Muslim Political Associations of Turks In Germany

by Gökçe Yurdakul

As Turkey negotiates its membership with the European Union, EU countries are trying to decide on acceptable forms of Muslim social and political life for their immigrants. In Germany, a number of Muslim associations are major political players, and they have used their clout to strongly defend Muslim minority rights vis-à-vis German political parties and, occasionally, vis-à-vis local and federal authorities (*Zentralrat der Muslime*, 2002, *Islamrat*, 2005).

After September 11, 2001, German state authorities and the German mass media began looking more closely at Islam, and at Muslim communities in particular. The gathering places of Muslims, such as mosques and religious associations, became targets of state inspections and the subject of flashy newspaper articles that depicted them as shelters for terrorists (*Milli Görüs*, 30 September 2004). In response, many Muslim associations opened their doors to the members of Germany's non-Muslim majority to demonstrate their innocence (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 23 July 2004). But some Muslim organizations, feeling threatened by the police raids and the journalistic hype, minimized their interactions with them. Overall, then, the treatment of Muslim associations by both the German state authorities and the German media affected their associational campaigns and member policies in Germany.

As a result, the aftermath of September 11 gave shape to two Muslim communities in Germany, from which two conflicting representations of Islam emerged: an Islam supported by the state and an Islam perceived as a threat to the state. A recent book by Mahmoud Mamdani (2004) refers to this split as "good Muslim, bad Muslim." In this essay, I will explore the "good Muslim, bad Muslim" distinction in two Turkish religious immigrant organizations in Germany, with a view to comparing their divergent approaches to Muslim integration. The first association is the Religious Affairs Turkish Islamic Union (*Diyanet ISleri Türk Islam Birligi*, hereafter *Diyanet Isleri*), which is mainly supported by the Turkish state and partially supported by the German state authorities. The second is the *Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs* (hereafter *Milli Görüs*), which is not supported by either state and, in fact, is considered a "threat" to both German and Turkish societies (Schiffauer 2004a).

I have chosen these two associations to represent the good Muslim/bad Muslim distinction because they are considered the two major Turkish religious organizations in Germany, each having a distinct ideology, a large number of members, and an interest in attracting the same Muslim clientele: second- and third-generation Muslims in Germany. By exploring these two associations' historical development and their policies, I will attempt to show how Turkish Muslim associations define and enact diverse integration patterns and policies. I will then briefly discuss how the competition between these two Muslim associations for second- and third-generation Muslims may affect the future of Muslim communities in Germany.

Diyanet Isleri and Milli Görüs

The Diyanet Isleri was established in Germany in 1985 as a result of the Turkish parliament's decision to establish religious centers for Turkish immigrants in Europe. The Milli Görüs, though present as an informal network in Europe even in the early 1970s, emerged in Germany as a diasporic association of the members of Milli Selamet Partisi, the party of Necmettin Erbakan, which was banned by the Turkish Constitutional Court. Erbakan is a former prime minister of Turkey and the spiritual leader of Milli Görüs ideology.

Although the Diyanet Isleri and the Milli Görüs share a common aim, which is to provide religious services to Turkish immigrants in Germany, their perspectives on politics differ. Contrary to the common belief that the Diyanet Isleri is a formal representative of the Turkish state institution Religious Affairs, the Diyanet Isleri members emphasize that they have only an informal agreement with Religious Affairs. Turkey appoints a religious attaché to the Diyanet Isleri to serve a four-year term and funds the imams it sends to Germany, but associational resources fund other services, such as youth groups, the mosque, or women's groups. Although Hüseyin Mydyk, a member of the Diyanet Isleri executive committee in Berlin, claims that Diyanet Isleri is not a formal religious representative of Turkey in Germany, the Turkish religious attaché is affiliated with this association. This formal affiliation puts the Diyanet Isleri in a different category from other Muslim religious associations in Germany. For one, the representatives of Diyanet Isleri are careful not to make any statements in it's the group's internal or external affairs that would offend official relations between Turkey and Germany.

The name Milli Görüs refers to the political ideology created by the Milli Nizam Partisi (the National Order Party) in Turkey during the 1970s. The ideology of Milli Görüs has been well represented in Turkey's political arena by a series of religiously oriented political parties, such as the National Order Party (founded in 1970 and banned from politics by the Constitutional Court in 1971); Milli Selamet Partisi (the National Salvation Party, founded in 1972 and banned in the 1980 coup); Refah Partisi (the Welfare Party, founded in 1983 and banned in 1998); Fazilet Partisi (the Virtue Party, founded in 1997 and banned in 2001); and finally, Saadet Partisi (the Felicity Party, founded in 2001). During these various bans from political activities and the subsequent reestablishment of the party under new names, Milli Görüs grew in strength as a diasporic network of Turkish Muslims in Europe, specifically in Germany.

