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Problems of Migrant Workers' Return to their Home Countries

by Heiko Körner, Darmstadt*

Germany's migration statistics for 1982 and 1983 show, for the first time in some years, an excess of out migration over immigration of foreign workers and their families. What are the problems facing the returnees? How can their modernizing influence on their societies be increased?

Having lost its initial impetus from 1976 to 1979 as a result of the improvement of general economic conditions after the first oil crisis, out migration of foreign workers from the Federal Republic of Germany is showing a mounting tendency again in recent years. The advent of the second oil crisis in 1979/80 and, in its wake, a new deterioration of economic conditions were reflected after a certain time-lag by mounting labour market problems especially in regions and industries showing a high proportion of foreign workers in the labour force. This caused a rapid expansion of unemployment, especially of foreign workers: whereas in 1979 the unemployment rates of Germans (3.7) and foreigners (4.7) did not differ very much, in 1983 the unemployment rate of foreign workers (14.9) exceeded the unemployment rate of Germans (9.0) in a very conspicuous manner.¹

The worsening of labour market conditions in the Federal Republic as well as the consequent disillusionment of foreigners with regard to their economic and social situation in this country are the main cause of growing return migration. It may have been intensified by deliberate action by the Federal Government to promote the foreigners' return home. First, since 1982 advance payments of their long-term savings and savings premiums as well as of their accumulated shares in the social insurance system are made to workers of Portuguese and Turkish origin six months after their final return to their home countries (other nationalities are not eligible because of special agreements between the respective countries and the Federal Republic).

Secondly, according to a "Law to promote the foreigners' readiness to depart" of December, 1983, all "guest workers" (with the exception of Italians, who

enjoy freedom of movement within the EC) who have recently lost their jobs can, until the end of September, 1984, profit from cash grants (of DM 10,500 per worker and DM 1,500 per child living in the worker's household) after their and their families' final return to their country of origin.

The Federal Government is confident that with the help of these direct incentives some 50,000 unemployed workers and their families can be induced to leave the Federal Republic. (A legal return to Germany is impossible for them because of the recruitment and immigration stop in force since 1973.) Today, the final outcome of this measure is not yet clear. The experience of the French Government, using a similar set of return incentives from 1977 to 1981, suggests that expectations should not be set too high.² But it seems nevertheless possible that this policy might have additional effects: official actions in conjunction with the worsening of labour-market conditions and of the general socio-psychological environment in the Federal Republic are causing foreigners to be discontent with the conditions of their stay in Germany, giving them a latent feeling that it would be better for them to return. Therefore, the return incentives and related official attitudes may indeed in the future intensify the tendency of growing return migration from Germany.

Attitude of Returnees

These circumstances are bound to generate mounting problems not only for the individual migrant worker but also for the migrant workers' countries of origin after their return. This supposition is confirmed by

¹ According to the Bundesanstalt für Arbeit: ANBA, No. 2/1984.

² Cf. A. L e b o n : Return Migration from France: Policies and Data, in: D. K u b a t (ed.): The Politics of Return. International Return Migration in Europe, Rome, New York 1984.

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recent experiences of migrant workers who were interviewed some time after their return.³

A large proportion of Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish returnees were of the opinion that their arrival in their home country was accompanied by economic, social and psychological problems, preventing them from finding jobs, especially in adequate positions, and preventing them from improving their social situation according to their aspirations. Under the pressure of the traditional social system prevailing in their native surroundings, many of them had resigned from the outset and returned to the traditional agricultural socio-economic system. Even if the returnee in most cases can take advantage of his savings and economic experience abroad, and therefore is able to realize a comparatively high standard of living, it seems difficult for him to readapt to the socio-economic structure of his native country. Dissatisfaction, especially with the functioning of the general socio-economic system in their home countries, leads a considerable number of returnees to the opinion that they really regret their decision to return, and moreover, that they would like to go back to their former host countries if only the possibility existed.

