After World War II, the German education system was reconstructed in a climate of extreme uncertainty. Nonetheless, Länder ministries cooperated in order to build a structure that would serve the needs of a new set of political and economic challenges. With the cooperation of Länder representatives in the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK), the three-tiered structure of education was instituted in a more cohesive manner across the Western regions than ever before (Führ 1997, 11). The Basic Law guarantees the cultural sovereignty of the regions, thus granting regional control of education policies (Grundgesetz 29(1)). While regional leaders saw the benefits of cooperation, the structures and decisions surrounding education, particularly in terms of language, remain deeply informed by the political complexion of the region.

In the three-tiered system, pupils are designated to one of three tracks after four years of primary education, based on their scholastic achievement to that point. The three tracks include Hauptschule (leading to a general certificate), Realschule (leading to an intermediate qualification), and Gymnasium or ‘grammar school’ (Behrens, Tost, and Jager 2002, 108). The Hauptschule provides general, non-academic education, normally up to the minimum school leaving age. The Realschule programme usually lasts a total of ten years, leading to jobs in middle management, engineering, or administration (Baumert and Kohler 1984, 367). Lasting twelve or thirteen years, Gymnasium is the highest qualification. It prepares students for academic or professional opportunities such as attending university or medical school. While the Gymnasium level has expanded to include growing numbers of German students, minorities appear to remain continuously underrepresented in higher levels of education (Heckmann 2006, 12-13).

Drawing on the experiences of regions with a fairly consistent political leaning, this paper will trace the relationship between the German education structures and the dominant conservative and liberal opposition parties, Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) and Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), and how these policies informed the
relationship with the Turkish community. While the CDU and SPD took opposing stances regarding the three-tiered structures, recent years have demonstrated a convergence of policies in language instruction.

### Education and the Guest-Workers

In 1961, a bilateral recruitment agreement was signed between Germany and Turkey, initiating the first wave of Turkish guest-workers to fill labor shortages in factories and foundries in the Federal Republic of Germany (White 1997, 754; Coleman 2002, 47). Like France and the Netherlands, Germany's migration policy was driven by the need for extra labor with considerations of legal status and integration taking second position (Huysmans 2000, 753-754). The young men who came in the first waves of the guest-worker programme were soon joined by wives and children through family reunification allowances. Several decades later, Turkish-Germans make up the largest ethnic minority in the country, about 2.5-2.6 million people ('Islam and Identity in Europe' 2007). Yet, throughout this era, Germany maintained the self-conception as 'not a country of immigration', a maxim in public policy that reacted to the presence of over four million foreign workers (Joppke and Morawska 2003, 63-64; Geddes 2003, 79; Joppke 1999, 63).

In the three-tiered system, children of immigrants experienced a distinct disadvantage. Their performance suffered because of inadequate language skills and insufficient support. In addition, Turkish youth, in particular, had to cope with low expectations within the schools and administration (Bommes 2000, 108). Compared with ethnically German migrants, Turkish youth were expected to have social problems in addition to inhibited abilities to assimilate.

As far back as the 1960s, SPD party leaders began to argue against the selective school system. They stated that it reinforced generational cycles of deprived children, cutting them off from higher education (Führ 1997, 128-129). However, in typically conservative regions such as Baden-Württemberg or Bavaria, leadership pushed to maintain the separation of these tracks, pointing to the fact that the three tracks should be able to adapt to changing times.

Nonetheless, the SPD and the Education and Science trade union helped to initiate various forms of comprehensive schools or Gesamtschulen in Hesse, Berlin, Bremen, and Hamburg (Führ 1997, 128-129). These schools offered more flexibility between subject levels. Some subjects such as social studies or religion were taught in a general class with only slight differentiations among students for 'different needs', while other subjects, including mathematics or English, remained differentiated by level (Führ 1997, 125).

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3 For the sake of clarity, only the CDU party is mentioned as the conservative component in German politics; however, the reader should note that in Bavaria, the CDU counterpart is referred to as CSU or 'Christlich-Soziale Union'.

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Länder with conservative governments continued to argue against the Gesamtschule even after various pilot projects had been positively evaluated. The value of the comprehensive school for migrant youth was demonstrated in a study by Diefenbach (2005), which showed that between 1990 and 2000, more migrant students completed Realschule and Gymnasium certificates in the comprehensive school setting than in separated schools (cited in Heckmann 2008, 25).

The three-tiered structures supported the differentiated levels of society, putting minority children at a distinct disadvantage next to their German peers. This deficit was revealed in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 2003. The gap in performance between native German pupils and pupils of a minority background was greater in Germany than most other countries with Turkish having the lowest in comparison to their German peers (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2006). Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of the Gymnasium qualification lessens the value of the lower qualifications. While the education structures were not established to cope with the challenges of large numbers of minority youth, the continued lack of accommodation seems to be a reflection of the country’s self-conception as ‘not a country of immigration’, accentuated in conservative Länder even more than their SPD-led counterparts.

**Language and Minority Youth**

Compounding the challenges of the three-tiered system, mother-tongue instruction served to maintain the boundaries between minority youth and their German peers. The CDU and SPD had different justifications, but when translated into practice, language education only maintained and perpetuated ethno-linguistic boundaries.

