

Austria and Turkey: their burden of histories

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the current situation of Turkish people in Austria and the position of many Austrians concerning Turkish immigrants. Opinion polls published in Eurobarometer say that only 16 percent of the Austrians support the EU-membership of Turkey. Austria holds the last position in the ranking of the 27 EU member states. Since 1964 when the Austrian office for recruiting “guestworkers” was opened in Istanbul many Turks have migrated to Austria. After building the mosque and the Islamic centre in Vienna in the 1970s the current Islamic population mostly of Turkish origin wants to create and build Islamic amenities like mosques, schools, cultural centres or cemeteries. This is the reason of discussions, demonstrations and political campaigns against the Islamic population and the EU membership of Turkey. These anti Turkish and anti Islamic attitudes have a long tradition and are determined by the long mutual history. Many Austrians and Austrian politicians mix the historically determined prejudices with current Anti Islamic attitudes and Turks in Austria and Turkey as a part of Europe and the European Union.

Keywords: Austria, Turkey, history, migration, citizenship, politics

EU Membership of Turkey and Austrian Politics

Opinion polls, like the Eurobarometer, in November 2008 said that only 16 percent of Austrians support Turkish EU membership. Thus Austria holds the last position in the ranking of the EU-27. The average support for Turkey’s EU-membership of the EU-27 was 45 percent. In contrast to this situation, many Austrians spend their holidays in Turkey. In 2007 Turkey ranked as the fifth main holiday destination of Austrians (www.statistik.at, accessed 29/03/2009). Why do only a few Austrians support Turkey’s EU-membership? What is the reason, that many Austrian politicians can gain votes with anti-Islamic and anti-Turkish campaigns? On a poster the campaign for the right wing party (FPÖ) shows on the left side the EU-flag and the Turkish flag on the right side. Between the two is a cross, which could be the sign for the no vote in a demanded plebiscite or the Christian cross. The FPÖ argues that Turkey is not part of Europe and therefore it is impossible to support their EU-membership. The FPÖ is opposed to any negotiations between Turkey and the European Union (<http://www.fpoe.at/index.php?id=7304>, accessed 29/03/2009). Maybe a look at the mutual history may help to understand the Austrian situation.

Austria and Turkey – Historical Framework

From the 14th-19th centuries, Austrian-Turkish (Ottoman) relationships were dominated by war and mutual prejudices which were transported from generation to generation. Two dates are well known even today in Austria: the sieges of Vienna in 1529 and 1683. After the battle of Mohacs in 1526 large parts of the Hungarian kingdom became part of the Ottoman Empire. The Viennese felt like the defenders of Europe and thought that without their courage Europe would have become an Islamic region.

After the Viennese victory in 1683 and the following triumphs until 1718 the border between Austrian and Ottoman spheres became a military zone with soldiers who settled as peasants along the boundary; the Danube near Belgrade was the limit. The Berlin Congress (1878) after the Turkish-Russian War brought an end to the military boundary. Due to the common interests in Balkan politics the Ottoman and Austrian Empires became allies against Russia, France and Great Britain in World War I. The Austrian government started a campaign to promote the 'new situation' but the Austrian population did not really understand the geopolitics due to their experiences in previous times.

Remembrance of History - Place Names and Monuments

Since the victory against the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 18th century the memories of the Austrian-Turkish wars have been kept alive in many places and regions. Place names and monuments show us the collective remembrance of this era. Pupils in elementary schools especially in Vienna and Lower Austria are taught about Austrian Turkish history. Especially in Lower Austria in villages and towns surrounding Vienna the remembrance of the siege of Vienna (1683) is still alive. Local museums show the history, for example in Perchtoldsdorf – *the massacre of Perchtoldsdorf in 1683* - in the south of Vienna where the entire population was killed by Turkish troops. The Battle of Vienna seems to be so important that it is a question in the Austrian citizenship exam. The questions- *When was the second siege of Vienna warded off? - Who attacked Austria hard in 1529, 1532 and 1683?* have to be answered (BMI 2008). Significantly, the Austrian place name directory shows the following names: Türkei, Türkenbichl, Türkengraben, Türkenreith, Türkensturz, Türkstetten. In these places battles or other events concerning Turks took place.

