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# „North-Rhine Westphalia: A Federal State of New Integration Chances“

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE STATE COMMISSIONER FOR MIGRATION OF THE FEDERAL STATE OF NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA, THOMAS KUFEN IN AMMAN

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**It is a great pleasure for me discussing with you jointly here in Amman today the issues and implications on which this roundtable meeting will be focussing. It is a special event organised in a city of significant importance. I have been staying in Jordan now for some days and am enthralled by this country and its impressive culture.**

The topic of today's discussion will be focusing on integration. I am convinced that Germany may serve as a very interesting example with a view to these issues as there have taken place political and legislative reforms of immigration and integration policy in our country in recent years of which many national and international observers would not have believed that Germany might be capable of implementing such policies.

Let us recall the following facts: Despite millionfold immigration of so-called guest workers as they were referred to for a long time, their relatives, ethnic German late repatriates, resettlers and refugees since the 1950s, the political elite of our country stuck defiantly to the view that Germany is not an immigration country.

Emphasis was laid again and again on the following statement: Foreigners in Germany were not to be regarded as immigrants at all and the recruitment policy carried out from the 1950s until the 1970s could not be

seen as immigration policy due to the fact that only a stay for a limited period of time had been intended.

It was also argued that resettlers and ethnic German repatriates from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union could not be subsumed under the definition immigrants as these people were Germans and thus could not immigrate to their own country.

It is therefore not an exaggeration to state that Germany has "re-invented" itself to a large extent in terms of its immigration and integration policies.

Thus, there has taken place indeed a real „policy change“. Bans on critical thinking were overcome and new political coalitions were built.

Old rifts between an ideological "Laissez-faire multicultural policy" on the one hand and an ideological denying of the fact that immigration exists at all on the other hand have been levelled.

Nowadays it is possible to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of immigration across the various political camps in a differentiated way - let alone the extremists of the left and right wings being an exception in this case.

This moderate discourse both in terms of its tone and as a matter of fact constitutes the prerequisite for viable political solutions integrating the society as a whole.

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To cut a long story short: A „pragmatic turn“ has taken place in German immigration and integration policies.

I would like to explain this by taking some examples:

1) Germany has become since 1st January 2005 also by law and not just de facto an immigration country.

The new immigration law contains for the first time regulations aimed at the targeted recruitment of highly skilled professionals and entrepreneurs.

It has become in the meantime an indisputable fact that there is a strong demand for skilled workers and highly qualified workforce in export-oriented Germany. The expansion of qualified employment is a key in order to ensure permanently both the performance (effectiveness) and innovative capability of the national economy.

However, it is almost an irony in itself that Germany defines itself nowadays as an immigration nation while at the same time there is hardly any immigration at all.

Family migration is declining, immigration of ethnic Germans has almost come to a standstill and only a small number of asylum seekers can be recorded. The times of high migration surpluses comparable to the figures of the 1980s and 1990s are long gone.

2) A new modern citizenship law entered into force on 1st January 2000 which was detached from old, obsolete ethnonational ideas that had been adhered to for a long time.

Central elements of the „ius soli“ were included in the law. Thus, with a view to the citizenship and naturalisation policy it may be stated that Germany has made an approach to the model of „classical“ countries of immigration.

The law has far-reaching consequences! Nowadays there are hardly anymore children born as foreign citizens: 19 out of 20

children born in North Rhine Westphalia are German citizens.

Only every 20th child is raised without a German passport.

The large majority of children with immigration family background may exercise their civic rights and obligations as German citizens from their date of birth. Who would have thought that this would be possible one day just 20 years ago?

We do need in Germany a culture of welcome. People who feel at home in our country should also have their home here and consequently become German citizens.

3) New immigrants are not left alone anymore after their entry as it used to be in the past but are now receiving support in language and guidance courses.

Anyone immigrating to Germany for the first time and without a command of the German language is entitled to a language training course of 600 to 900 hours in connection with a guidance course of 45 hours.

The guidance course aims at providing a basic knowledge of Germany's legal system as well as its history and culture.

The intention underlying such measures is to familiarise persons with an immigration background with the living conditions in Germany to such an extent required that they may be enabled to act independently on their own, thus coping with all matters and affairs of daily life without help or intervention by third parties.

