“Will Turks decide the election?” This was the disturbing question asked on the front-page of Germany’s biggest and most influential tabloid newspaper Die BILD-Zeitung on September 14, 2005, just eight days before Germans went to the polls for federal elections. Of course, the idea that Turks could decide German elections was more than just unfamiliar for most Germans. So far, Turkey has not had a record of direct interference in German electoral politics. In addition, the large majority of Turkish citizens residing in Germany, i.e. the former ‘guestworkers’, have not gained German citizenship yet. Their electoral participation in Germany is therefore restricted to the so-called ‘aliens councils’ (Ausländerbeiräte). However, these institutions have little political impact. For this reason, the turn-out of voters (only citizens of non-EU member countries) has been dwindling for years.

Yet, the front-page story of the BILD-Zeitung was not based on nothing. It rather responded to Germany’s biggest Turkish-language newspaper, Hürriyet, which had stated in its headline of the preceding day: “The vote of the Turks shifts to the SPD (Türkler’in oyu SPD’ye kayıyor)”. This contention referred to a telephone poll conducted among its readers which had concluded that 77 percent of German citizens of Turkish descent would cast their vote for the Social Democrats. The poll did not even claim to meet scientific standards. Most importantly, it was not clear whether the people polled by Hürriyet did, in fact, hold German citizenship and, thus, were allowed to vote. However, apart from this, the headline was clearly meant to give the

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1 Social Democratic Party of Germany, led by the then-chancellor Gerhard Schröder.
then-chancellor Gerhard Schröder a warm welcome on his visit at the Frankfurt-based headquarters of Hürriyet that same day.

In the following days, the ostentatious exchange between the two papers triggered some debate in the German public sphere on whether German citizens of Turkish origin should be called ‘Turks’ and whether they really constitute a decisive voting block. Eventually, the election turned out to be rather undecided: neither the Red-Green government nor the Christian Democrat-Liberal opposition could win a majority. In the aftermath, the noisy struggle for the chancellorship superseded any debate on the actual role of ethnic Turks in the elections.

Nevertheless, this brief anecdote sheds light on two interesting developments. First, Turkish media and particularly the Turkish press have established themselves in Germany. Far from being a mere extension of the Turkish public sphere into German territory, Turkish newspapers have taken root by adapting themselves to the specific situation in the diaspora. They became a vibrant part of the German public sphere in two ways: by giving a voice to the Turkish community vis-à-vis the receiving society and by providing a forum for internal discussions among ethnic Turks. Second, it is generally agreed that the former Turkish guestworkers and their descendants have become ‘members’\(^2\) of German society. The large majority of them hold the right of permanent residency and, resulting from it, significant social rights. Beyond this, there is an obvious inclination to identify with certain aspects of German society such as the city or region of residence or certain companies with a longer local tradition (e.g. AEG, Opel). Yet, since only a minority of them have also become ‘citizens,’\(^3\) they have remained disenfranchised politically.

In the following article, I will discuss the interconnection between ethnic media and the construction of ‘multiple memberships’ in more depth. Questions of belonging, membership, and citizenship are crucial topics in the European editions of the Turkish press, because they are connected to the demand for recognition and equal rights. Analysing the discourse of the most influential Turkish newspaper on the German market, Hürriyet, from the 1970s to the present, I will show how the mono-national concept of citizenship has given way to

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\(^3\) Ibid.