

Like It or Not, Germany Becomes a Melting Pot

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BY ALAN COWELL

BERLIN — Almost 30 years ago, Ellebeyi Inci left his home on Turkey's Black Sea coast and came to West Germany to work on construction sites — one of the so-called guest workers lured by official design to the dynamo of the post-war economic miracle. At that time, foreigners were less than 4 percent of West Germany's population.

These days, according to his son Sabri, Mr. Inci's descendants in Berlin number about 20. They include the four of Sabri's five children who were born in Germany. Sabri spoke in an interview at the Inci Pizza, the family business on a street in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin where Turkish overwhelms German.

Now, roughly 7.1 million of Germany's population of 82 million, or almost 9 percent, are foreigners, the highest proportion in Europe, far ahead of the continental average of 5 percent and well above that of such countries as France (5.7 percent) and Britain (3.8 percent).

The combination of numbers and stories like that of the Inci family might suggest that Germany, whose foreign population was a negligible 1.2 percent of the total in 1960, is being forced into an unfamiliar cosmopolitanism not only by economic factors but also by Europe's changed dynamics after the cold war.

But if Germany is being forced to acknowledge that it has become a melting pot, then it is doing so with extreme reluctance. When guest workers came to Germany 20 to 30 years ago, jobs were plentiful, and the expectation was that with short-term residence rights they would disappear when they were no longer useful.

Now, jobs are scarce, and Germany's unemployment stands at a record 4.5 million. But many foreigners have acquired permanent residence rights in a land that is less interested in diversity than in cohesion and that does not want to be viewed as an immigrant nation as the United States once was.

"Foreigners seeking German citizenship must through their behaviour show a credible integration into our social and state order," said Erwin Marschewski, a Christian Democratic spokesman on internal affairs.

And as a divisive debate over the future citizenship of foreigners born here seems to suggest, many Germans — particularly those close to Chancellor Helmut Kohl — are reluctant to abandon the principle that the nation's core be made up of Germans who can trace the ancestral blood line demanded by a 1913 citizenship law that still defines the

essence of German nationality.

The whole debate about citizenship was incited by a proposal by the Free Democrats, the junior partner in the coalition Government, to permit foreigners born in Germany to hold dual citizenship until the age of 18. After that, they would have to choose one nationality or the other.

But Interior Minister Manfred Kanther, who belongs to Mr. Kohl's Christian Democrats, insisted, "There will never be dual nationality in Germany." Indeed, said Finance Minister Theo Waigel, rather than devise new rules, the best solution to Germany's problem might be "a sensible limit on immigration". The idea is stuck in political wrangling.

Unlike the United States but like most other European countries, Germany does not automatically grant citizenship to children born here of

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Guest worker's are not so welcome in Germany now.

foreign parents. They may only apply for citizenship under strict rules once they have reached age 18.

Increasingly, however, the definition of who is a German is being challenged by people like Ozlem Inci, Sabri Inci's 19-year-old daughter. She has applied to become German, in part because she feels remote from the land of her forebears and has none of a previous generation's attachment to a country she has seen only on vacation.

"I'm not thinking of going to live in Turkey; I grew up here," she said, speaking a much more confident German than her father after her years in German schools, which have left her far more open to mixing with Germans, even dating them.

"People like me are foreigners in Turkey," she said. "They call us the Deutschlanders. There you are not a real Turk, and here you are not a complete German. We are somewhere in between."

The aim of the dual citizenship proposal is to prevent Germany's growing population of foreigners from becoming alienated minorities. But the response to it has said as much about the fears of many Germans as it has about the aspirations of many foreigners.

Easing the rules on citizenship, Mr. Kohl said recently, would double the number of Turks streaming into Germany. The remark drew widespread criticism from Turkish groups and from



A debate over the future citizenship of foreigners born in Germany is dividing the country. Ozlem Inci, 19, working with her Turkish father, Sabri, in the family's pizzeria in Berlin, has applied to become German.

Germany's Jewish organizations as likely to worsen anti-foreign sentiment.

The urgency of the debate is a result of the startled recognition by officials that contrary to the original vision of the guest workers' doing their bit for Germany and then going home, and despite immigration policies that have become more restrictive in recent years, an established Immigrant population has grown with its own youthful dynamics.

Almost one-quarter of all foreigners are under 18. And, most telling of all, more than 60 percent of legally registered foreigners under 18 were born in this country, a phenomenon that German officials call "immigration by birth."

"The longer-term demographic development is characterized by a reduction in the proportion of Germans in the population and a drastic increase in the younger age groups" said the latest report issued by officials dealing with legal immigrants. It does not reflect untold numbers of clandestine immigrants, largely from Africa and Eastern Europe.

Not only have the Turks, Yugoslavs and Italians imported to fuel the economic miracle grown into an settled community of around 3.4 million — two million of them from Turkey — but the ranks of Germany's foreign population have also swollen with war refugees from the former Yugoslavia, settled community of around 3.4 million — two million of them from Turkey — but the ranks of Germany's foreign population have also swollen with war refugees from the former Yugoslavia, asylum-

seekers from many parts of the world and East Europeans drawn to the Continent's traditional economic powerhouse. Berlin alone has a Russian population estimated at 100,000. And Italians who first arrived as guest workers now have automatic rights under European Union rules to live and work in any of the Union's 15 member countries, including Germany.

At the same time, the very nature of the economic pickings that drew the guest workers here has changed. Like his father before him, Mr. Inci came to work on construction sites. But since 1992, he and his brother have been running the modest Inci Pizza eatery, which is just one of ranging from kebab stands to textile companies and travel agencies.

For all that, though Germans and Turks remain keenly aware of the distinctions between the groups. "Even if I had a German passport, I would still feel like a foreigner and be regarded as a foreigner," Mr. Inci said.

Indeed, Miss Inci said, even though some of her friends have married Germans, qualifying for German passports, there are parts of Berlin where she feels uncomfortable, even threatened, because of violent rightwing extremists who flourished in the early 1990's and attacked Turks and other immigrants.

"I'm at home here," she said, gesturing to a part of the Kreuzberg district that is overwhelmingly inhabited by Turks, "but there are parts of Berlin where I don't feel at home at all."