In the beginning of the guest-worker phase, the emphasis of language instruction was on return migration. Given the implied temporary condition of the guest-workers’ stay, German language acquisition did not seem urgent (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003, 34). Most measures that were taken emphasized preparation of pupils to return to their home country after the work period of their parents ended (Faas 2007, 46; Faas 2008, 110).

In 1976, the KMK issued a recommendation called the ‘Instruction of children of foreign workers’, which was intended ‘to enable foreign students to learn the German language, acquire German school-leaving certificates, and preserve and increase knowledge of their native language’ (Behrens, Tost, and Jager 2002, 113). However, because of the ambiguous terms of the recommendation, it was implemented inconsistently across the regions. Rohr-Sendlmeier (1986) identified three tendencies of implementation in the regions (cited in Behrens, Tost, and Jager 2002, 112-113). The first way emphasized the need to incorporate foreign youth into the German school system by educating them alongside their German peers, only using German.

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The second way tended to support the goal of reintegration into their home culture, arranging classes in their mother tongue, separate from their German peers. The third way put migrant youth into classes with their German peers in addition to special classes in their mother tongue, a dual strategy.

CDU/CSU-led states favored the separation of classes by nationality, preferring the second option. Bavaria, for example, maintained segregated and homeland-oriented immigrant minority language instruction for the longest period (Brubaker 2001, 537). In practice, mother-tongue instruction meant that pupils were separated into classes by nationality and taught by a teacher from their home country. After several years, German was introduced as a second language with the goal of bilingualism, but in reality, the strategy was unsuccessful and supported ethnic and social segregation above integration (Heckmann 2006, 12-13).

In the 1980s and 1990s, native language instruction with the objective of return migration ceased for the most part and was exchanged in favor of a multiculturalist approach (Baubock 2002, 181). In the SPD-favored multiculturalist frame of reference, foreign youth had the right to learn their mother tongue as it was part of their cultural identity. At the federal level, it was believed that mother-tongue instruction was fundamental to pupils’ awareness of their cultural identity, even while language instruction in German may be crucial to their socio-economic success (Behrens, Tost, and Jager 2002, 115). Even though the logic of multiculturalism differed from the conservative emphasis on preparation for return migration, the result was the same. In essence, the multiculturalist policies in language instruction simply served to maintain the distance and linguistic boundaries between the German and Turkish communities that were laid in the national self-conception as ‘not a country of immigration’. Germany appears to have perpetuated an ethnoculturally defined identity according to community of descent (Brubaker 1992, 14).

In the context of increasing concerns regarding the development of parallel communities and national security, however, language competency and ethno-linguistic boundaries have risen to the fore of integration discussions (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003, 20). A ‘parallel society’ is a ‘politically framed term’ that ‘suggests’ that immigrant community’s ‘actively and deliberately segregate’, not using state programs to help them acquire basic language or vocational skills, leading to high rates of unemployment (Cyrus 2005, 16). In a rush to confront fears of terrorism from within its borders, Germany kept pace with its multiculturalist policy-affirming neighbors like Sweden and the Netherlands by identifying language and expanding opportunities for naturalization to close the socio-economic gap between its minority and native community (Joppke and Morawska 2003, 2; Geddes 2003, 4). The first integration summit was held in July 2006 under the Grand Coalition. The main focus of this summit was to discuss educational opportunities for minorities as well as German language-learning programs (Faas 2008, 108).
the National Integration Plan, extra funding was designated for schools with high minority population in order to employ more teaching staff and social workers (Heckmann 2008, 42).

Yet, it was not long before language requirements were tied to residency. Germany offered a quicker track to an unlimited residence or work permit to those who passed a German language test or added delays to family reunification to those who did not learn German (Geddes 2003, 89). On the one hand, this logic is reasonable as language seems to limit interaction and participation in civil society; however, many are wary of such strategies. Some see it as a reaction to the loosening citizenship regulations and further evidence of the shift away from multiculturalism (Kostakopoulou 2008). For example, when the citizenship law of 1999 lowered the residency requirement from fifteen to eight years, it was accompanied by a tightening language requirement, and in some states like Bavaria, it became extremely difficult to pass the language tests (Joppke and Morawska 2003, 19). The responses to the CDU’s wish to include German as the national language in the constitution demonstrate the tension between the notion that language will encourage integration but also might serve only to protect ethno-linguistic components of the national identity.

**Conclusion**

The challenges of minority integration throughout Western Europe highlight the tensions within national identities. For Germany, a nation founded on a community of descent with strong ethno-linguistic ties, the influx of guest-workers at a time when the German nation itself was divided, deeply influenced the political self-conception as ‘not a country of immigration’. This rhetoric was translated into support for the three-tiered education system, especially by CDU policy-makers. In terms of language education, however, there appears to be a convergence between the goals of return migration and multiculturalist policies when translated into practice, effectively maintaining ethno-linguistic boundaries. Though stemming from different justifications, this convergence persisted even as the language of minority accommodation shifted from multiculturalism to incorporation. This parallel demonstrates the need to explore the way that the presence of a large minority community challenges core components of German national identity in addition to reinforcing the value of examining the implementation, interpretation, and translation from policy to practice.
List of References


