

# Merkel, Muslims and Multi-Kulti

By Victor Grossman

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**It's** those foreigners again! In June and July, during the World championship, Germans cheered their soccer team's every skilled pass, every goal, and seemed proud that so many of its players had immigrant backgrounds, from Tunisia, Nigeria, Spain, Kosovo, Cameroun, Ghana, Poland and Turkey. Hurrah!

But now it's October. The leaves have changed colour, and so have the sentiments. Hurrahs are forgotten. Millions, it seems, dislike immigrants, and old slogans like "The boat is full" gain

ground. Or the new one: "Multi-kulti is dead!" And dangerous wintry storms threaten on the political field.

As pressures grow, the normally smiling Angela Merkel looks less and less angelic; is she too joining the "defenders of German culture" crusade? A motive is all too clear—her party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), is sinking in all the polls. Her big business partner, the Free Democratic Party, is doing even worse. State elections chip away at their strength; brutal police attacks on peaceful demonstrators trying to save a central railway station in Stuttgart and the nearby park, with 200 ancient chestnut trees, could cost her dearly in March elections there; and national elections in 2013 are gradually approaching. Yet on she goes, come what may, with harsh new measures and cuts, painful to all but the wealthy. There is a tried and true therapy for all the contradictions, and not only in Germany: appeals to primitive emotions, super-patriotic pride in one's own nationality, language or religion, coupled with ancient fears and dislike of anyone who seems "different." Of course such nationalism or chauvinism inevitably leads to hatred.

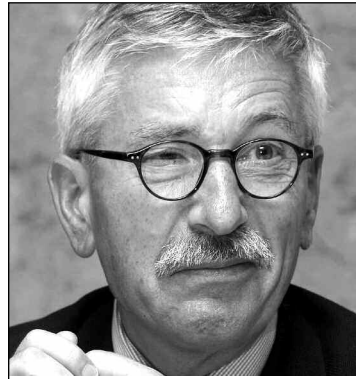
In earlier postwar years, West Germany, needing labourers, welcomed men from Spain, Portugal and Italy, who usually returned home after a few years. Following an agreement with Turkey, there was a very large influx of Turkish workers, but these often brought their families and settled down, becoming the country's largest minority. It was always difficult, even for those in the third generation and born in



Angela Merkel

Germany, to acquire citizenship, and they were constantly discriminated against in housing, education and job-hunting. A practice of accepting them and other communities of foreign origin with their native culture was called "multi-kulti," but the term was demonized by those who disliked "foreigners" on any basis.

Most recently it was the financier Thilo Sarrazin from the Social Democratic Party, one of its wealthy set, who loudly opted for a chauvinist gambit. He had earlier gained notoriety by claiming that the jobless should be happy with their meager dole money; after all, sauerkraut and a sausage made a healthy, inexpensive dinner. And they could "get along quite well at home at 15-16 degrees by wearing a heavy sweater." Then he narrowed his attack: "I don't have to recognize anyone who lives off this state while rejecting this state, and who doesn't care properly for his children's education but keeps on producing more and more little girls to wear head cloths." As finance minister in Berlin he asked: "How can I manage things so that only those people get children who



Thilo Sarrazin

can take care of them? Some women have two, three or more children even though they lack the 'wherewithal' or 'personal characteristics' to see to their education."

On August 30th Sarrazin published his book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* ("Germany Does Away with Itself") which grimly warns that unless German women hurry and have more children, the

country will be overrun and ruled by Muslims within a few decades. They are already making Germany dumber, he asserted. In one interview he claimed that there are Jewish genes and Basque genes, that mental characteristics are inherited, and that Muslim genes pulled down the average. When leaders of the Central Council of Jews in Germany objected to references to "Jewish genes," good or bad, Sarrazin backed down a bit. He hadn't really meant it genetically, not against Jews. But he strengthened the fears of those good citizens who may accept a nun's habit but not a Muslim head covering, a bank skyscraper but not a minaret.

The Springer press (akin to Murdoch's empire) serialized Sarrazin's book, which soon topped the best-seller lists, selling over a million copies. He was invited on countless talk shows and debates. At first, some political leaders slammed the book as racist.

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The head of the Social Democrats said Sarrazin should be expelled from the party (which still hasn't happened). Angela Merkel also objected to it. Sarrazin had to quit his new Federal Bank job, though with a big pension.

