Umbrella Organizations of Turkish Migrants: A Comparative Analysis of Migrant Claims-Making in Germany and Austria (Zeynep Sezgin)

The number of international migrants has reached incredible amounts, and international migration has become more complex in composition and motivation since World War II. Consequently, the public struggle over how to deal with „guest-workers“ and other migrant groups in host societies; rapidly growing diversity in countries of immigration; problems and questions arising out of the settlement process, such as the ones concerning national identity, or the ethics of citizenship and diversity have become worldwide issues in the era of globalization.

Similarly, in Germany and Austria, with the undermining of assumptions about the temporariness of the “guests” stay, and the increasing visibility of a second generation of foreigners, especially in the schools, the “foreigner issue” became politically unavoidable. As questions of policy toward the new minority became the subject of parliamentary debates and electoral campaigns, legal scholars and social scientists joined politicians in an effort to define the basic issues at stake. Until recently, however, in spite of the increasing number of attention directed to the subject of migration, migrant organizations have been perceived neither as political- nor as social actors in Germany and Austria. If they acknowledged, then mostly as a threat factor to the internal security of the society, as in the case of the Islamic organizations since the nineteen-nineties.

Since 1960s, nonetheless, Turkish migrant communities have formed a large number and diverse types of more or less stable organizations in Germany and Austria. These organizations have experienced a dynamic development from informal social gatherings of fellow countrymen to an advanced functional differentiation, politicization and polarization, and plurality of the organizational spectrum. The formation and development of such migrants’ associations have been influenced and shaped by German/Austrian governmental policies, political structures as well as the political and institutional networks and ties maintained with the country of origin.

It is for this reason that this research is particularly interested in the dynamics of development of Turkish migrant organizations; and in the relationship between the Turkish umbrella organizations and Turkish/German/Austrian government bureaucracies, institutions and/or political parties. Furthermore, it will be discussed how the contacts between the Turkish umbrella organizations and Turkish/German/Austrian government bureaucracies, institutions and/or political parties have changed the integration process of Turkish migrants in Germany and Austria. Migrant organizations are significant in the process of integration of migrants in German and Austrian societies, and in self-assertion of migrants as cultural, religious or discriminated social minorities. Therefore, the expected results of this research is not only significant for the Turkish, German and Austrian governmental agencies, institutions and political parties in redefining and reshaping their policies towards the Turkish umbrella organizations in Germany and in Austria, but also for the Turkish society in reevaluating the role of their organizations.