accessed June 10th 2010, 1 pm.

How to design the Office's institutional framework?¹⁵

In considering the institutional framework for a future German-Turkish Youth Office, two main obstacles must be overcome. First and foremost, for reasons of equality and fairness, the Office's setup cannot simply be a replica of the existing German youth offices in cooperation with France and Poland. Turkish ideas and wishes have to be taken into consideration. However, with their binational steering committees, a bilingual staff, and offices in each of the respective countries, the existing offices can be called "truly balanced binational organizations".

Secondly, the new German-Turkish organization ought to work at arm's length from both countries' governments.¹⁶ This is a simple truth and yet hard to realize. Minimum-demands are that budgets should be approved in consideration of a long-term perspective, and that independent decision-making bodies should be empowered to withstand even difficult periods in bilateral relations. Furthermore, the Youth Office should take a strictly neutral stance on contemporary politics.

The Office and contemporary politics

The contemporary German-Turkish relationship is characterized by a complex network of relations between the German government(s), the German-Turkish community in the country, and, finally, the Turkish people and its government. A series of issues on which civil society and governments in both countries take differing stances are yet to be solved. One of these is the issue of secular and religious education opportunities in Germany for German-Turks. This issue, once again, came to the fore during Chancellor Merkel's visit to Turkey in March 2010, during which time, Prime Minister Erdoğan, was insistent on the establishment of Turkish Schools in Germany. Furthermore, the debate about dual citizenship is still a highly emotive one. At an international level, the case for recognition of the Armenian genocide and also the conflict with Cyprus remain unsolved for Turkey. Finally, the country's pending accession bid to the European Union continues to overshadow the aforementioned problems.

These difficult issues should not be tackled by a German-Turkish Youth Office. Legal guidelines would have to ensure the separation of youth work and politics, and fundamentally, the neutrality of the Office. The Youth Office directors and supervising government officers should abstain from any comment on Armenia or Cyprus. These issues impact more widely than on the German-Turkish nexus alone. If the Office authorities do not remain neutral, their organization may become the plaything and "hostage" of divided governmental interests. However, civil society stakeholders supported by the Office have to enjoy all democratic freedom to organize exchanges between young Germans and Turks, and retain the

15 The last two chapters are based on the findings of the my prize-awarded master's thesis from 2008 (University of Münster): "Das Deutsch-Polnische Jugendwerk 2004 bis 2007 - Opfer der Spannungen in den bilateralen Beziehungen, in: *Inter Finitimos* 7 (2009), S. 260-267.

16 That this is not the case at present reveals a closer look at the "Agreement on Youth Policy Cooperation" from 1994 mentioned on page 1. At the consultation committee's meetings established by the agreement, government representation prevails. Notwithstanding the committee's flaws, this basic document may be the starting point for future Youth Office's guidelines as it defines a basic legal framework for exchanges: http://www.ijab.de/downloads/1%C3%A4nderfachprogramme/t%C3%BCrkei/Abkommen_mit_der_Tuerkei.pdf, page accessed June 10th 2010, 1 pm.

freedom to decide on any (political) topic they choose.

Some words about funding the Office's work should be said before concluding. It goes without saying that both governments should contribute an equal share to the budget - not excluding the possibility of third party contributions, e.g. from the private sector. To anticipate those arguing that government commitment to yet another costly institution in times of crisis is not possible, a closer look at the existing offices is helpful. For instance, as we see with the case of the German-French and the German-Polish Youth Offices, a budget of only 10 - 15 million Euro per year is sufficient to sustain them.¹⁷

Conclusion

The German and the Turkish governments have been in consultation over their youth exchange policy for more than 16 years now. The time has come to take the next step. A binational, equally-governed body in the form of the Youth Office would be a symbol of high political value in the common German-Turkish nexus. A German-Turkish Youth Office would both deepen and add value to the states' mutual relationship.

Should it be a success, the Youth Office may be considered an experiment for German-Turkish intergovernmental cooperation, and the potential nucleus of even closer future integration in other policy fields (spill-over effect). Finally, the German-Turkish Youth Office would be the institutionalized bridge to a Muslim majority country that Europe is so desperately in need of.

17 In 2009, the German-Polish Youth Office disposed of a budget of 9,6 million Euro, see: <http://dpjw.org/c4,geschichte>, page accessed June 9th 2010, 11 pm; the German-French Youth Office's budget is 20,8 million Euro in 2010, see: <http://www.dfjw.org/aufgaben>, page accessed June 9th 2010, 11 pm.