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Article

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Weekly Report

The Party Identification of Germany's Immigrant Population: Parties Should Not Fear Eased Naturalization Requirements

Individuals with a migration background represent a steadily increasing percentage of Germany's population. Although the majority of individuals with migration background lack German citizenship and are therefore unable to vote, the number of naturalized immigrants continues to rise. Accordingly, political parties have been showing greater interest in this group of potential voters.

Data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) show that individuals with migration background develop diverse orientations to Germany's political parties in relation to their country of origin. The effect exercised by the country of origin is still present after many years of residence in Germany and among the second-generation. A large majority of individuals from the so-called "recruitment countries"—i.e. countries from which Germany acquired workers for its booming economy in the 1950s and 60s; namely, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal—identify politically with the SPD (Germany's mainstream labor party). By contrast, foreigners of German descent who have immigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia (so-called "Aussiedler" or "Spätaussiedler") tend to support the CDU/CSU (Germany's traditional conservative party alliance). Germany's smaller political parties find relatively little support among immigrants and their offspring. While extremely diverse party identifications are witnessed among migrants depending on their country of origin, these differences can only be minimally attributed to social circumstances or basic ideological outlook. Model calculations show that eased naturalization laws would not provide an appreciable advantage to any single political party.

According to the German Federal Statistical Office's 2007 Microcensus,¹ more than 15 million people with a migration background live in Germany. Of this number, 5.6 million are entitled to vote at the federal level.² The number of fully franchised individuals³ with a migration background residing in Germany has been increased first and foremost by two groups: (1) foreign nationals of German descent, predominantly from Eastern Europe and Russia, who have immigrated

1 For more information on the German Microcensus, see: <http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/EN/Content/Statistics/Mikrozensus/Aktuell.psm1>

2 German Federal Statistical Office: Der Bundeswahlleiter: 5,6 Millionen Wahlberechtigte mit Migrationshintergrund. Press release, 2009, <http://www.wahlrecht.de/doku/presse/20090911-1.htm>

3 Non-German EU nationals residing in Germany are entitled to vote in municipal (as well as EU) elections, but not in federal ones, and therefore have a partial franchise.

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Box

Data and Method

The Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP) is an annual representative survey of Germans, foreigners, and immigrants in the old and new German states. The survey is carried out by the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin) in cooperation with "Infratest Sozialforschung."¹ In 2008, the survey queried almost 11,000 households, composed of more than 20,000 individuals. The survey provides a rich source of data on various topics such as income, quality of living conditions, life satisfaction, and political orientation since 1984 in West Germany and since 1990 in East Germany. In the first survey wave in 1984, immigrants from the former "recruitment countries" were overrepresented. The new immigrants to Germany in the 1990s – particularly ethnic Germans – were also surveyed by means of a new sample.

Survey respondents are considered to have a party identification when they answer "yes" to the following SOEP question item: "Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party?" Only individuals who indicated allegiance to a specific party were included in our analysis of party preferences.

A number of items in the SOEP questionnaire address the topic of national origin. In this connection, for example, individuals with a Turkish immigrant background can be

born in Turkey or Germany. If Germany is the place of birth, then the nationality of the individual – or former nationality, if he or she has been naturalized – is used as a criterion to identify migration background. Information about the respondent's parents – if they have also participated in the survey – is also used. In this way, individuals with migration background can possess either German or foreign citizenship. The "second-generation" is born in Germany and has parents who are immigrants. Individuals of Spanish, Greek, Portuguese, or Italian origin are designated as originating from an "EU recruitment country."

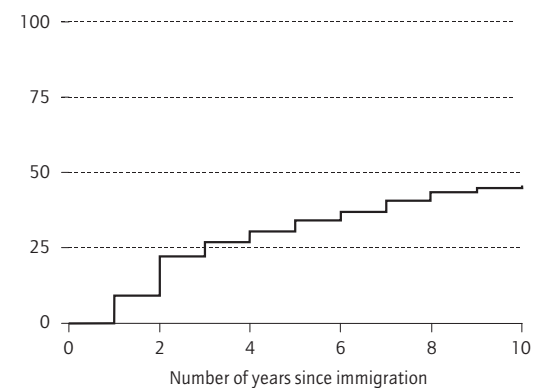
A multinomial regression model was estimated in order to explain party identification. This regression model was used to calculate the chance that an individual identifies with a specific party. The SPD was used as the reference category. In this model, marginal effects are calculated in order to interpret the estimated coefficients. These effects show how variations in individual factors (e.g. country of origin) impact the expected likelihood that the dependent variable will deliver a particular result. Individuals without migration background are the reference category for all other groups.