This rather sceptical attitude of the returnees with respect to the possibility of integrating successfully into their native milieu is also reflected in the opinions of Italians, Spaniards, and Turks who were interviewed recently in Germany.⁴ Approximately half the foreign workers interviewed are aware of the social and economic problems in their countries of origin. They do not hope to get adequate jobs with a fair remuneration after their return or to find good investment opportunities for their savings. Most of them would return to their native countries only under the pressure of family problems (health, schooling of the children) and would not hope to improve their economic and social situation.

Deficiencies in Economic and Social Systems

Like those who have returned, these workers have the feeling that at home the national administration is not very effective in the tasks of job creation, improving the social insurance and labour-market systems, and providing a modern educational system. They think that, in general, it is one of the most important responsibilities of their countries' governments to improve the conditions for return by providing a modern socio-economic framework.

This is not without rationale. For the main roots of the rather disappointing experiences of a considerable

number of migrant workers after their return are to be found in general deficiencies in the economic and social systems in the countries of Southern Europe:

- The persistence of *traditional patterns of economic activity* and *non-diversified market structures*, especially in the rural regions, prevent the establishment and successful functioning of economic activities outside the traditional pattern by the returnees with the help of their savings.
- The *inflexibility of national and regional labour markets* imposes severe restrictions on the returnees when trying to use the "know-how" acquired during their stay abroad. They are thus forced back into the typical, low-productivity occupations of the traditional milieu.
- The *neglect to modernize the system of socio-economic institutions* inhibits the returnee from taking advantage of his social experiences abroad. Therefore in most cases return is connected with social disillusionment and frustration. Because the younger, more modern returnees strive to escape from this situation by moving to the cities, the rural areas remain in their traditional socio-economic conservatism. This enhances the general socio-economic dualism which is a typical feature of the countries of Southern Europe.

Features of Return Migration

The individual returnee is not able to alter this set of conditions. In theory, the individual returnee can be seen as the typical "marginal man" bestowed with special qualities, moving from one social system to another and so exerting dynamic modernization impulses on his native society and economy. But this view underestimates some special features of return migration:

- The success of an individual innovator is dependent on the existence of an open, flexible socio-economic milieu. And exactly this precondition is not fulfilled in the backward agricultural regions of origin of most returnees.

³ Cf. M. Bernitt: Die Rückwanderung spanischer Gastarbeiter: Der Fall Andalusien, Königstein (Ts.) 1981; J. Leib: Rimesen, Ersparnisverwendung und Investitionsverhalten: Das Beispiel Spanien, in: Geographische Rundschau, Vol. 35 (1983); C. Lienau: Remigration – was danach, in: Geographische Rundschau, Vol. 35 (1983); E. Serra-Santana: Le retour: La réalisation d'un projet ou la préservation d'une idée: Le cas de retour des migrants portugais à Bragança, First European Conference on International Return Migration, Rome 1981 (mimeo); M. Silva, et al.: Return, Emigration and Regional Development in Portugal (Summary), Instituto de Estudos para o Desenvolvimento, Lisbon 1983 (mimeo); K. Unger: Die Rückkehr der Arbeitsmigranten. Eine Studie zur Remigration nach Griechenland, Saarbrücken, Fort Lauderdale 1983.

⁴ Cf. E. Harsche, K. Rautenberg: Regionale Orientierung der Rückwanderung von Gastarbeitern und motivationsstruktur anlageorientierten Sparverhaltens, Gesellschaft für Wirtschafts- und Regionalsoziologie, Gießen 1983.

MIGRATION

□ Out migration during the sixties and early seventies, on an average, was small in relation to the population staying at home, and so the number of returnees is also relatively small. Therefore, in most cases the individual leverage effect of a returnee trying to transplant modern activities and attitudes into his native milieu is too small and isolated to have lasting results.