Because of the dramatic differences in their political views, the Milli Görüs and the Diyanet Isleri do not collaborate. In fact, the Diyanet members do not think very highly of the Milli Görüs: "We supported the establishment of the DITIB [Diyanet Isleri]. We didn't support the Milli Görüs, because we don't support their views. They have political views. Religion must be separated from politics. This is why we established the DITIB [Diyanet Isleri]." (Ali Gülcek, secretary general to the Diyanet Isleri, Berlin, 24 February 2003) In turn, the Milli Görüs criticizes the Diyanet Isleri: "The Diyanet was established in 1985 After Kenan Evren's coup d'état, it was established to counter the rising Islamic trends in Europe . . . Unlike the Diyanet, we are not staying quiet when there are changes in society. We express our opinions on every matter. Our opinions are crystal clear. Our aim is not to provoke people, but we take a firm position. Other associations do not do that. And therefore, Milli Görüs causes an allergic reaction in the conservative milieu. They say, 'Ha, they have a certain discourse.'" (Mustafa Yeneroglu, lawyer for the Milli Görüs, Cologne, 27 July 2004)

The differences between the Diyanet Isleri and the Milli Görüs are not limited to their political ideologies. And here, Milli Görüs has a big disadvantage: it is listed in the Bundesverfassungsschutz (the intelligence agency of Germany) as a "threat" to German democracy. The association is considered to be part of a political Islam that prevents immigrants from achieving full integration into German society. The label of "threat" to the German democracy largely restricts Milli Görüs activities and campaigns, and it puts Milli Görüs members under suspicion (Schiffauer 2004a, Bodemann 2004). Therefore, the Diyanet appears an attractive alternative for many second-generation Turks in Germany who, after September 11, seek only a secure atmosphere for prayer.

Being Muslim in Germany

Although Turkish party politics are definitely reflected in the Milli Görüs, many second-generation Milli Görüs members would argue that Germany has a different political atmosphere, with its own social dynamics that are independent from the politics of Turkey. They deny that the Milli Görüs factions in Turkey bring anything to the Milli Görüs in Germany, and they emphasize that Milli Görüs in Germany should be perceived within its own social and political atmosphere. In the view of second-generation Milli Görüs members, the association has developed its own dynamics and unique responses to German society; my informants who represent the view of the second-generation in the Milli Görüs community have drawn my attention to this fact. Mustafa Yeneroglu, the leader of the association's legal office, says: "They always ask us whether we are supporting the Justice and Development Party or the Felicity Party. We say, this does not exist in our agenda. . . . Our agenda is that Muslims live in Germany, Muslims live in Europe, they form a big population. We are occupied with the future of these people." (Interview with M. Yeneroglu, Cologne, 27 July 2004) Similarly, Burhan Kesici, a pedagogue for the Islamische Föderation in Berlin, explains how he chooses appropriate teachers for the schooling of Muslim children: "Many well-educated theology teachers came to us, but we did not take them, because their perspectives did not overlap with ours. Or their perspectives were not appropriate for this society. They have to know the psychology of these children. They have to know the social environment of these children. For example, the Islam that is lived in Turkey or the Islam that is lived in Saudi Arabia is different from the Islam that is lived in Berlin." (Interview with B. Kesici, Berlin, 20 August 2004)

With regard to Muslim integration policies, the major distinction between Diyanet Isleri and Milli Görüs lies in the interpretation of Muslim life. The Diyanet Isleri sees Muslim life in Germany as a cultural difference between the Muslims and the non-Muslim majority, whereas the Milli Görüs takes a holistic approach to Muslim life in Germany. The Milli Görüs wants to integrate the specificities of Muslim life into the German public sphere and to claim certain rights for Muslims, such as Islamic education for Muslim children, ritual slaughtering of animals, and Muslim-only cemeteries. Although Diyanet Isleri may agree with some claims of Milli Görüs in principle, such as the right to religious education of Muslim children in public schools, they do not raise legal claims in Germany, whereas the Milli Görüs members do.

Albeit a counterpart of Milli Görüs, Diyanet Isleri supports the "intercultural dialogue" between Turks and Germans as an integration policy. For one thing, Diyanet members claim that they do not take a political position, and that religion must be kept separate from politics. To this end, they support the

Turkish state’s politics on Islam, which apparently favor state control over religious affairs through state institutions and regulations. This form of Islam is not considered to be a direct threat to German society, because it is controlled by the Turkish state. In this sense, the Diyanet Isleri association’s intercultural dialogue emphasizes the cultural component of religion: Muslims should enter into a dialogue with the majority society in order to introduce the cultural components of Islam. In sum, the second-generation Milli Görüs members claim to create a space for Muslims in Germany, whereas the Diyanet Isleri sees its services as an extension of religious services from Turkey to Germany.