¹ See Wagner, G. G. et al.: The Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP): Multidisziplinäres Haushaltspanel und Kohortenstudie für Deutschland – Eine Einführung (für neue Datennutzer) mit einem Ausblick (für erfahrene Anwender). In: AStA Wirtschafts- und Sozialstatistisches Archiv, vol. 2, book 4, 2008, 301–328.

to Germany and claimed citizenship under the so-called "Federal Expellee Law" (depending on the date of immigration, these immigrants are known either as Aussiedler or Spätaussiedler); as well as (2) naturalized persons of Turkish descent. Since the reform of Germany's citizenship laws in 2001—reforms which provided for, among other things, the reduction of the minimum period of residence for naturalization from 15 to 8 years—an average of more than 100,000 people have been naturalized annually.⁴ Nevertheless, Germany is still one of the few OECD countries in which only a minority of individuals with a migration background possess citizenship.⁵ A situation thus persists in which large numbers of immigrants, many of whom have been living in Germany for decades, are excluded from full political participation. In many cases, the adult children of immigrants lack citizenship

Figure 1

Percentage of Immigrants with a Party Identification



Source: SOEP.

DIW Berlin 2009

⁴ Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge: Migrationsbericht 2007.

⁵ OECD: Children of Immigrants in the Labour Market of EU and OECD Countries: An Overview. Paris 2009, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/39/32/43880918.pdf.

and are unable to vote, despite having been born in Germany.

**Immigrant Party Identification:
A Question of Time**

Before developing an affinity for a specific political party, immigrants must first become acquainted with the political issues in their new country of residence. Accordingly, the SOEP-based results indicate that individuals with a migration background indicate less frequently than other survey participants that they have supported a certain political party in Germany for a long period of time.⁶ In the annual SOEP survey results from the 1980s, some 45% of individuals with a migrant background indicated an identification to a political party; by contrast, this figure was 65% among non-immigrant citizens. Since the 1980s, the number of survey participants who indicate a party identification has steadily fallen, a phenomenon also prevalent in many other Western countries.⁷ A decline of 10 percentage points has been witnessed among individuals with a migration background, and 15 percentage points among those without migration background. However, on the basis of the persistent and more or less stable gap between the two groups, one cannot conclude that immigrants and their offspring have not increased their political awareness or engagement. This is because many new immigrants arrive each year in Germany who, lacking knowledge of Germany's party system, initially have no party identification. Figure 1 displays the percentage of immigrants indicating a party identification in relation to their years of residence in Germany, according to SOEP survey results. After ten years of residence, approximately half of all survey participants indicate a party identification.

Party Identification Stable Over Generations

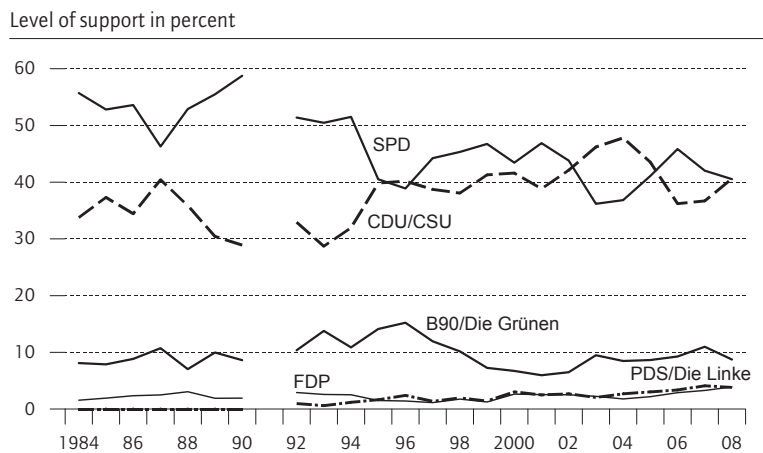
Post-war Germany has experienced two major waves of immigration. Beginning in the mid-1950s, German companies recruited workers on a massive scale from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal. Later, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, many individuals of German descent immigrated to Germany (so-called Spätaussiedler). In addition, prior to the tightening of Germany's asylum laws in 1993, a large number of asylum seekers came to

⁶ In this respect and elsewhere, the SOEP survey data encompasses both naturalized and non-naturalized immigrants.

