Measures against racism and animosity towards foreigners in Berlin*

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1. Points of departure/conditions in Berlin

- As a consequence of the political changes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe since the disappearance of the internal German border and the opening of Eastern European borders, a heavy immigration influx from these areas to the Federal Republic has resulted; Berlin, the nearest central European metropolis to the East and the city with the largest population of sedentary minorities from these countries, is especially hard-hit by immigration. This influx will eventually subside, but, depending upon circumstances, could increase.

- The reunification of the country and the city of Berlin have forced overwhelming economical and socio-political problems associated therewith into the forefront of public discourse; consequently, interests for the welfare of ethnic minorities in Germany have been repressed, with the exceptions of the discussions about the wave of hate crimes directed against foreigners and the asylum debate. Repression in regards to foreigners' welfare takes place not only on an unconscious level, but also in conscious word and deed, especially on the job market and in educational and vocational training institutions. The fears of discrimination that many immigrants have perceived since the fall of the Wall have in a sense been validated. That such fears work against the integration of minorities into German society is obvious.

The authoritarian structures inherent in former GDR society, with heavy reliance upon indoctrination and rejection of everything foreign, have produced certain ascertainable differences in the attitudes of East Berliners as compared to their Western countrymen on the issue of non-Germans living in Germany. Incidents of hate crimes involving violent right-wing German youths have taken place for the most part in East Berlin.

But the population of East Berlin can by no means be characterized as entirely xenophobic. The latest opinion polls have shown that the differences

between East and West regarding openness toward foreigners have decreased. Interestingly enough, this openness falls short in the East when those polled were asked about their willingness to have closer contact with non-Germans (in such situations as friendship, marriage, etc.).

The conditions under the former GDR regime made it difficult to engage in a relaxed and natural intercourse with foreigners. East Berliners have a noticeable need to make up for lost time in respect to this point. That an interest in establishing contact exists is demonstrated by the fact that after unification, a disproportionately large number of organizations and projects sprung up devoted to the interests of ethnic minorities, offering advising and intercultural encounter opportunities. These projects regard as their emphasis the raising of sensitivity of Germans for their non-German fellow citizens. Many of the projects work closely together with schools to reach this goal. This accentuation demonstrates the specific problems and needs in the eastern part of the city and at the same time documents the potential to overcome these problems.

1.1. A short overview – facts and figures on the non-German population in Berlin

- Berlin has a foreign population of about 11%, in numbers, about 385,000.
- There are only about 2–3% of non-Germans living in the eastern city districts, the majority of them being former contract workers from Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique and Poland.
- The Turkish population makes up the largest percent of foreigners, numbering about 139,000, followed by approximately 55,000 people from the former Yugoslavia and approximately 30,000 Poles.
- There are currently about 45,000 refugees and asylum-seekers living in the city, most of whom are being housed in emergency shelters and receive welfare.

2. Animosity towards foreigners, discrimination and tolerance

There are various problem areas regarding ethnic discrimination that can be distinguished among the complaints that have come through the Office of the Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs.¹ These findings correspond for the most part with the findings of the commissions for equal opportunity and anti-discrimination established in some European countries a few years ago:

¹ 'Die Ausländerbeauftragte' des Senats, which has been translated here as the Commissioner for Foreigners' Affairs, is a state office devoted to foreigners and the difficulties they may encounter during their residence in the city of Berlin. The office also provides extensive informational Brochures and counseling services free of charge to the public.