

How Social Democrats Have Reacted to Migrants: Turkish and German Samples

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Abstract



In this study, the discourses of the CHP and the SPD on Syrian migrants were evaluated. In this study which was carried out for this purpose, firstly, the migration narrative of Turkey and Germany were defined, and then SPD and CHP's position on this issue were discussed. In this respect, the CHP's and SPD's discourses in the media and some of their party documents had been evaluated within path dependency theory. In this context, how the different conjunctures in the two countries affected the universal claims of social democracy and how these two different social democratic parties took positions within the scope of these effects were also evaluated.

Key words: Migration, CHP, SPD, Social Democracy, Path Dependency

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Sosyal Demokratların Göçmenlere Yaklaşımı: Türk ve Alman Örnekleri

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Öz

Bu çalışmada CHP ve SPD'nin Suriyeli göçmenlere yönelik söylemleri değerlendirilmektedir. Bu amaçla gerçekleştirilen bu çalışmada öncelikle Türkiye ve Almanya'nın göç anlatısı tanımlanmış, ardından SPD ve CHP'nin bu konudaki duruşu ele alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda CHP ve SPD'nin medyadaki söylemleri ve bazı parti belgeleri yol bağımlılığı teorisi kapsamında değerlendirilmiştir. Bu bağlamda iki ülkedeki farklı konjonktürlerin sosyal demokrasinin evrensel iddialarını nasıl etkilediği ve bu iki farklı sosyal demokrat partinin bu etkiler kapsamında nasıl pozisyon aldığı da değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Göç, CHP, SPD, Sosyal Demokrasi, Yol Bağımlılığı



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Introduction

Social democracy, in theory, is an ideology that enforces solidarity, equality, freedom and justice in the international arena. However, I need to remind you that social democracy prioritizes national policies instead of international ones after it shifted from the Marxist perspective to the Kantian one, which believes in the voluntary favor of human beings. To clarify, social democracy prioritizes developing the living standards of the national working class within the bourgeois democracy instead of an international class struggle against the bourgeoisie. Therefore, social democratic parties' reflexes can be totally different from each other in current crises.

In this study, the reasons for the different attitudes of the social democrat parties of Germany and Turkey, consecutively the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) and the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), on migrants will be discussed from a comparative perspective. In order to do that, my theoretical framework will be path dependency, which offers a unique conjuncture analytical research by focusing on where and when decisions have been taken and analyzing relations between the decisions and social, cultural, economic, and political developments in different social contexts.

In order to understand whether social democracy is an international approach to migration, we should use a comparative perspective. To do that, we need to know the historical, social, conjectural and political limits and opportunities of the actors compared. In this context, path dependency gives an essential perspective to analyze the link between the actors' decisions, policies and discourses and the path that forced them to take these decisions.

So, in this study, the CHP's and SPD's attitudes will be evaluated depending on which paths and which of these attitudes they approach more. In this study, the different reasons for the different emphases in the CHP's and SPD's attitudes will be discussed, and which of the main principles of the CHP and SPD on this issue are compatible with these different emphases.

A Short Introduction to the Migration Policies of German and Turkish Governments

The reason for using path dependency in this research is based on two reasons. First, the approach provides a suitable basis for compiling the vast amount of available information on the background of the social and political spheres and the historical sources in which the conjuncture is embedded. The second reason for using path dependency in this study is that it has a new triangulation approach that integrates the institutions' reflexes, political goals and conjuncture (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Kay, 2005; Pierson, 2000). Some reports and bulletins of the CHP and the SPD will be the primary sources of this study for demonstrating the relationship between these parties' discourses on migrants and the conjuncture.

Germany has become one of the vital actors of the Western world, which developed in a capitalist sense, especially after the Second World War (WWII). In this development process, Germany has become a "country of immigration" by hosting important waves of immigration from the Second World War to the 1990s, with the pragmatic purpose of overcoming the

labor shortage. Germany, which had given up encouraging immigration waves since the late 1970s, asked to prevent new immigration waves in the 1990s.

In 1998, a new debate on attracting qualified labor was launched due to the ageing of the population and the resulting shortage of qualified labor, and in accordance with this purpose, the Immigration Law of January 1, 2005, which transformed Germany from a nation-state into a modern immigration country, came into force. Again, with a similar concern, the European Union started the Blue Card application in 2009, similar to the Green Card application of the United States, and institutionalized its claim to encourage a qualified-selected workforce on the European scale (Akdede et al., 2021). Therefore, for many years, Germany has transformed and implemented its immigration policy as a state policy in accordance with the interests and needs of the country.