⁷ Dalton, R., Wattenberg, M. P. (ed.): *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Societies*. Oxford 2000.

Figure 2

Party Identification of Individuals with Migration Background



Source: SOEP.

DIW Berlin 2009

Germany, including many seeking to escape the war in Yugoslavia. Germany's immigrants are thus quite heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity and culture, a fact that is reflected in the evolving party preferences of the immigrant population.

Until the end of the 1980s, the families of so-called "guest workers" constituted the majority of Germany's immigrant population. Some 70% tended to support the SPD. In the early 1990s, many ethnic Germans immigrated to Germany; these immigrants, by contrast, primarily supported the CDU/CSU. This has led immigrant support to be divided almost equally between the two main parties since the 1990s (see Figure 2). At present, political support among individuals with a migration background who indicate they have a party identification is divided roughly equally among the SPD and CDU/CSU at 40%. An identification with smaller parties is less prevalent among individuals with a migration background than among natives. This is particularly true with regard to support for the FDP (Germany's libertarian party) and "Die Linke" (a left party).

A more nuanced assessment of party allegiances among Germany's immigrant population shows that survey participants from former "recruitment countries" still have a clear preference for the SPD. However, of individuals indicating a party identification in this group of immigrants, the percentage supporting the SPD has fallen since the 1980s to 65%, down from 75%. At the same time, among ethnic German immigrants (Aussiedler and Spätaussiedler), 75% preferred the CDU/CSU in the 1990s; this number has fallen since then to 65% (see

Table

Party Identification, Average Support in 2000-2008¹

Support in percent among all individuals with a party identification

	SPD	CDU/CSU	FDP	B90/ Die Grünen	PDS/ Die Linke
Persons with migration background	39	41	4	9	5
Persons without migration background					
Ethnic German immigrants ²	24	65	3	4	4
Turkey	70	13	2	9	3
1st generation	69	14	1	8	3
2nd generation	73	8	2	10	1
(Former) Yugoslavia	63	23	2	5	3
1st generation	68	22	1	4	3
2nd generation	39	27	11	10	7
EU recruitment countries	64	20	3	8	2
1st generation	68	22	3	3	3
2nd generation	55	18	2	17	2
Other Western countries	37	35	4	20	1
1st generation	39	33	4	20	1
2nd generation	33	38	5	19	1
Other non-Western countries	38	47	2	5	5
1st generation	38	48	2	5	4
2nd generation	35	43	5	9	8

¹ In contrast to voter intention, party identification measures long-term support to a specific party. The long-term support enjoyed by Germany's major parties is generally higher than the support measured in surveys that query vote intentions for an upcoming election. In voter intention surveys, smaller parties profit overproportionally from voters who are not committed to a single party.

² Number of observations too small for a meaningful measurement of second generation preferences.

Source: SOEP.

DIW Berlin 2009

Figure 3). Only among their key constituencies do Germany's mainstream parties otherwise enjoy such high levels of support. The remaining immigrant groups are extremely heterogeneous in terms of their countries of origin and reasons for immigration. Of those who indicate a party identification, the majority (44% in 2000-2008) support the CDU/CSU.

