

# Transnational Communities

An ESRC Research Programme

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## **DIASPORA-POLITICS OF IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES FROM TURKEY RESIDING IN GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS, UK AND DENMARK**

### **Principal Investigator**

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### **Aims and objectives:**

This research aims to introduce understandings of trans-state political links of diasporas to the study of political activities of immigrants and refugees in Western Europe. Throughout Europe policy-makers are increasingly met by demands from diasporas who urge them to pursue a particular policy towards their homeland. Governments in Europe are met by demands from the homeland governments of diaspora to restrain their political dissidence.

So far there has been no systematic comparative study of the homeland strategies of the ‘same’ transnational community diaspora in several countries in Western Europe. Transnational communities from Turkey are highly visible immigrant groups and, as such, an obvious case. Turkish citizens constitute one of the largest and most widely dispersed immigrated groups in Western Europe and the largest group in Germany, the Netherlands, and Denmark.

The research aims to investigate two aspects of trans-state political links of immigrants and refugees (diasporas):

- How the a) scope, b) forms and c) effectiveness of diaspora politics (homeland politics) are related to the diaspora’s opportunity to participate in politics in the countries in which they reside.
- The intensity and use of political links between diasporas and political, ethnic or religious counterparts in their homeland as well as among different parts of the diaspora residing in several host-countries.

### **Duration of research**

February 1999 – December 2001



### **Methodology/study design**

The research is designed as a comparative study of diaspora politics of Turks and Kurds in four Western European countries chosen to highlight the relationship between political rights in the host-country and homeland political mobilisation, participation and its impact. The Netherlands provides the sharpest contrast to Germany, with Denmark and the UK as intermediate comparative case studies. In order to map out and analyse selected political organisations in each of the countries qualitative studies are undertaken including in-depth interview with leaders of diaspora political organisations, politicians and civil servants of the host-country. Other sources include written material from the organisations, archives of local and national governments and the press. Substantial research is also undertaken in Turkey where central policy-makers, civil servants and leaders of NGO's are interviewed about their perception and policies of the Turkish and Kurdish communities' political mobilisation abroad.

### **Academic and policy implications**

This research will contribute original data to a comparative theoretical understanding as well the ongoing policy debates on trans-state political mobilisation. In particular it addresses the issue of how a democracy deals with members of society whose loyalty is also directed back towards their country of origin. Dissemination will be through reports and minor policy oriented workshops.

### **SOME PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

- Throughout Europe, transnational commu-

nities of immigrants and refugees from Turkey retain and develop an interest in, and political ties with, their country of origin. There is a situation of 'spatial diffusion of domestic politics' in both countries.

- There are not two separate sets of organisations within the communities – rather each organisation has dual agendas of *immigrant politics* and *homeland politics*, which overlap and reinforce each other. There are several examples of this.
  - a) An immigrant political agenda may have a 'hidden' homeland political agenda, such as the right to express cultural or religious distinctiveness. Given that these are sensitive issues in the homeland, the quest for and recognition of such distinctiveness in the host-countries sends an important message to homeland politicians.
  - b) Turkish immigrants may link their immigrant political claims for integration with the promotion of foreign policy interests of the homeland. Turkish organisational representatives, particularly in Germany, link their minority status in Germany with the status of Turkey in Europe (the EU).
  - c) A homeland political agenda may be justified in immigrant political terms, by arguing that contributing to the solution of a homeland political problem will also contribute to easing the same conflict in host-country. Violent acts of extreme left-wing and Kurdish groups against Turkish shops – as well as different ethnic or religious organisations unwilling-

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ness to co-operate, are among the ‘spill-over’ effects from political developments in Turkey to the communities abroad.