On the other hand, Turkey has chosen to determine its immigration policy according to the interests and needs of the government instead of determining the country's one. While the government turned Turkey into the West's outpost for asylum seekers and refugees as a result of the financial reward it gained from its negotiations with the European Union, it followed the path of producing consent to its own authoritarian policies (Ongur et al., 2019, s. 111-112). Again, the government, which provides cheap labor to the capitalists it favors with crony capitalism, maintains the existence of outmoded business lines based on this cheap labor force instead of investments that will create added value in Turkey. Finally, while the government Islamizes society through immigrants, it also gradually creates a new electoral group by giving them citizenship.

In Germany, on the other hand, local governments are an active subject in every process, from the acceptance of immigrants to their city change. While this active participation prevents immigrants from living free from humanitarian standards, it also facilitates their integration into the system by including them in the production process. In addition, controlled migration makes migration not a chaotic process for the host community, namely the inhabitants of the city (Müller et al., 2021). This minimizes the dangers that have the potential to destroy democracy, such as possible hate speech towards immigrants and the strengthening of far-right movements arising from anti-immigration.

CHP's Reaction toward Migrants

It is possible to say that four fundamental dynamics have shaped the CHP's approach to the migrant crisis since the very beginning. The first of these is the CHP's claim to send the immigrants back as soon as possible against the tension that may arise between the immigrants and the Turkish citizens because the CHP has determined that as the life expectancy of immigrants in Turkey increases, they establish a new life in Turkey and so their tendency to stay in Turkey increases (CHP, 2012). Accordingly, the second determination of the CHP is that Turkey should abandon its confrontational foreign policy understanding and make peace with its neighbors, primarily Syria. The third policy of the CHP is shaped according to its first two policies. According to this policy, Turkish contractors will rebuild Syria after reconciliation with Syria and the return of immigrants (CHP, 2012). The most significant financial source of this construction process will be EU funds. At this point, the

fourth policy of the CHP emerges: sitting at the negotiating table with the EU in order to bear the burden of immigrants together (CHP, 2012). The immigrant attitude of the CHP, which was shaped by these basic principles, has been maintained whether one of these principles comes to the fore or falls behind, depending on the path.

From Confrontational Foreign Policy to a Peaceful One

In a 2012 report written by a commission under the leadership of Faruk Luğoğlu (Vice Chair of the CHP at this time), CHP searched for an answer to the question:

“How can a soft transition take place without separation of Syria in the post-Assad period?” (CHP, 2012).

In this context, the CHP has reached two main conclusions. For the first one, CHP suggested holding a conference between permanent members of the United Nations and countries in the region led by Turkey. There was also a call which encouraged changing the foreign policy of Turkey from a confrontational to a peaceful one to government at the end of the report (CHP, 2012).

This period was both the very early period of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu’s leadership in the CHP and the very beginning of the Syria crisis. For the first one, Kılıçdaroğlu had not yet established its leadership authority within the party. The party still maintained its structure to be an umbrella party among the état-nationalist (*ulusalcılar*),³ social democrats and some neoliberals inherited from the previous leadership period. In other words, in this period, the CHP continued its role as the representative of nationalism in the mainstream political arena, albeit with a decreasing emphasis. For the second one, the intense wave of migration from Syria to Turkey had just begun, and the social, economic and political outputs that exist today were not yet evident. Therefore, in this uncertain process, the path forced the CHP to develop a perspective that is compatible with the traditional codes of both Turkey and the party.

In its report published in 2016 (but written in 2014), around 70% of Turkish people think that accepting Syrian refugees in Turkey is a necessity; CHP stated that this practice is in line with international law but has some drawbacks (CHP, 2016, s. 1).

The main focus points of CHP’s 2016 report entitled *“Social Capability of Immigrants in Turkey and Compliance Report”* can be explained as follows: The first inference made by the CHP based on the research data is that the longer the Syrian immigrants stay in Turkey, the more their tendency to settle or become permanent. According to the second inference of the CHP, despite the situation in the first inference, the tendency of Turkish people to live

³ There is no consensus about this concept in English. This concepts can also be seen as moderate nationalism, modern nationalism, and neo-nationalism in the literature. Probably the reason for this situation is the structure of état-nationalism, which is not including ideological homogeneity. Instead of ideological homogeneity, état-nationalism has occurred to defend the nation state against the strengthening of the political Islam and the Kurdish separatism.

with Syrian refugees is declining rapidly. According to CHP's last detection, these two opposing tendencies are a factor that rapidly increases the contradictions and contradictions that arise in daily life and makes a living together difficult. If these trends continue, tension and increasing conflict will be inevitable (CHP, 2016, s. 9).