On the whole, the immigrants' offspring tend to have the same party identification as their parents (see Table). For example, 69% of first-generation Turkish immigrants with a party identification support the SPD; among the second generation, this figure is 73%. In this connection, it is noteworthy that immigrants' offspring show higher levels of support for "B90/Die Grünen" (Germany's green party alliance) than first-generation immigrants. The percentage of immigrants who support Germany's green party rises between the first and second generation from 8% to 10% among individuals of Turkish descent; from 4% to 10% among those of Yugoslavian descent; and from 3% to 17% among individuals from the EU "recruitment countries" (Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece). It is not clear at present, however, whether this discrepancy reflects a generational gap per se or merely age differences. Yet regardless of generational affiliation, Germany's green party enjoys particularly high support (20%) among immigrants from other Western countries.

Migration Background Strong Determinant of Party Preferences

Germany's political landscape is characterized by stable lines of dispute; the mainstream political parties have advocated consistent positions on dominant issues for decades. Thus, citizens with a religious identification and the self-employed traditionally tend to support the CDU/CSU. By contrast, employees without a strong religious identification support the SPD, and, with increasing frequency, "Die Linke."⁸ Highly educated individuals with weak religious ties have shown stable support for "B90/Die Grünen." The positions taken by each party within the political spectrum reflect the preferences of their constituencies. For individuals without migration background, the SOEP surveys conducted in recent years confirm the contours of party loyalty described here.

Party identifications are distributed among survey participants with and without migration background in a very similar fashion.⁹ When one combines all SOEP-respondents together regardless of national origin and sorts them according to education level,

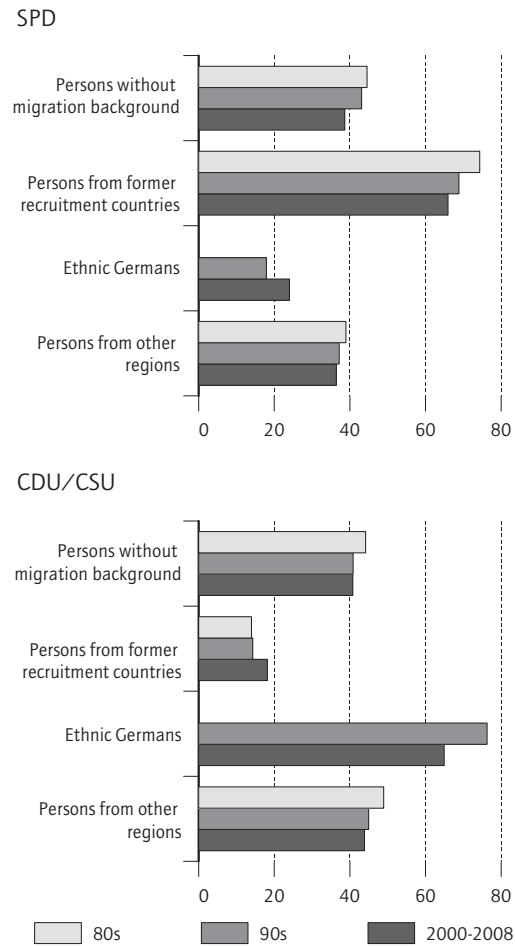
⁸ Kroh, M., Siedler, T.: Die Anhänger der "Linken": Rückhalt quer durch alle Einkommensschichten. DIW Berlin Wochenbericht 41/2008 (German version).

⁹ Zuckerman, A., Kroh, M.: The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany: A Comparison of West Germans, East Germans, and Immigrants. *Comparative European Politics* 4, 2006, 65–93.