After the Battle of Vienna in 1529 Ottoman troops approached the outskirts of Vienna once again in 1532. Many stories and tales are told about this time and have been passed on over generations. One of these is the tale about the *Purbacher Türke*. In 1532 a Turkish soldier hid in the chimney of a house in Purbach. The inhabitants fired the oven and the poor soldier had to climb through the chimney to survive. He was sentenced to working in this house after converting to Christianity and being baptised. Still today the monument of the Turkish soldier can be seen on the top of the chimney in Purbach.

Many monuments in Vienna were erected to the memory of the battle in 1683. For example the monument of the Lord Mayor Liebenberg opposite the University of Vienna was erected on the *Ringstraße*. *Türkenschanzpark*, *Türkenstraße*, *Zentagasse* remember the battle and the heavy battles between Austrians and Turks. Streets and lanes are named after famous men like King Sobieski of Poland who led the army to rescue Vienna or the Earl of Starhemberg who was the defender of Vienna. The *Pummerin* – destroyed in 1945 - which is the big bell in St. Stephen's Cathedral, was made from Turkish cannons symbolising victory of Christianity over Islam. Since that time Islam and Turkey have been used as synonyms by many Austrians. The slogan in the election campaigns in 2006 of the FPÖ – *Pummerin instead of Muezzin* – should maybe remind the Viennese of the history.



Figure 1: Monument of the battle of Zenta. 1697. Photo: Ch. Matzka

Two hundred years after the battle of Zenta in 1897 a monument for the Austrian regiment *Deutschmeister* was erected. One relief on this monument on the *Ringstraße* shows the killing of Turkish soldiers by Austrian soldiers in a dramatically realistic manner. Mutual history is still alive and everybody in Austria knows some parts of it.

Spatial distribution of the Turkish population and society

The office of the Austrian government for recruiting ‘guest workers’ was opened in 1964 in Istanbul and existed until 1993. This was the beginning of migration of people from Turkey to Austria intended by the government and the economy. After 1964 the ‘guest workers’ were brought to Austria by enterprises which sought workers. Many Turkish immigrants settled in Vienna and Vorarlberg as well as in industrial centres in the Tyrol, Lower and Upper Austria (Lichtenberger 2000). Due to high unemployment rates in the 1970s in Styria only a few Turkish people found employment there.



Figure 2: Vienna 16th district, Turkish supermarket
Photo: Ch. Matzka

Today approximately 30 percent of the Viennese population were born abroad, and twelve percent of these people were born in Turkey. In Vorarlberg, 27 percent of people who were born abroad are from Turkey and in Telfs in Tyrol near Innsbruck 16 percent of the population are from Turkey. In Vienna more than 70,000 people use the Turkish language. In modern multicultural Vienna this is the most important foreign language after Serb which is spoken by approximately 100,000 people (Fassmann, Hatz, Patrouch 2006).

Table 1: Turkish citizens in Austria

	1971	1981	1991	2001
Austria	16.423	59.900	118.579	127.226
Burgenland	33	238	630	1.280
Carinthia	23	173	595	1.192
Lower Austria	3.479	10.125	18.129	19.911
Upper Austria	1.261	5.665	13.233	17.226
Salzburg	951	2.986	6.558	8.800
Styria	140	401	1.560	4.793
Tyrol	1.664	6.890	13.652	16.017
Vorarlberg	5.049	13.712	20.346	18.838
Vienna	3.823	19.710	43.876	39.119

Source: www.statistik.at, accessed 28. 3. 2009

Table2: Colloquial Languages in Vienna (persons) in 2007

Serbian	97 824
Turkish	71 000

Croatian	37 654
Polish	21 000
Czech	7 769
Hungarian	15 435
African languages	12 000
Asian languages	30 000