But the hefty media promotion continued to stir up old prejudices. More and more prominent men, even Social Democratic elder statesmen, began to backtrack: "Maybe Sarrazin exaggerated, but he is finally naming the problems openly. And after all, we support freedom of speech." Of course, there are indeed problems, though they were never secret. North American history shows how each wave of immigrants required a few generations to integrate into the general population. If they were unfortunate enough to look different and faced heightened discrimination in housing, schooling and job-hunting, the process took longer. But this is not the fault of the victims, even when some young men, usually hit worst, sometime grow rebellious. In Germany, as elsewhere, attention to these problems is definitely required; many efforts are being made, by immigrants and Germans, often against severe right-wing pressure. But with four million Muslims, mostly Turkish, out of a total population of about 80 million, and with the number of immigrants steadily dropping, the "Muslim menace" scare is arrant nonsense. Yet it is dangerous racist nonsense.

**As** the government parties continued to wane in popularity, Horst Seehofer, head of the Bavarian wing of Merkel's party, decided that he had to get into the act, and into the headlines. He declared that the concept of a multi-cultural society had collapsed. "As reality has shown, multi-kulti is dead." German must prevail as the "leading culture," he said, and Turks or Arabs who did not conform and learn the German language and culture might as well leave. Only highly-educated foreigners with professional, valuable skills should be tolerated.

His fellow Bavarian, and very blue-blooded national Minister of Defense, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, seconded his threat and called on Bavarian party members not to repress the "values of Christian culture, but to convey them openly with open hearts." Outside very Catholic Bavaria, other Christian Democrats were slightly more careful; they spoke of long-established "Judeo-Christian traditions" which must be defended against alien incursions.

Then Merkel's Minister for Family Affairs discovered suddenly and dramatically on TV that in some schools with a Turkish or Arab majority, German girls were called names for not wearing a head covering or for eating pork. Her outcry was aimed directly at all good German citizens, insulted in their own country—but disregarded the fact that only children were involved, that expletives are overwhelmingly aimed in the opposite direction, and that some schools are working hard, and succeeding, in overcoming prejudices in both directions.

At this point the recently-elected German President, Christian Wulff, surprised nearly everyone by stating in a major speech that Islam, too, had become a part of German culture, along with Christian and Jewish traditions. He followed this courageous

statement with a state visit to Turkey to mend some fences. High-ranking rightists immediately attacked him, and the heated arguments continued.

At a meeting of career-minded young Christian Democrats, Angela Merkel, while pedantically careful in her choice of words, ended by delivering the coded but clear statement they had demanded: "We are a country which, at the beginning of the 1960s, actually brought guest workers to Germany. Now they live with us, and we lied to ourselves for a while, saying that they won't stay and that they will disappear one day. That's not the reality. This multi-kulti approach, saying that we simply live side by side and are happy about each other, this approach has failed, utterly failed."

**But** it would seem that Merkel's tactic of keeping the chauvinists happy may also fail, or even backfire. A group called variously PRO-Berlin, PRO-Cologne, or even PRO-Deutschland, and based on anti-foreigner action, plans to found a new legal party on October 29th, first of all in Berlin and provocatively in the borough with the largest number of immigrants. It hopes to enter the Berlin elections next year, and could well win ten per cent or more. This could change the entire political scene in Berlin, and then Germany. A former city councillor from Merkel's CDU party recently invited the Dutch anti-Muslim crusader Geert Wilders to Berlin; he boasted that the new anti-Muslim movement now holds key positions in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and perhaps Belgium and Austria, and is related to government anti-foreigner trends in Italy, France and other countries. He might have mentioned the Ground Zero anti-Muslim hysteria in the U.S., where he has spoken to large audiences.

An excursion to handsome little Arnstadt might offer an appropriate closing note. This oldest town in the state of Thuringia, founded in 704 C.E., a quaint little place where Johann Sebastian Bach began his career, now has a mayor belonging to this emerging party, which calls itself PRO Arnstadt here. After grabbing nearly half of all Christian Democratic votes, but then allying itself with the CDU, it obtained a majority in city council, beating out a combination of Social Democrats and the *Linke* (Left Party). Mayor Hans-Christian Koellmer, referring to the late pro-Nazi Austrian politician Joerg Haider, said, "He always impressed me. If I am a rightist because I love my country, then I am indeed a rightist." He opposes foreigners—when told that there are very few in Arnstadt, he answered, "We must nip things in the bud!" And foreign tourists? We don't want them either, was his reply. But he made an exception. For its so-called "Thuringia Day," Arnstadt welcomed the biggest gathering of pro-Nazis, domestic and foreign, in all Thuringia, and not on the outskirts of town, as is usual with such gatherings, but right in the main square. And Mayor Koellmer is considering running for a seat in the national Bundestag. PRO-Arnstadt, PRO-Berlin, PRO-Deutschland: a political climate change threatens to hit hard right in the centre of Europe. The roughest winds would now be aimed not at Jews but at Muslims, but the dangers again threaten everyone. ♦