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CDU Politician Roland Koch against Dual Citizenship (January 15, 1999)

On January 13, 1999, the SPD-Green federal government coalition introduced its proposed law to ease the naturalization process and permit dual citizenship. The CDU-CSU strongly opposed the proposal and launched a grassroots signature drive against it. The petition was particularly successful in the state of Hesse, where, according to reports, the party collected 290,000 signatures by the end of January. This populist strategy helped Hessian CDU leader Roland Koch beat the favored SPD candidate in the Hessian state parliamentary elections on February 7, 1999. Koch published the following article two days after the red-green coalition announced its plans to revise the citizenship law. In it, he argues against dual citizenship and for integration. At times, however, Koch's call for integration seems more like a demand for assimilation.

"The Will to Integrate is Necessary"
CDU politician warns of a split in society over the citizenship law

It is strange indeed. The millions of signatures collected in petitions against the NATO Dual-Track Decision [of 1979] were regarded as a moral victory and as evidence of democratic culture. But the millions of signatures collected against a fundamental amendment to our citizenship law are supposedly immoral and indicative of the demise of political culture.

Yet everyone knows that the coexistence of Germans and our fellow citizens from abroad presents us with certain problems that can't be talked away. People who broach the subject should not be labeled xenophobic. It must be possible even for us Germans to talk openly about problems concerning the integration of foreign citizens. The general "dual-citizenship" option that the red-green* government coalition intends to introduce will not solve these problems. The language problems in our schools would thus continue to exist.

Those who don't want to accept the division of our society cannot remain indifferent to the obvious trend toward ghetto-formation, especially in major cities, or to the exclusion of foreigners or even the violence against them. For example, the plight of many young Turkish women, who are closed off from their larger surroundings – not to mention any real participation in social life – alone on the basis of utterly inadequate language skills, cannot be a vision for future coexistence.

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* A red-green coalition is a coalition between the SPD and the Green Party – eds.

Citizens of our country rightly expect honesty in the treatment of the issue – and they expect that politicians will point to realistic solutions. This is not the case with the general possibility of dual citizenship proposed by the new red-green federal government coalition. It would seal the division of our society. Conflicts of loyalty would be the inevitable result. For example, in which country would young people do their military service? Which government would represent the interests of citizens of foreign descent now living in Germany? And which country would be responsible for the protection of these citizens in third countries? Where would claims for social benefits be asserted? Why should fellow citizens of foreign descent have a say in German politics when Germans living abroad have no right to vote? The red-green concept would serve to extend "dual citizenship" further and further to children and children's children, to reunited families and later arrivals. If a father and mother live here, then no one can blame them for wanting their children with them. But it's a major problem when children are deliberately sent back to their home country for schooling and then return to us when they're sixteen – without German schooling and without German language competence.

According to the red-green proposal, every foreigner who has lived here for eight years would in principle be entitled to German – that is, dual – citizenship. This would mean that even members of the terrorist PKK* could become Germans. If the red-green government were to implement the general "dual citizenship," it would no longer be possible to deport criminals easily. Thus, there's a danger that Turkish domestic conflicts could be shifted to Germany. That would do a great disservice to peaceful and neighborly coexistence.

Anyone who is seriously interested in workable solutions must be prepared to toss prejudices and untruths to the wind. He must rid himself of the traditional image of the "guest worker" who returns to his home country after a few years of employment in Germany. That is not the reality. We invited foreign workers to come here, and by now they have become fellow citizens who live here permanently.

Coexistence between foreigners and Germans is normal in our country. Germany is cosmopolitan and open to foreigners. Fellow citizens from abroad have found their niche in our society. It's no longer possible to imagine many economic sectors without them. Fellow citizens from abroad have become part of our society and we support this. But we don't want a system of first- and second-class citizens – some with more rights, some with fewer. According to the wishes of the red-green government, more than four million people would be entitled to "dual citizenship." Eighty million Germans would not have this option.

We support the fair offer: anyone with a clean record who sees his life and his future in Germany, and who has lived here for a long time, can become a German citizen. But we expect integration, not a wishy-washy "both-and" situation. The will to integrate is necessary. It is not too much to demand good language competence. It is actually in the interest of the person who

* Kurdish Workers' Party – eds.

wants to become integrated into his new surroundings. The more the fellow citizen from abroad is willing to commit himself to the diverse cultural traditions that have characterized our country for centuries, the more likely this is to succeed.

Integration is not a one-way street. We need to show tolerance toward other religions, customs, and traditions. At the same time, however, we expect that people of non-German heritage who live here permanently will adapt to the lifestyle of a society shaped by the principles of the Christian West. Germany is open to having prayer rooms and religious buildings for non-Christian religions. But in Germany we want to continue to hear church bells ringing, not muezzins calling people to prayer.

Anyone who supports integration must ease the process of naturalization. It is necessary to continue removing bureaucratic obstacles [to naturalization] and, above all, to reduce the waiting period for naturalization to eight years. It is especially important to simplify the process for the younger generation: Children of foreign nationals should – if the parents wish – receive a "guarantee of naturalization" at birth. If they give up their foreign citizenship later on, they will automatically become German citizens.

The plans of the new federal government, however, aim to force general "dual citizenship" on Germany. Evidently, the red-green government has already lost its footing after only a few weeks in power. Therefore, with this signature campaign, the Union [CDU/CSU] will bring the SPD and the Greens back down to earth. The Hessian CDU will also turn the state parliamentary elections on February 7 [1999] into a referendum on the issue of general "dual citizenship."

Source: Roland Koch, "Der Wille zur Integration ist nötig" ["The Will to Integrate is Necessary"], *Die Welt*, January 15, 1999.

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