In this report, the CHP also referred to the psychology created by the social exclusion of immigrants. The CHP draws attention to the social problems that can be caused by the permanent settlement of refugees in Turkey and underlines the possibility of creating social conflict rather than the return of the refugees. There are two reasons for the CHP's unclear attitude. The first one is the ambivalent attitude of Turkish society. In this period, the Turkish society, on the one hand, said that it was a humanitarian necessity for the refugees to come to Turkey; On the other hand, they stated that refugee policy has a serious cost to the economy (CHP, 2016, s. 2-3). It is possible to say that in that period, CHP asked to create a third way between these two conflicting arguments of Turkish society in order to reconcile them by minimizing the possible social crisis. CHP stated that the perception that they bring a burden to the economy, which is the most common opinion in society about Syrians, can be overcome by giving them work permits for specific jobs (CHP, 2016, s. 8). It can be stated that the reason why the CHP put forward this argument is both to eliminate the idea of "they make money from where they sleep" and to eliminate their isolated lives in the camps relatively. Therefore, the CHP was concerned about developing an interim solution so that the disturbances in Turkish society would not increase. On the other, the Syrians would live in more humane conditions.

Another concern in this period is to take care not to develop a perspective that conflicts with international law as this period was a period when the relations of the current government in Turkey with the West were still extremely good. In addition, the CHP was planning to come to power with a coalition in the 2015 elections, which will be held a year later, and it was extremely important to create international legitimacy for this.

While the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AK Parti) government, which lost its majority in the June elections, decided to re-election in November with the support of the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), a chaotic process was experienced in Turkey. In this chaotic environment, the AK Parti came to power once again in the November elections. The ruling party, which signed an agreement with the EU right after this election, promised to prevent immigrants from crossing to Europe and staying in Turkey in return for 3+3 billion euros in line with this agreement. CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu reacted to that agreement as follows: "Let us give them – the EU – 6 billion euros so that they can take all the Syrians, Afghans and Pakistanis" (Daily Sabah, 2016). This harsh statement is because there is no serious anti-immigrant sentiment in society yet. As a matter of fact, after the establishment of the Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*, ZP), which fueled hate speech against refugees, Kılıçdaroğlu put the government's immigration policy and the EU, which consented to the government's authoritarian policies in return for immigrants to stay in Turkey, on the target board. He said the CHP is able to solve that problem if it comes to power as follows:

"My call to the EU, which claims to attach great importance to human rights, is to bear the burden together. When we complete this process, rest assured that our

Syrian guests will be as happy as our citizens. There is a solution, my people. Only the administrators who will not surrender to euros are missing!" (Hürriyet Daily News, 2021).

"My call to the world: I'm nothing alike to Erdogan. I come from the Kuvayi Milliye tradition. No one can declare our soldiers as watchmen to where they fled; or declare my country an open prison to refugees. Let me tell you in advance, very tough negotiations are waiting for you."⁴

Therefore, the CHP is trying a third way because it realizes that the government consents to authoritarian policies in the EU by keeping asylum seekers in Turkey, and the ZP triggers immigrant hatred. In this way, the CHP is trying to direct social anger towards the immigration policy of the government and the EU. In this respect, the CHP underlines that they will not sit down with the EU for the euro and that they will enter into a tough struggle with the EU for a new policy that will equally divide the migrant burden.

"We will send our Syrian brothers and sisters within two years at the latest. We will send them without racism and protect Turkey's reputation. First, our contractors will build their roads and hospitals with European Union funds. In order to ensure the safety of life and property, a protocol will be signed with the existing administration of Syria, and if necessary, the United Nations will step in. Business people from Gaziantep had factories there before. We will say, 'Reopen the factories, give them jobs'. Let them work there and produce (Haber Sol, 2022)."

As seen in this quotation, Kılıçdaroğlu stated that the negotiations to be made with the EU would be shaped by obtaining funds from the EU for the reconstruction of Syria by Turkey. In this third-way approach, which is compatible with neither the conformist approach of the government nor the racist attitude of the Victory Party, the immigrants, whose burden is shared equally with the EU, will be sent back to the rebuilt Syria in a dignified manner.

SPD's Refugee Approach: "If you want to stem illegal migration, you must create legal ways to immigrate."