- Political mobilisation and organisation on homeland political issues do not relate to host-state political structures in the same way as political organisation on immigrant political issues does. Despite the different national institutional and political context the landscape of homeland politically oriented Turkish and Kurdish organisations in the Netherlands largely resemble that of Germany. That is, there are organisations representing the various ethnic, religious and political movements in Turkey as well as in diaspora. Such organisations, using different methods, seek to support their compatriots at home with direct economic aid, or indirectly via lobbying in their host-countries. The most interesting findings of the research relate to the latter dimension.
- Political lobbying on homeland political issues do not relate to the host-state political context in the same way that immigrant political participation does. Both German and Dutch political authorities do not welcome discussion on homeland political issues in these fora, as they are seen as counterproductive to integration of immigrated minorities. While immigrants participate on issues of common interest to them and policy-makers of their host-society, homeland political movements do not. Campaigns for minority rights in Turkey, for instance, are not welcomed with the same kind of interest and attentiveness as activities to counter soaring crime rates among second generation Turkish youth.
- This is particularly the case in countries that perceive themselves as having done a great deal to incorporate immigrants into their society and political system such as the Netherlands (and to some extent Denmark). In such countries, homeland politics are seen as a failure of integration of ethnic minorities. Thus, although the organisations have better opportunities for obtaining funding by

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Dutch national and local authorities, and there are more platforms and fora for dialogue between immigrants and refugees and Dutch policy-makers and civil servants than is the case in Germany this does not make for more channels for dialogue on issues of homeland politics.

- Simultaneous processes of Europeanisation and decentralisation shape trans-state political networks of Turks and Kurds. Generally homeland politically oriented organisations in the Netherlands (as is the case in Germany and Denmark) find it difficult to come together because of their differing homeland political orientations. Rather, there are intense trans-state links within the different sub-groups of the communities from Turkey (Kurds, Alevi’s, Sunni-Muslims, right-wing nationalist Turks, etc).
- Homeland political organisations pool financial resources and draw on expertise and manpower in sister organisations elsewhere. They reinforce their campaigns by co-ordinating them with political counterparts in other countries – either in the form of producing joint informational material or in organising and co-ordinating confrontational activities (demonstrations/mass meetings) to happen simultaneously.
- In more cases than not the institutionalisation of trans-state networks within Europe, are mainly initiated either from Turkey or from communities based in Germany. Or both, when the organisations in Germany act as bridgeheads between the political party/

movement in Turkey and organisations elsewhere in Europe. The Turkish State has a very ambiguous relationship with the communities abroad as it seeks to curb political dissidence and evoke loyalty at the same time. The different political parties are interested in economic and political, and quite a few exchange safe seats in national or local elections in return for economic support from the increasingly well to do communities abroad.

- As a consequence, the networks within Europe are often quite hierarchical, and organisations in particularly the Netherlands are slightly wary of the German based organisations, which they feel dominate in terms of membership and agenda setting. In the Netherlands there is therefore also a tendency to decentralise and act more independently from the German or Turkish counterparts.

## USERS ENGAGED IN THE PROJECT

Local and national politicians and civil servants in Germany, Denmark, The Netherlands and the UK.

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

- Trans-state loyalties and politics of Turks and Kurds in Western Europe, *SAIS Review, A Journal of International Relations*, vol. 20, Winter/Spring Edition, 2000, 23-38
- Diasporas in World Politics, in William Wallace and Daphne Josselin (eds): *Non-state Actors in World Politics*, MacMillan Ltd, 2001 (*forthcoming*)
- Avrupa'daki Turk Gencleri, Introductory chapter in Gunduz Vassaf, *Daha Sesimizi Duyurmadik. Avrupa'da Turk Isci Cocuklari*. Belge Yayinlari Istanbul, (*forthcoming in Turkish*).
- *Outsiders on the Inside? Turks and Kurds in Germany and their Influence on German-Turkish Relations*, Western European International Politics Workshop, 18/2 2000
- 'Turkish and Kurdish Transnational Political Mobilisation in Germany and the Netherlands', Paper for Conference on Migration and Development, Princeton University, May 4-6 2000; (*Working Paper Series of Center for Migration and Development*).
- *From Remittance Machines to Euro Turks: Turkey's Changing Perceptions of Citizens Abroad*, Workshop on 'Perceptions and Policies of Sending Countries towards their Citizens and Former Citizens Abroad', London School of Economics, 10/7 2000

## Transnational Communities Programme

On the programme's website (<http://www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk>) you will find contact details for all the project teams, guidance notes for would-be authors in the book series', information about past and forthcoming events, downloadable working papers, a searchable bibliography of world diasporas and links to related sites. An on-line news digest, TRACES aims to make sense of the human dimensions of globalisation by monitoring news items from around the world and presenting them in summary form. You can register on-line to receive hard copies of newsletters, reminders of website updates and information about related events.

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