

## 2006 EUIJ Scholarship Report

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### **The Integration Process of EU and Immigrants and Refugees of Non-EU Nationalities: Focus on political and cultural activities of Kurdish immigrant in Germany**

#### **Research Purpose**

In the process of European integration, while in EU/ Shengen member countries there has been prompted various mobility, stretching from short-time labor to information, there has been an increasing interest in the gap between EU citizens and immigrants from non-EU member countries in terms of their respective rights. Although western EU member countries try to construct a common immigration-refugee policy, the universalistic human rights spirit, which is a characteristic common to both the EU constitution and Germans, and the realities of the market, which needs cheaper labor, condition policy-making processes in various levels, such as the acceptance of Turkey as an EU member State, from EU and national to local societies.

In this context, I study formations of transnational spaces and activities by which Kurdish immigrants and refugees, who are one of the biggest diaspora groups in Europe, have shaped and I focus on their integration problems especially in Germany. From the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the region Kurdistan, where borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria cross, has been the point at issue along with Israel-Palestine conflicts in the Middle East. After the Second World War, those who have Kurdish origins have begun to move to Europe as students, workers and refugees. Although their destination countries varied from Eastern to Western European countries because of division of state-ideologies, the biggest part of them had migrated from Turkey to West Germany as Gastarbeiters. Prior research on immigration in Europe show how they shifted their interests in host countries from participation in trade unions to self-organization in point of ethnicity or religious beliefs. In the same way Kurdish migrants began to be active as un-recognized nations or oppressed minorities in the social and political sphere.

These problems could be divided into 4 quadrants by 2-axes. Global-axis: the Integration in Europe and the problem of Turkey's joining the EU (1) and transnational associations and activities of Kurdish nationalists (2). Local-axis: Multiculturalism and social integration problems in the local context, relationship between Kurdish immigrant communities (3) and the host society (4). These problems could be understood as attempts to mediate between the universalism, in which shared by both the German Constitution and the principle of EU, and the particularistic claiming in cultural and political contexts in the host-society and immigrants. I made an effort to focus on the local context, organizational structure of Kurdish immigrants in German societies and their integrations policy through interviews with members and the collection of pertinent data regarding this study.

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**KOMKAR: Union of Association from Kurdistan, Verband der Vereine aus Kurdistan: interview**

At KOMKAR (central office in Wuppertal), I asked questions to the staff about the details of their activities and their focal point in German society. KOMKAR is one of the oldest Kurdish associations in Germany, and the largest number of participants is those who came to Germany as *Gastarbeiters* and their children. They pointed out the social-structural problem, of which Kurdish parents tending to quit having their children learn Kurdish, as there is no official recognition for the Kurdish language and the Kurdish nation in Germany. At that time they held a Newroz , the new years festival of the Kurdish people and there were also participants who came from Syria and Iraq.

**YEK-KOM :Federation of Kurdish Associations in Germany:** interview

YEK-KOM organizes various cultural and social activities including political demonstrations in Germany, and mediates between asylum-seekers and lawyers. In my interview, a staff pointed out a paradoxical condition for refugees, who were in danger because of their political activities in Turkey, in order to acquire legal status as refugees or a German pass because of their political pro-PKK activities, such as participate in a demonstration in Germany. Ceni, the women s department of YEK-KOM, organizes panel discussions with different themes. In 2006 Ceni held a series of critical debates on Honor-killing in Kurdish society.

**Kurdish Center: Kurdisches Zentrum (Berlin):** interview

Kurdish Center is one of the oldest Kurdish associations, which is independent from political parties. The founders were political refugees from Turkey in 1980 and the aim was to hold cultural and political activities in order to integrate Kurdish immigrants and their children into German society. The Center is given financial assistance by the DPWV(German Parity Welfare Union) and a ward office of Friedlichshein-Kreuzberg. They also offered a Kurdish class in public school in the 90 s in cooperation with the German teacher s union, but now there is no class because of the lack of participants.

**Hinbun: Education and Consulting Center for Women and their Family (Berlin):** interview

Hinbun, which means to learn something new in Kurdish, is a core center for immigrant and refugee women in ward Spandau in Berlin, and it receives financial support through the Evangelical Church Spandau from die Berliner senatsverwaltung für Arbeit. Although the founder is a Kurdish woman from Turkey, visitors and staffs are not only Kurdish or Turkish women, but also German and other nationals. Their activities vary from literacy classes for Kurdish women, who didn t have a chance to go to school in Turkey, to training classes for German Police in order to discourage their prejudice against the Kurdish people.

I was also received many documents and reports concerning Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Germany from Kurdologie, European center for Kurdish studies, in Berlin and NAVEND in Bonn. In Ausländerbeauftragter des Senats in Berlin I was able to collect a lot of documents on immigration statistics and analyses.

**Research Result**

This research made it possible to demonstrate that different immigration and refugee policies in each cities and states condition the factor to organize Kurdish associations, and its institutionalization could function as a route to integrate immigrant associations into German societies. In that case conflicts between the German administration or Turkish associations and Kurdish associations happened sometimes on account of recognition for the symbolized name Kurd or Kurdistan , but it looks as if the focus would have already changed from who they are to how they are . However it is still an

important point to consider the social structure of the host society in the case of a minority's identity politics and the integration problems of immigrants from non-EU countries.

Finally, I would like to express to all the groups and persons involved, my gratitude for their cooperation with this research. I also deeply thank the EUIJ for offering me this precious opportunity. I would like to make a contribution towards the study of integration problems of immigrants and refugees from non-EU countries by turning these experiences and this research result to the development of my study and doctoral thesis.