□ Out migration as well as return migration is a

selective process with respect to personal qualities: experience tells that the majority of the emigrants is younger and more mobile than the average resident population, and that the returnee in most cases is older than the average emigrant, and consequently shows the more passive behaviour of people in the latter part of their life-cycle. Therefore their modernizing energies will also be lower. Thus, if these individuals are confronted

Table 1
Federal Republic of Germany: Migration of Foreigners
1978 – 1983 (1000 persons)

Selected nationalities							
European Community							
Period	Total	Nationals of all members countries	Greeks	Italians	Turks	Yugo- slavs	Spaniards
Immigration							
1978	456.1	137.2	15.4	83.0	131.0	38.6	5.3
1980	631.4	155.9	15.8	86.1	212.3	41.9	5.4
1981	501.1	133.1	18.5	65.0	84.1	33.9	5.7
1982	321.7	91.6	12.8	41.4	42.7	22.2	3.8
1982 1.Q	83.7	25.6	3.0	13.9	13.4	6.0	1.1
2.Q	71.8	20.0	2.3	8.9	9.8	5.2	0.7
3.Q	95.4	26.0	4.2	10.9	11.6	6.4	1.1
4.Q	70.8	19.9	3.4	7.7	7.8	4.6	0.8
1983 1.Q	59.4	19.3	2.1	10.7	6.3	4.3	0.7
2.Q	60.8	16.8	1.9	7.7	6.2	4.0	0.5
3.Q	81.2	21.5	3.1	9.6	7.9	4.8	0.9
Emigration							
1978	405.8	141.0	36.3	73.9	88.1	50.9	17.4
1980	385.8	134.4	22.3	77.4	70.6	41.1	10.0
1981	415.5	134.5	15.8	80.7	70.9	40.0	8.9
1982	433.3	136.6	18.1	81.8	86.9	41.2	10.4
1982 1.Q	96.4	31.4	3.6	18.9	16.1	9.7	2.2
2.Q	90.9	30.7	3.9	18.7	16.8	9.1	2.5
3.Q	130.6	40.2	6.2	23.5	28.9	12.6	2.9
4.Q	115.3	34.3	4.4	20.7	25.0	9.8	2.8
1983 1.Q	94.9	27.9	3.6	16.8	18.6	8.8	2.3
2.Q	93.0	28.9	4.4	17.3	19.2	8.5	2.5
3.Q	124.9	36.8	6.7	21.1	30.2	10.5	2.9
Balance of migration							
1978	+ 50.3	- 3.8	-20.9	+ 9.1	+ 42.9	-12.3	-12.1
1980	+245.6	+ 21.5	- 6.5	+ 8.7	+141.7	+ 0.8	- 4.6
1981	+ 85.6	- 1.4	+ 2.8	-15.7	+ 13.1	- 6.0	- 3.2
1982	-111.6	- 45.0	- 5.3	-40.4	- 44.2	-19.0	- 6.6
1982 1.Q	- 12.7	- 5.7	- 0.6	- 4.9	- 2.7	- 3.7	- 1.1
2.Q	- 19.2	- 10.7	- 1.7	- 9.8	- 7.0	- 3.9	- 1.8
3.Q	- 35.2	- 14.2	- 2.0	-12.6	- 17.3	- 6.1	- 1.7
4.Q	- 44.5	- 14.4	- 1.0	-13.0	- 17.2	- 5.3	- 2.0
1983 1.Q	- 35.4	- 8.6	- 1.5	- 6.1	- 12.4	- 4.5	- 1.6
2.Q	- 32.2	- 12.1	- 2.5	- 9.6	- 12.9	- 4.5	- 2.0
3.Q	- 43.7	- 15.3	- 3.6	-11.5	- 22.3	- 5.8	- 2.0

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, Wirtschaft und Statistik 2/1984, p. 98

with the traditional structures and attitudes prevailing in the backward regions of origin, the likelihood that they will slip back into the traditional milieu is very high.