Figure 3

Evolution of Party Identification

Support in percent among all individuals with a party identification



Source: SOEP. DIW Berlin 2009

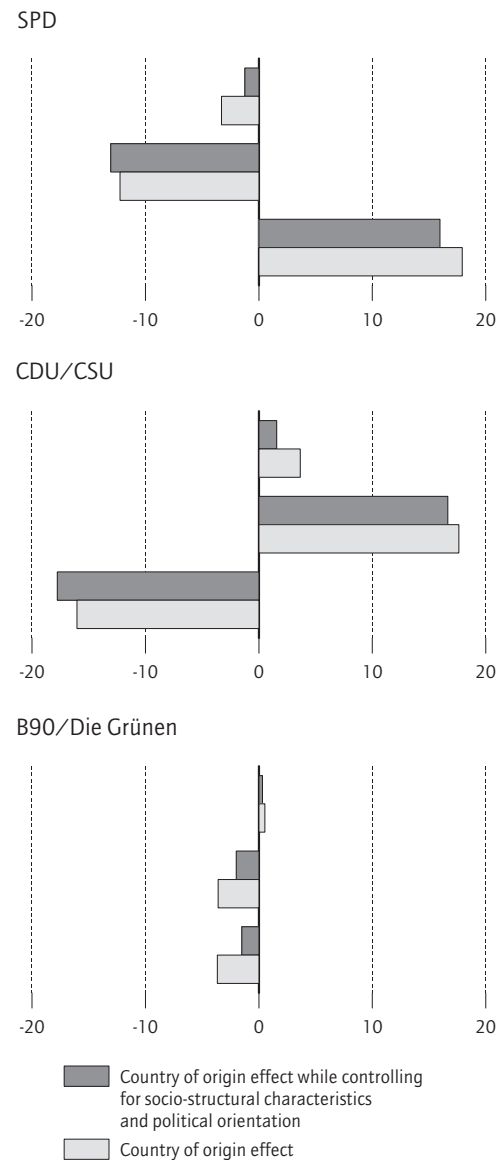
professional status, or political orientation on a left-right scale, one finds that there are often only minimal differences between respondents with and without migration background in terms of their political preferences. For example, the percentage of Catholics who support the CDU/CSU is 59% among those without an immigrant background and 52% among those with an immigrant background. The percentage of college graduates who support “B90/Die Grünen” is 14% among those without migration background and 17% among those with migration background. Among individuals with migration background, only “Die Linke/PDS” appears to be relatively unattractive—even for those immigrants who are unemployed.¹⁰

¹⁰ As the party alliance “Die Linke/PDS” advocates increasing unemployment benefits, one might initially predict to see a higher level of support among unemployed immigrants.

Figure 4

Significance of Country of Origin for Party Identification

Effects in percentage points



Source: SOEP. DIW Berlin 2009

Yet among those with migration background, there is relatively strong heterogeneity in party preferences according to country of origin. Varying reasons for emigrating and alternate levels of success in integrating in German society as well as divergent social positions are all possible factors that might explain this heterogeneity. For example, immigrants from the former “recruitment countries” work with particular frequency in industrial manufacturing, and workers in such professions are a traditional SPD constituent-

cy.¹¹ This observation also applies to the offspring of Turkish immigrants.¹² Nevertheless, the data show that variations in party identification according to country of origin for the most part remain when one controls for demographic and regional characteristics (age, gender, city size, region) in addition to social factors (occupational status, household income, education level), basic political outlook (left-right orientation, values, importance attached to various issues), union membership and religious affiliation (Catholic: yes/no). Approximately 39% of those surveyed without migration background indicated an allegiance to the SPD in 2000-2008. Among individuals with migration background from the traditional “guest-worker” countries, this figure is about 18 percentage points higher (see Figure 4). When one controls for social factors and basic political orientations, this discrepancy declines slightly to 16 percentage points. Hence, social and political factors only account for two percentage points of the divergent level of support for the SPD witnessed between individuals without migration background and respondents from former recruitment countries. A similar picture emerges when one examines ethnic Germans: Whereas 41% of native respondents support the CDU/CSU, this figure is 18 percentage points higher among ethnic Germans. When one controls for social factors and basic political orientations, the level of support is only one percentage point lower.

Solely the comparatively low level of support for “B90/Die Grünen” among individuals with migration background is explained to large extent by personal factors. Among survey participants without migration background who declared a party identification, approximately 9% voiced support for “B90/Die Grünen.” Support for this party is approximately 4 percentage points lower among immigrants from former “recruitment countries” and their offspring. However, if one views the particular social position of this group—a group which is not a traditional constituency of “B90/Die Grünen”—then the gap separating survey participants with and without migration background shrinks to just over one percentage point.

The fact that the considerable differences in party identification among individuals with migration background can only be explained to a minimal

¹¹ Wüst, A.: Eingebürgerte als Wähler: Erkenntnisse aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Wiener Hefte—Migration und Integration in Theorie und Praxis, Vol 1, Nr. 1, 2003, 113–126.

