

Germany evaluates its integration policy positively

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On 12 January, Maria Böhmer, the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, presented a report on the degree of integration of foreigners into German society. The authors (from the Institute for Social Research and Social Policy and from the Social Science Research Centre Berlin) checked the progress in the integration of immigrants upon a request from the German government. This was the second survey concerning this issue (the first report was published in 2008). The federal government, state administration of lower ranking, non-governmental organisations and representatives of immigrant circles agreed in 2007 as part of the 'National Integration Plan' to cyclically evaluate the situation of immigrants. This survey covers foreigners and immigrants holding German citizenship (at present one in five residents of Germany are of immigrant descent). The authors of this document have positively evaluated such factors as: the increase in the number of children receiving pre-school care, and falling unemployment figures. The report has criticised the continuing differences between ethnic Germans and foreigners (for example, the unemployment rate among immigrants is still double the general unemployment rate in Germany). The authors have also emphasised that it is still the case that too few people of immigrant origin are employed by the German public services and administration, and that the German public still represent a reluctant approach to immigrants.

Commentary

- The German integration policy, which has been conducted by the Christian Democrats present in the government since 2005, is focused primarily on improving the level of knowledge of the German language among foreigners as a means to resolving problems with education and employment. The gradual improvement of the situation of people of immigrant origin as shown in the report proves that this approach has been successful. At the same time, the document indicates that the actions taken by the government are needlessly one-sided and fail to include the education of the German part of society. Hence the still popular anti-immigrant sentiment among ethnic Germans (for example, according to surveys conducted earlier, approximately 50% of Germans would not have a Turk for a neighbour), which contributes to the emergence of parallel societies.
- The Christian Democrat model for the integration of foreigners de facto contributes to their assimilation, for example through their acceptance of German citizenship. This is in line with the expectations of the German public – individuals of immigrant descent

holding German passports are accepted as politicians (for example, the president of the Green Party, and ministers in local parliaments), actors and scientists. Individuals who were naturalised or born in Germany have performed better in all areas tested by the report than citizens of other countries living in Germany. This concerns both progress at school, success in the labour market, and the public engagement of immigrants.

- As a consequence of demographic changes there is a shortage of highly qualified workers in Germany already now. Since the previous programmes encouraging educated foreigners to work in Germany have failed, politicians will place a greater emphasis on developing the potential of immigrants living in Germany. Therefore, further action to be taken by the German government to promote integration will be concentrated on the education and vocational training of young people of immigrant origin. This group is seen as the most promising for the future of the German labour market, especially considering the increasing number of cases when young, educated immigrants leave for the homelands of their ancestors in search of better career prospects (for example, in 2008 the number of people who left Germany for Turkey was approximately 10,000 higher than that of those who left Turkey for Germany).