The SPD can be called a party of and for both immigrants and workers. The reason why the SPD brings these two identities together originates from the migration policy of Germany in the post-WWII period. As mentioned above, Germany hosted a serious number of immigrants in an attempt to develop its economy and rebuild its market at that time. As the majority of guest workers migrated to Germany as blue-collar during that period, the SPD had a close tie with them with the help of labor unions, which were functioning like a branch of the SPD in the labor market. In addition, SPD's unofficial branch, calling like Arbeitsvohlfahrt, established a solidarity organization for foreign workers in order to make

⁴ <https://twitter.com/kilicdaroglu/status/1416753857900814339>

use of their spare time and to give them necessary information about Germany's rules in 1962.⁵

Many migrant workers were fired, with the serious economic crisis starting at the end of the 1960s in Germany. This crisis led to two remarkable results. Firstly, as a result of the crises, the migrant approach and discourse of German society, politics and media became critical. Secondly, migrant workers quickly unionized as they realized the relationship between losing their jobs easily and being unorganized and socially insecure. As a result, SPD-affiliated unions acidly founded special branches for migrant workers. Migrant workers who were thought to be temporary in the early 1970s gradually became permanent. After this had been understood, agreements granting social rights, in addition to the previous agreements, began to be signed with the pressure of international organizations and trade unions. However, due to the Oil Crisis in 1973 and the unemployment that started in Europe, Federal Germany took a decision to stop the recruitment of workers. He made the provisions of the law on foreigners more difficult. Migrant workers in Germany were also advised and encouraged to return (Şen, 2002, s. 32).

With the growth of the second generation in the 1980s in Germany and the lack of returns, Turks, in particular, and migrant workers in general, gradually began to realize that they were permanent. Therefore, these people comprehended that it is the only way to improve their living standards and defend their rights was to have political influence by becoming the political subject. Then, they became an active subject in German political parties, although they did not have suffrage.

So, there is a question to ask here: what was the SPD's role during these developments? The SPD was the first party to take the bold step to give Turks, the biggest migrant group in Germany, suffrage in the local administrations governed by the party (Hinze, 2008). Although SPD's trial to give some political rights, including voting in local administrations rejected by the Federal Constitutional Court, it caused the Turks in Germany to defend their political rights more ardently and to gain some positive outcomes such as being employed in the public sector, albeit limited, and gaining various rights in the civil society (Green, 2003).

It should be underlined the reasons why these steps were bold. During the 1980s, xenophobia gained momentum in German society as a result of some reasons, such as a remarkable number of migrants, migration from East Germany to the West and a new migration wave from Africa, Asia and Latin America (Panayi, 1993). Until 1993, 1st section of article 16 of the German Constitution was so generous: "*Persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum (Constitution).*" As a result of the encouragement of this article, about two thousand people applied for asylum in Germany in the 1990s. Thus, this article became the focus of reactions in German society. Of course, this kind of reaction is triggering for the open-minded politicians of a country such as Germany, which had a fascist trauma.

⁵<https://web.archive.org/web/20071015012927/http://awo-frankfurt.de/awo/wir/geschichte/ausbau/>

Indeed, some data supported this trauma. For example, in a survey conducted in Germany in 1985, "How do you find a few million foreigners living among us?" 45% of the participants answered "I am not a supporter", 21% "I am a supporter", and 34% "I am undecided". Four years later, in 1989, those surveyed 75% of them answered, "There are too many foreigners in Germany (Abadan-Unat, 2002, s. 258)." More importantly, research has shown that 77% of the German population thought that foreigners abused their social security systems, while 60% stated that they caused unemployment (Abadan-Unat, 2002, s. 259). This corresponds to the general understanding that in the neoliberal era, which is called neoliberal chauvinism in the literature and manipulates societies by hiding behind the basic claim that "ideologies are over", people direct their reactions to the weakest instead of directing them to the capitalist.

Social democracy, which was already in an identity crisis in the neoliberal era, took steps to prevent new waves of immigration with the concern of protecting social peace in this path where the reaction against immigrants increased, and social peace was under threat. As a result of these doubts, the ruling party CDU and the main opposition party SPD agreed and abolished the relevant constitutional article that facilitates immigration in Germany.

In addition, between 1990 and 1995, Germany adopted a series of laws with the initiative of both state and federal governments to prevent the resurgence of Neo-Nazism. In 1993, a law was passed by the German parliament mandating high compensation to foreigners who suffered from racist attacks. A year later, displaying Nazi symbols in public places became a crime. German society, after various racist attacks against immigrants, took preventive attempts to avoid being stigmatized as racist. However, despite all these measures, especially small parties with limited voting potential continue to abuse this issue. In the first half of the 1990s, when these measures were taken, many racist attacks and arson cases occurred against Turks, who are Germany's largest immigrant population. The results of this situation occurred both in politics and in organizing activities. This period became the age of umbrella organizations, and many umbrella organizations were established. Turks began to express themselves in a higher tone under the leadership of the second generation (Uslucan et al., 2020).

