

Syrian refugees in Türkiye and what the future holds

Alındı/Received: 1 Ağustos / August 2022
Kabul/Accepted: 3 Aralık / December 2022
Yayımlandı/Published: 31 Aralık / December 2022

Bu mektup editörlerin onayından geçmiştir.
This letter has been approved by the editors.

As a Dutch born hyphenated person, I have been a sequential part of the Dutch immigration process that started during the sixties of the last century. My father went to the Netherlands in 1964 as a labourer. Needless to say, the sole reason for this migration to the Netherlands was an economic one. It is a well-known fact that Western countries needed cheap labour after the destruction of the Second World War. The answer was governmental policy to bring in temporary labour from certain countries such as Türkiye as well as Morocco. At first instance such a policy seemed mutually beneficial as these imported labourers foresaw a positive change in their economic positions. However, this economic migration that was supposed to be a temporary one, took an unexpected turn during the eighties and became a permanent immigration. Such a development was as unexpected for the first-generation immigrants as it was for the Dutch people.

In this brief letter, I want to give a short account of my personal observations of the period I lived in the Netherlands. This brief analysis includes an account of failed immigration policy and how the Dutch society changed from being one of the most tolerant countries in the world into one of the most bitter countries in the Western hemisphere. The fact that the so-called *guests-of-labour* were not going to go back, was one of the most important turning points in the Dutch immigration history of the Turkish and Moroccan minorities. Back in those days there were silent public sentiments but no direct racial or discriminatory appeals within the public or political realms against the economic immigrants. We do, however, know today that there was a strong general public tendency for minorities to return to their host countries. Minorities increasingly were being perceived as different or *the-other* in appearance as well as in cultural and religious terms within the larger society. The political sentiment during the seventies, on the other hand, can be characterised as rather positive and constructive. Nevertheless, politics had caught up by

the time when one of the most charismatic populist politicians in the Netherlands had made his entrance on the political stage. Pim Fortuyn was not a typical Dutch man! He was erudite, a professor of sociology, and was convinced that there was a new enemy which evidently became to be known as 'İslam'. Until that time, main key terms utilized by the public was to describe minorities along the lines of those being ethnically or racially others. One of the new words that were used to identify the ethnic minorities was the word *allochthonous* (Gökçekuyu, 2022). Before Fortuyn, Dutch politics was acknowledged to be boring, yet politics was considered to be boring, but boring was also considered to be good as it meant stability (Vossen, 2017). Koen Vossen describes the 'swinging sixties' as a typical Dutch society that was deeply divided by different world views cutting through the already existent social realm. The Dutch were no aliens to a divided society in terms of Catholics, Protestants, Humanists, Socialists and Liberals. The Dutch society surprisingly seemed so stable, but the metaphorical deep waters were treacherous. The seemingly boring Dutch politics indeed proved to be a stable one as the so profound cultural and historical cleavages were knitted together with a lesson learned also known as the consensus politics. When Fortuyn was murdered in 2000, most people suspected or expected a Muslim immigrant to be the assassinator. I remember thinking and hoping that the murderer was not going to be a Muslim person as Fortuyn was quite negatively outspoken against the Muslim existence. Eventually, the assassin was caught, and it happened to be a Dutch man who was a radical leftist.

The governmental policies for the immigrants during the seventies were meant for immigrant children to learn their mother tongue. The idea behind these policies were that Turkish and Moroccan second-generation individuals would be able to adapt to the society in their own countries upon arrival. This specific policy was designed with the idea that immigrants were definitely going to go back to their host countries. But

as it is by now a factual common good, the second generation born in the Netherlands were already well rooted within pockets of ghetto environments in large Dutch cities. When the opposite reality dawned upon politicians, policies toward ethnic language at public schools were also immediately abolished. New policies were underway to be implemented, which were at first designed to instigate integration and the celebration of the Dutch multicultural society and its benevolent diversity. The public debates, discussions and criticism regarding the multicultural society, the lack of language skills and the lack of the capacity to integrate into the wider society during the nineties took a big hit especially after the 9/11 attacks causing a major shift from the former to what later became to be known as the *global war on terrorism*.