By the end of the year 2006 there had been admitted 1,851 course organisers for the performance of integration courses at more than 5,800 locations on a nationwide level. These measures ensured integration courses being offered across the whole country.

The costs are borne to a large extent by the taxpayers. Immigrants are required to pay only a symbolic contribution of 1 Euro per

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language lesson. This offer was not intended to be completely free of charges.

If there had been a comparable integration programme already in the 1960s and 70s, a number of current social subsequent problems would not have arisen. But better late than never.

4) Massive attempts are made in order to promote the education of pre-school children and primary school children at an early stage.

Both the school and education system have turned a blind eye to immigration for quite a long time. Many nursery schools (kindergartens) and schools acted as if there did not exist students who grew up with another language than German.

However, the social and cultural composition of students is nowadays much more heterogeneous than it used to be during the 60s and 70s. This causes a need for new concepts!

But there have taken place positive changes in this regard, too. A new study conducted at the behest of the integration ministers of the federal states reveals that nowadays the language ability of all children is assessed before they enter school on a nationwide level and it is examined whether they have a good command of German corresponding to their age or not.

If they encounter difficulties, they will receive special support. I expect of such measures that the downward spiral consisting of a lack of German language command, failure in the school career and professional exclusion may be avoided as a whole.

North Rhine Westphalia as the federal state with the largest proportion of people with an immigration background is a pioneer with regard to the promotion of language skills (language acquisition) during the early stage of childhood.

5) It has finally been achieved that politicians and immigrants talk to each other instead of talking only about each other.

I am convinced of the following: The dialogue held jointly by the parties involved is the first step towards a successful integration.

The two national integration summits which took place upon the invitation of the Federal Chancellor may serve as an example. The integration committee set up in North Rhine Westphalia must be mentioned in this respect as well since it makes its contribution to a better succeeding integration in North Rhine Westphalia. It consists, of course, also of representatives of various migrant self-help organisations.

This dialogue is necessary and it is the more regrettable that we did not launch it much earlier. For far too long, responsible politicians have ignored in Germany the needs and interests of persons with an immigration background. Sometimes not even notice was taken of them. People who came to our country over a period of more than fifty years and have been living among us in our society, have paid their taxes here, have been working here and maybe wish to build a house or start a family.

6) Discussions are led on the highest national administrative level with the Muslim organisations.

More than 3 million Muslims live nowadays in Germany. Most of them have immigrated from Turkey. Discussions between national administrative representatives and Muslim organisations like those dialogues maintained with Christian churches were only launched a few years ago.

This was a mistake as Islam is a reality in our cities. It is an integral part of our society.

Nowadays there exists the "German Islam Conference", an organised regular dialogue held between high representatives of the German government and local administrations and the spokesmen of the five large Islamic associations (including Alevi).

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These talks help reducing mistrustfulness on both sides. They also would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

However, the appreciation and recognition of multicultural diversity does not imply a multicultural arbitrariness. For many years, a certain kind of misinterpreted (misunderstood) tolerance was associated with the artificial term "multicultural", but whenever conflicts arose they were ignored by people who turned a blind eye to them.

Such kind of looking the other way has led to the fact that a proportion of the immigrants that must not be underestimated now live in their ethnic colonies – partially even without the need of making use of the German language.

But a mere coexistence cannot bring us forward. Without a minimum of community and commonness a society will not successfully cope with diversity. The fundament of our society must be a command of the German language and a common basis of values founded on the liberal-democratic rule of law. This must be a binding obligation for all people residing in our country.

Integration is also characterised by the following requirements: The willingness of immigrants to become a part of our society and their determination to succeed in the social advancement.

I would like to mention some role models as they have mastered successfully all hurdles and may point children and adolescents in the right direction:

Mesut Özil is just one example. Many other football players like Gerald Asamoah or pop singers like Xavier Naidoo or moderators such as Nazan Eckes are present in public and show us that the hurdles of integration may be mastered well. Guidance and strength may be provided, of course, not only by the big stars but as well also by those whom we encounter in our daily life. There exist, of course numerous role models who are not present in the media.

Many people with an immigration background but never appearing in the headlines of the news are good examples of a successful integration. Role models and good examples communicate confidence in a more efficient way and can faster encourage to become active instead of all kind of theories or appeals.

The chances of the immigrants are at the same time always also our chances, i.e. the chances of the receiving society.