

## Merkel's Integration Rhetoric

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Recently, German Chancellor Angela Merkel made headlines by declaring multiculturalism an "absolute failure" (Bloemraad, 2010). Her colleague, Horst Seehofer, Bavaria's Premier and head of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the Bavarian sister party of Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), similarly proclaimed that "multikulti [an abbreviation for multiculturalism] is dead" in the article "Merkel says German multicultural society has failed" (BBC News, 2010). Both made their remarks at the annual convention of the youth wing of the CDU, the Junge Union, in Potsdam.

Given that Merkel's governing coalition has been sinking in the polls, one could interpret her remarks as a mere attempt to rally her conservative base. The latest figures according to the article "Umfragen von ARD und ZDF-Grüne im Höhenflug-Regierung ohne Mehrheit," in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nov 12, 2010, confirm the precarious position of the governing coalition (between the CDU/CSU and the Free Democrats (FDP)) relative to their opposition opponents, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Green Party, who together are currently ahead by 10 percent in most polls. The Green Party in particular - who can claim to have coined the term "multikulti" - are riding high in the polls. It was their understanding of multiculturalism that Merkel lampooned. It allowed for a Canadian-style mosaic but also required state-lead integration policies.

But most international observers were not interested in Merkel's domestic troubles. They took her comment at face value and joined in a lament over the failure of multiculturalism in Europe and Canada more generally. Only a few caught onto the truth behind the rhetoric. As Irene Bloemraad described in the article "Multiculturalism has been Canada's solution, not its problem" in *Globe and Mail* on November 4, 2010, "multiculturalism could not have failed in Germany because it was never tried." What failed, noted James Jupp, an Australian academic, in an interview with Germany's newsmagazine, *Die Zeit*, is Germany's *Gastarbeiter* (foreign workers) policy (Sprothen, 2010).

This policy, which officially ended in 1973, brought large numbers of low-skilled foreign labourers to Germany. Because the German government regarded them strictly as guests, migrants were not considered permanent

enough to institute meaningful integration measures, and the workers were not forced to return to their home countries. On the contrary, court rulings ensured that family reunification continued even after 1973. Thus immigration continued, with no one wanting to call it such by name.<sup>1</sup>

Without significant integration policies, a pattern of discrimination, exclusion and neglect became entrenched in the subsequent decades. For instance, compared to other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, socio-economic advancement of second generation migrants in Germany, an important indicator of integration, remains uncharacteristically low.

### **Angela Merkel made headlines by declaring multiculturalism an "absolute failure."**

Unfortunately, the 2005 passing of Germany's first official Migration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*) was mostly symbolic and had little effect on integration and immigration. Although the Act created highly publicized opportunities for the immigration of highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs (similar to the "Green card" program for IT workers in operation from 2000 to 2004), currently, there is hardly any net migration to Germany. While the OECD and others have long urged Germany to institute a labour-market-driven immigration policy, German politicians continue to dither.

While both the Federal Minister for Economic Development and Technology (FDP) and the Minister of Labour (CDU) have publicly called for a targeted immigration policy with a Canadian-style point system, and the reduction of hurdles for foreign workers, populist Seehofer declared that "we do not need any further immigration."

Merkel herself has followed up her headline-grabbing speech with a more moderate tone towards integration by inviting representatives of migrant organizations and others to participate in the Fourth Annual Integration Summit in early November. There, she clarified her declaration regarding the failure of multiculturalism. Integration, she argued, is not possible without massive societal effort. Previously, it was expected that integration would

occur simply by living together.

Critics argue that events such as the recent summit are mere window dressings because they neither produce substantial policy initiatives, nor counter the populist perception that a large number of migrants in Germany simply do not want to integrate.

Regardless of how one judges these latest attempts to address Germany's integration dilemma, the fact remains that given Germany's central role in the European recovery and its current labour shortage, the direction its future immigration and integration policy takes is important not just for the prospects of German society, but also for Europe as a whole.

### References

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### Biography

**Dr. Dagmar Soennecken** is an Assistant Professor at the School of Public Policy & Administration and Department of Social Science (Law & Society Program) at York University. Dr. Soennecken holds a BA (Hons.) in Political Science and Law from Carleton University, an MA in Political Science (with a concentration in Women's Studies) and a PhD (2009) from the University of Toronto. Dr. Soennecken's research focuses on comparative politics and public policy in the EU and North America. She is particularly interested in questions concerning law and the courts as well as citizenship and migration.

<sup>1</sup>Together with asylum seeking and entry as an "ethnic" German, family reunification became one of the three routes to Germany post 1973.