¹² Tucci, I., Groh-Samberg, O.: Das enttäuschte Versprechen der Integration: Migrantennachkommen in Frankreich und Deutschland. Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie, Vol. 34, Nr. 2, 2008, 307–333. Tucci, I.: Lebenssituation von Migranten und deren Nachkommen in Deutschland. In: Datenreport 2008. Ein Sozialbericht für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Statistisches Bundesamt, GESIS-ZUMA und WZB (ed.), 2008, 200–207.

degree by social position and basic political orientations suggests that the political positions advocated by parties with regard to immigration and integration policies play an influential role.¹³ In this way, it would appear that personal experiences with regard to immigration and integration are an important factor for the party identification of immigrants and their offspring.

Naturalization Does Not Affect Relative Strength of Parties in the Electorate

Despite the easing of naturalization laws in 2001, requirements in Germany to obtain citizenship remain comparatively restrictive.¹⁴ According to the German Federal Statistical Office's 2007 Microcensus, some five million people born in Germany have migration background; a third of this number possess foreign citizenship. Among native-born adults with immigrant parents, 42% of 20-to-25 year olds possess foreign citizenship. This figure rises to 64% among 25-to-35 year olds and to 70% among 35-to-45 year olds.¹⁵ A relatively large number of the second generation is thus excluded from the political process.

In countries such as the US and France, the extension of citizenship to children born domestically is a long-standing practice. If citizenship—and, in turn, voting rights—were granted to all persons born in Germany, the relative levels of support enjoyed by each political party would hardly change. A projection based on SOEP data shows that the SPD would gain 0.1 percentage points at the expense of the CDU/CSU.

Furthermore, there are some 8.3 million first-generation immigrants who have been living in Germany for more than eight years. Of this number, three million are foreign citizens. In a second scenario, we investigated what would happen if citizenship and voting rights were granted to all foreigners with a term of residence longer than eight years. In this scenario, as well, the effects on party support are minimal: The SPD would gain one percentage point,

¹³ Wüst, A.: Das Wahlverhalten eingebürgerter Personen in Deutschland. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 52, 2003, 29–38.

¹⁴ Germany's citizenship laws were reformed such that all children born in Germany on or subsequent to January 1, 2000, automatically receive German citizenship. Other changes were also introduced, including the rules concerning applying for citizenship. According to these rules, all foreign nationals must: 1) have lived in Germany regularly and legally for a minimum of eight years; 2) support themselves independently, without receiving welfare; 3) possess sufficient knowledge of the German language; 4) not have been committed of a felony; 5) avow their support for Germany's laws and democratic principles; and 5) renounce their former citizenship.

¹⁵ German Federal Statistical Office: Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit. 2009.

while the CDU/CSU would lose half a percentage point. Thus, in spite of the hopes and fears entertained by Germany's various parties, modified naturalization laws or changing naturalization trends would have only little impact on the relative strength of each party.

Conclusion

The longer an immigrant has been living in Germany, the greater the chances he or she identifies with a particular political party. Nearly 70% of immigrants with a party identification from former "recruitment countries" tend to support the SPD. This party identification is relatively stable across generations, even if immigrants' offspring tend to support "B90/Die Grünen" with somewhat greater frequency. By contrast, ethnic Germans display a clear preference for the CDU/CSU.

The differences between immigrant groups are not determined by disparities in social position or basic political outlook. Rather, a migrant background unto itself—and the experiences and circumstances associated with it—make an independent contribution to explaining the political preferences of immigrants and their children.

The effort to promote dialog and cooperation between immigrants and the so-called "majority"—a key goal of Germany's National Integration Plan—is contingent upon the political participation of individuals with migration background.¹⁶ This, in turn, requires that immigrants and their children acquire German citizenship so that they can vote and take a seat at the table of democratic society. The extension of citizenship to foreign residents should be viewed by the political parties as an opportunity. The easing of naturalization laws would send a clear signal of openness and acceptance, and encourage long-standing foreign residents to become full members of German society.

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¹⁶ Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration, Der Nationale Integrationsplan, 2007, www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Publikation/1B/Anlagen/nationaler-integrationsplan,property=publicationFile.pdf.