Source: <http://www.migranten.at/umgangssprache.html>, accessed 29. 3. 2009

Many Austrian-Turks came from rural and poor regions of Turkey. Because of low levels of education – illiteracy being a problem especially for women – they came to Austria as unskilled workers to do jobs which Austrians didn't want to do. Due to Austrian immigration policies immigrants have quickly become part of the lower and underprivileged social classes (Lichtenberger 2000). Results of Austrian migration researchers say that the lack in education and illiteracy is inherited by the children. Many children of Turkish Austrians are brought up in Turkey by their grandparents. The result is that the children do not learn the German language. When they attend primary schools at the age of six they are often not able to speak German. This is the reason for many problems in reading, writing and understanding. Therefore only small numbers of migrants especially of Turks attend secondary schools or universities. Many of them are part of a new Viennese underprivileged class with little chance of social improvement. In 1999 a private organisation founded an Islamic secondary school in Vienna. There it is possible to pass the final exam and to take the A-levels. The aims of this organisation are to ensure the education of children of immigrants, the integration into Austrian society and the contribution to Islamic culture and identity. In the future it will be necessary to integrate more students with migration background in secondary schools as well as in third level education programs.

Is Austria a Contested Space?

In recent years discussions about amenities for Turkish and Islamic organisations took place. Turkish people have lived and worked in Austria for more than forty years. They did not return to Turkey as many Austrians thought they would. Therefore it was necessary to found organisations and institutions like the Turkish cultural community to represent the Turkish ethnic and religious minority in Austria (Gürses, Kogoj, Matzl (ed.) 2004). Due to the immigration after 1964, in today's Austria Muslims - most of them of Turkish origin - hold the third position in the ranking of denominations.

Table 3: Religions in Austria

Catholic	5 917 274
Orthodox	179 472
Protestants	376 150
Other Christian churches	69 227
Jews	8 140
Muslims	338 988
Without denomination	1 123 925

Source: www.statistik.at , accessed 10. 04. 2008.

In 1979 the first Mosque in Vienna was opened. Now more than 2000 mosques and prayer rooms exist throughout Austria which was no problem and no reason for political discussions for a long time because Islam has been in Austria an officially recognized Religion since 1912. In recent years similar to international discussions about the Islamic world in Austria discussions about Islamic amenities are main topics in regional and local politics.

In 2005 a minaret was built in Telfs in the Tyrol. This should be 20 meters high but a petition of 2,500 signatures was collected against the minaret. A compromise between the Turkish community and town council finally agreed on 15 meters height for the minaret. The same problem can be recognized in Vienna. In 2007, 700 people demonstrated against a planned mosque and an Islamic Centre in Vienna's 20th district. The decision of the town council allows only a building without a minaret. It should not be recognized as a mosque at first sight. This can be compared with the situation of synagogues in the later 18th and early 19th century in Austria. The Jewish Centre in the First District in Vienna was built in the 19th century in the style of an apartment house similar to other buildings in the neighbourhood. This concept was also used in Bad Vöslau in Lower Austria. There a mosque with a dome and two minarets, each 15m high was planned. Many people in Bad Vöslau opposed against the planned mosque. After discussions and mediation between the Islamic community, anti Islamic activists and the town council the mosque will be realized without minarets and dome. No Muezzin is allowed and the building has to be lower than the neighbouring buildings. The Mosque has to be located in the rear part of the building in which a school, a youth centre and a cafe will be integrated. The mosque was built in 2008 under control of the town council.

A law to prevent Islamic buildings was passed in the regional parliament in Vorarlberg. In §16a the regional planning law says that event locations for many expected spectators (for example buildings for cult activities with 150 visitors) are only allowed on specially dedicated estates. So each community has the right to prohibit such buildings by the local development plans based on the regional planning law.

It took more than twenty years for the Islamic community to negotiate with the Viennese Town Council the building of an Islamic cemetery at the edge of the City in the 23rd district. Many people do not accept the construction of the cemetery. Thus in 2006 anti Islamic activists desecrated the cemetery which was under construction. The cemetery was opened for the public in 2008.



Figure 3: Islamic cemetery in Vienna,
Photo: Ch. Matzka



Figure 4: Islamic Centre Vienna,
Photo: Ch. Matzka

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