The next big discussion in the Netherlands after this global shift was the public realization that the efforts to establish a multicultural society had in fact failed. As a result, the integrationist policies slowly started to make place for *assimilationist* policies. This is also the period that the public sphere really started to get eerie and uncomfortable for many minority individuals. When 9/11 had happened, labels such as ethnic, Turkish or Moroccan had shifted into an all minorities encompassing label, 'the Muslim', and with it the associated potential danger that every young Muslim could be a potential threat against the good of the Dutch society. Almost every single night there were TV shows and talk shows on the matter of where things had gone wrong, reminiscing one of Bernard Lewis' classic book *What Went Wrong?*. Such novel national debates were mainly about Muslims and Islam with the difference that these debates were initially without the participation of the so-called Muslim. There were constantly new public faces in the media, the so-called experts, who were benefitting of the new global hype called Muslim-bashing. The media channels from the perspective of Muslim communities were perceived as partial and as exacerbating or overheating the public debate. Voices of soundness and wisdom were majorly overwhelmed by the voices of fearmongering and hate.

With this social background in mind, a new Dutch society was created according to Marinus R. Ossenwaarde (2007). This new Dutch society slowly started to refocus on what was gradually becoming an imperative national identity; one that required individual loyalties to politics, or policies. This development was meddling with constitutionally defined rights and liberties. Ossenwaarde argues that national policies during the eighties were associated with governmental interventions in moral matters such as interference in the lives of the minority groups (Gökçekuyu, 2022). The underlying social dynamics in this context were

clearly based on societal fears and the loss of cultural identity and value disputation. The debate on values were getting more and more about the inferiority of the 'others' who were considered to be socially and morally incompetent to participate in the good of society. New political values started to define what and who a 'good citizen' was supposed to be. The new policies for minorities were interventionist and racially problematic, because *race* can only be a politically motivated dynamic that infringes the conventional modern society.

The problematic nature of such a deeply sentimental matter is twofold; the first is that there is a politically motivated intrusion which does not perform to improve the existing social-economic inequality. It is also at odds with the spirit of equality since such a political intervention is done in the name of ending a 'may or may not' existing societal chaos. The second problem is the *racialized* undertone that taints the spirit of the Social Contract thinking. The seventeenth century Social Contract discourse greatly impacted modern constitutionalism that has been the result of a long struggle of ordinary people pursuing citizenship in the face of political and economic privileged elites. The Social Contract discourse is the correction of a history long social political and economic inequality and the recognition of the infallibility of natural rights of all peoples entrusting the protection of these values to the state as a sovereign to uphold these historical wins. Even from this perspective, it is natural that racially different citizens adhere to the same constitution but cannot be forced to comply with governmental policies and political values that undermine equal treatment protected by the constitution. Such a political expectation would adhere to the creation of *institutional racism*, complicating social co-existence, creating institutional treatment based on racial dynamics, and segregating benefitting one racial group over another which inherently is racist and therefore undemocratic.

One serious problem in this Dutch social-political debate was the delayed political response or willingness to tackle societal problems, which resulted in delayed policymaking instruments. All the while it is true that the assumption in the Netherlands was truly based on the conviction that these minorities would someday return to their host countries, it is a fact that politicians and policymakers were simply too late to come up with constructivist policy instruments. In my opinion, if the policymakers had been perceptive enough, as all the public sentiments were there, the policymaker would know to act immediately and guide immigrants in their path toward positive integration into the wider society. The reluctance and the fear of getting burned by this precarious issue was itching right under the public skin. Politicians' reluctance and incompetence lead to the

awakening of nationalist sentiments and the making of a new business, namely the business of populist politics that once was thought to be extinct.