In the short term, the Diyanet Isleri may be effective in providing religious services for Turkish Muslims. But many second-generation Muslims, who emphasize their permanence in Germany, also demand more rights than just the permission to hold religious services in backyard mosques. These rights would include, for example, large-scale availability of the ritual slaughtering of animals, permission to wear Muslim attire in public places, and the establishment of Islamic theology institutes for the training of Muslim clergy. However, unlike Christian churches and the Jewish community, Islamic religious associations do not have the legal status of a corporation under public law. They are rather considered private associations without legal standing (Fournier and Yurdakul, forthcoming in 2006, Jonker 2000).

Many of the above-cited claims are far from being realized in Germany. Mustafa Yoldas, a member of Milli Görüs and the chairman of the Council of Islamic Communities in Hamburg, explains the situation in the following manner: “They want to prevent Muslims to institutionalize in Germany. I mean, they do not want us to have an institutionalization like Jews and Christians. When we have körperschaft des öffentlichen Rechtes status, we can have kindergarten, cemeteries, taxes, or membership payments. We can use these funds in the pflegeheim, schools . . . They don’t want that. Therefore, it does not matter if I have super ideas. We want institutionalization [of Islam]. I want the German government to support us. We don’t want money, we want legal counterparts.” (Interview with Mustafa Yoldas, Hamburg, 10 August 2004)

Is Milli Görüs really trying to create a space for Muslims in Germany that is independent from Turkish politics? Is the Diyanet Isleri really campaigning for intercultural dialogue, rather than promoting the Turkish-Islam as a religious ideology in Germany? Do Muslim associations really have a hidden agenda that they will reveal once they receive legal status? Considering the growing Muslim population in Germany and in Europe overall, it is clear that these questions will continue to yield provocative discussions. What we know is that the issues surrounding Muslim integration and their increasing number of claims will be far more complex in the future.

As the Milli Görüs tries to peel off the “bad Muslim” label that came with being listed in the Bundesverfassungsschutz, and attempts to become legitimate, the present Diyanet Isleri services seem to be sufficient for many Turkish Muslims. Muslim communities in Europe may eventually require a supranational body to convince the European Union to meet Muslim immigrant needs. That supranational body may well be influenced by one of the two Turkish Muslim associations discussed here, but only time will show which association is more competent to fill that role.

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Notes

1 For example, Burhan Kesici, a member of the Islamische Föderation in Berlin, is hesitant toward journalists. He says that he had negative experiences with them: "We have a very positive interview [with the journalist]. Then we look at the newspaper, he wrote all the negative stereotypes [about us]. We call him: Why did you do this? He says: 'This is the order from the Redaktion.' Then why does he take our time for three hours? He can write whatever he likes" (Interview by the author with Burhan Kesici at Islamische Föderation in Berlin, 20 August 2004).

2 This distinction has been present before September 11, but it has sharpened since the events. See also T. Faist, "Migration-Security Nexus: International Migration and Security Before and After 9/11," in Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos: Incorporation Regimes in Germany, Western Europe and North America, ed. M. Bodemann and G. Yurdakul (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2006).

3 It is almost impossible to collect accurate numbers of members, since the registered members of these associations do not reflect all of the affiliated immigrants (i.e., frequenters of the mosques). Many associations therefore make the distinction between taban (base) and üye (official member). However, these definitions are blurry and sometimes overlapping.

4 The Diyanet Isleri controls 800 mosques in Germany alone, whereas the Milli Görüs controls 514 mosques in Europe, most of which are located in Germany. Both have established a social service network over several decades in Germany, and both have youth and women's groups, Quran reading courses, and funeral funds. See www.diyanet.org and www.igmg.de.

5 Interview by the author with Hüseyin Mydyk, member of the Diyanet Isleri executive committee in Berlin, 25 February 2003.

6 Milli Görüs appears as a diasporic network in many countries in Europe and also in North America. The networks in Germany, the Netherlands, and France are the most well-known.

7 Kenan Evren was the military leader of the coup d'état on 12 September 1980.

8 I discuss the various reasons for being listed in the Bundesverfassungsschutz in my Ph.D. dissertation. See also W. Schiffauer, "Das Recht, anders zu sein," in Die Zeit, 18 November 2004.

9 Most of these ideas are specific to second-generation Milli Görüs members and cannot be generalized to reflect the ideas of all of the members of this association.

10 The Diyanet also does not share many of the Milli Görüs claims, such as the wearing of headscarves in public places in Germany or the exemption of Muslim girls from attending swimming classes in schools.

11 In Germany, "a special partnership exists between the State and those religious communities that have the status of a 'corporation under public law.' If they fulfill certain requirements, including assurance of permanency, size of the organization, and an indispensable loyalty to the State, organizations may request that they be granted 'public law corporation' status, which, among other things, entitles them to levy taxes on their members that are collected by the State for the church." (Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State Annual Report on

International Religious Freedom 2002, available online at www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/13936.htm).
12 Status of corporation of public law.
13 Foster home.

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