Conservative Re-integration

All this leads to the conclusion that it would be illusionary to expect the individual returnee to be an innovator in the backward native regions. In an open migration system without official selection of the migrants according to qualities related to modernization⁵ it depends mainly on the economic and social policies of the country of origin whether return migration results in a modernizing or in a conservative re-integration.

Up to now most governments of the migrants' home countries complain that they did not receive more than marginal benefits from emigration or return migration, and therefore implement policies to accomodate the needs of the returnees with only a modicum of enthusiasm.⁶ But since the effective utilization of the returnees' savings, as well as of their skills, is largely dependent on the availability of jobs and remunerative economic opportunities, the deficiencies of the *national labour markets* and of the *interregional economic connections* (especially the absence of interdependent markets for goods, money and information) are responsible for this situation. And since the returnees' abilities to promote change can be made fruitful only by opening up possibilities of social advancement, the rigidities of the socio-economic system and its incapacity to reward modern attitudes are additional impediments. Therefore both the ability of the home countries to profit from return migration as well as the successful economic and social re-integration of the returnees are dependent on the progress of socio-economic development at the regional and national levels.

Essential elements of a policy conducive to this are:⁷

- ☐ monetary stability and export-led growth to improve general economic conditions;
- ☐ regional development of infrastructure and small-scale industries related primarily to agriculture to open up markets and investment opportunities;
- ☐ administrative and political decentralization to enlarge the possibilities of local and regional socio-economic initiative.

In all the Mediterranean countries of Europe national stabilization programmes aiming at monetary stability

⁵ A unique example of return migration organized by official agencies of the sending as well as of the host countries is the case of Algeria and France. Cf. T. Voss: Die französisch-algerische Arbeitsmigration. Ein Beispiel einer organisierten Rückwanderung, Königstein (Ts.) 1981.

and balanced growth are now under way. But it seems that the crucial role of regional decentralization and development is underrated by some governments. Others have cancelled regional and social development schemes under the pressure of high inflation, unemployment and mounting internal and external deficits caused by the oil crisis, the slowdown of the world economy and the resulting debt problems.

The Role of the Former Host Countries

So it seems to be the task of the former host countries to initiate the development of the out-migration areas of the countries of Southern Europe by financial and technical aid programmes. Activities like vocational training at the point of return, attuned to the needs of the region, the promotion of small-scale industries with a high labour absorption by creating industrial estates and possibly local free-trading areas, the improvement of agriculture by introducing new products, new market outlets and high productivity modes of production are essential elements of such programmes. The complementary build-up of a modern social and economic infrastructure as well as stable economic conditions at the national level should be promoted by inter-governmental socio-political cooperation.

There is no doubt that the institution of these programmes will imply high financial expenditures, exceeding the efforts the former host countries are extending now, be it direct from government to government or in an indirect manner via the social and regional funds of the European Community. To effectively induce the economic and social development of the regions highly affected by workers' migration by combining foreign assistance and self-promotion, a new mode of inter-European cooperation is needed. The experience of the social and economic reconstruction of the European countries with the help of the Marshall Plan should be considered as a valuable example in this respect. The institution of the necessary large-scale aid programmes not only seems to be warranted as a moral obligation of the Northern European host countries, which without doubt benefitted from the inflow of migrant workers in the past. It also seems to be an expression of enlightened self-interest if the rich countries of Europe promote the economic and social development of their future companion countries in an enlarged European Community.

⁶ Cf. D. G. Papademetriou: Return in the Mediterranean Littoral Policy Agendas, in: D. Kubat, op. cit.

⁷ Cf. H. Körner: Zusammenfassender Bericht "Probleme der Rückwanderungs- und Reintegrationspolitik", in: H. Körner, M. Werth (eds.): Rückwanderung und Reintegration von ausländischen Arbeitnehmern in Europa, Saarbrücken, Fort Lauderdale 1981.