Those days, when multiculturalism and diversity were celebrated and perceived to be enriching, were divorced for quick and easy narratives. Government policies could have been built around principles of non-discrimination, anti-racist laws, and the construction of inclusive programmes. Time and again, public misdiagnoses were employed, and ill-fitted policies were implemented with disastrous consequences. Every time a new policy was developed, it was either to manage the anger of the native Dutch people or to try out a new policy for a year or two and see if it would work. The truth with human psychology is that identities grow over generations of people (Gökçekuyu, 2021). Such a growth under proper circumstances has the potential to develop towards a virtuous form or has the potential to take a malignant path. The identity formation of second-generation young individuals in the Netherlands was definitely challenged as 9/11 did not do much good and created a toxic environment. The effects of the global war on terror could be immensely reduced by Dutch politics through developing policies that would pull allochthonous youth into inclusion, instead of pushing them to the periphery of the society.

With the above depiction in mind, the question must arise what Türkiye as a migrant receiving country should learn from these lessons. In my mind, there are two dangers for the Syrian refugee problem in Türkiye. One is that government officials must not be too late -as a lesson to be learned from the above- in diagnosing future social problems and is therefore tasked to design proper nationwide policies that will benefit Turkish people as well as the Syrian refugees in becoming Turkish citizens. It is for the best that Türkiye acknowledges the reality that Syrian-Turkish people have a real choice to not return to their host countries. It is therefore all the more important that there are *community leaders* who can represent the minority groups and start engaging in the joint constructive talks through all possible channels. The Syrian people should not isolate themselves from the greater public and, instead, should be by virtue of policymaking be guided to understand the great benefit of becoming a part of the Turkish nation. It is the government and the advent of a Minister of Integration and Minorities who play a key role in understanding and appropriating policymaking for minorities within the Turkish society. Such policies should also be concerned with addressing public sentiments. There are great mutual wins for all parties in multiculturalism, diversity and creating a new future for the upcoming new generations. It is crucial that populist narratives should not transform into nationwide movements

with their own markets and electorate. Governmental policies regulating and guiding the distribution of Syrian refugees from a geographical perspective will be an essential move. It is of utmost importance to prevent ghetto formations that would respectively create their own internal dynamics, such as anger, frustrations and new generations that are ill-formed with malignant and destructive identities.

Another significant common understanding should be the prevention and degeneration of societal responsibilities and categorical divisions of 'we' and 'you'. Governmental policies should prevent an increase of miscommunication and a mutual distrust. All this has to potential to lead to believe that democratic values are not equally distributed and that *some* are more equal than others. The truth can only be that all are equal before the law, and all are required to contribute to the good of a society, proportional to their personal capacities.

Ertuğrul Gökçekuyu 

Asst. Prof. Dr.
Anadolu Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi
Eskişehir - Türkiye

Sorumlu Yazar / Corresponding Author:

Ertuğrul Gökçekuyu
Anadolu Üniversitesi
İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi
Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü
Yunus Emre Kampüsü
Tepebaşı/Eskişehir, Türkiye
E-posta/E-mail: egokcekuyu@anadolu.edu.tr

References

- Gökçekuyu, E. (2021). Political appraisals constituting tolerant versus radical identities: An empirical comparison between Dutch and British Muslims. *Necmettin Erbakan Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 3(1), 68-81. <https://doi.org/10.51124/jneusbf.2021.12>
- Gökçekuyu, E. (2022). Democracy taken for granted: Minority dilemmas amidst Dutch populism and the deterioration of the social contract idea. M. Ercan, K. E. Yıldırım ve M. Karaca (Ed.) içinde, 21. *Uluslararası kamu yönetimi formu tam metinler kitabı* (s. 566-579). Efe Akademi Yayınları.
- Ossewaarde, M. (2007). The New Social Contract and the struggle for sovereignty in the Netherlands. *Government and Opposition*, 42(4), 491-512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2007.00233.x>
- Vossen, K. (2017, March 8). 'De stukken vlogen ervan af' [The pieces flew off]. *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 10-11. <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-stukken-vlogen-ervan-af>



2022. Author(s).

This work is an open access article published under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC 4.0) license.