Even though Turks, especially the second-generation youth, did not have the right to vote and be elected, they were actively working both in the local elections and in the youth branches of the SPD and Greens. In the 1994 election, two second-generation young people with German citizenship were elected as federal parliamentarians from the two parties in which Turks were most active, the SPD (Leyla Onur) and the Greens (Cem Özdemir). Another first that emerged as a result of the relationship established by the SPD and the Turks is that Ozan Ceyhun was a European parliamentarian from the SPD lists in the 1999 European Parliament elections (Uslucan et al., 2020).

On the way to the millennium, the SPD made important promises to Turkish immigrants that dual citizenship would be recognized. Thus, under the leadership of the SPD, the new citizenship law came into force in 2000. Despite the positive attitudes of the Schröder government and other government partner parties regarding immigrants in Germany before the election, this new citizenship law was only cut back to the parliament due to the harsh

reactions of the CDU (Anil, 2006). According to the new law effective from January 1 2000, children of foreign parents with a permanent residence permit in Germany become German Citizens. Although the principle of not limiting dual citizenship is still valid, the exceptions related to dual citizenship have been expanded and made more concrete (Anil, 2006).

In the meantime, two vital breaks took place in Germany. The first of these was the warnings of the state authorities to the politicians that the German population is decreasing and the population working in skilled jobs is disappearing while preparing the 2050 projection. Therefore, Germany began to promote migration for qualified people with the Immigration Law of January 1, 2005, as mentioned above. Secondly, Turkish votes played a big role in the last elections, in which Prime Minister Schroeder narrowly won. While 60% of 471,000 Turks voted for the SPD, the Greens, the coalition partner of the SPD, received 22% of the vote (Özçelebi, 2002). The Turks living in Germany played such a decisive role in an election for the first time in the country they have been in for 40 years. As a result, the role played by the number of voters with a migrant background in Germany's competitive elections was understood and political parties started to take positions accordingly.

As known, there were two grand coalitions between CDU and SPD, one between 2005-2009 and the other between 2013-2021 under the leadership of Merkel. During these years, the most important debate on the immigration issue was experienced in 2018, when the alliance of the CDU and CSU came to a breaking point due to this issue. The junior partner of the coalition, SPD, took advantage of the path in which the public's attention turned to this point and shared with society what it thinks about the immigrant issue in 5 articles:

- more to be done to combat the reasons why people flee their home countries
- No unilateral action to turn people away at national borders within the EU
- Nore help for Italy and Greece, the two EU countries where migrants crossing the Mediterranean most frequently end up
- Tighter controls of the EU's external borders
- A comprehensive German law governing immigration to the country and the German job market (Chase, 2018).

Today, the migration policy of Germany is publicly discussed under four themes: upper limit for refugees, family reunifications, deportations and immigration law. According to the SPD, the migration issue needs a European-wide solution, and the economic, social and political burdens of the migrants should be shared fairly between EU members (Chase, 2018). After Merkel's open-door policy, which began to be implemented in 2015, caused a crisis in the alliance between CDU and CSU, CDU is underlining to assist neighbors of countries experiencing waves of migration. However, SPD stresses that Germany should be a part of EU resettlement programmes, and it is the moral duty of Germany to welcome the refugees (Noyan, 2021). On the other hand, SPD is against limiting the number of refugees permitted

to enter EU borders. SPD leader Martin Schulz emphasized the reason for that situation as follows:

“What would we do with the first refugee to reach the European border once the quota is reached? Would we send them back to a certain death? As long as this question has not been answered, a debate about [an upper limit] does not make sense (Bierbach, 2017).”

SPD asks to promote voluntary returns of rejected refugees instead of deporting them forcefully in its party programme. More importantly, It also wants to ensure that rejected refugees who have been law-abiding residing in Germany for two years and are currently working or at school remain in the country legally. SPD’s programme also stresses that the party asks to introduce a similar law to Canada for immigration, which has a flexible quota for skilled migrants. In the party programme, SPD marks, *“If you want to stem illegal migration, you have to create legal ways to immigrate” (Bierbach, 2017).*

After Merkel’s 16-year administration, a traffic light coalition formed SPD, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Alliance 90/The Greens in 2021. The new coalition government promised to have a more friendly immigration policy, which gives residence permits easier and increases the number of skilled foreign people in the labor market. SPD also makes an effort to recognize the dual citizenship right of German citizens (Financial Times, 2021). Of course, these policies coincide with both the state policy against Germany’s ageing population and the social democrats’ claim that Germany has a moral responsibility for immigration. The SPD’s perpetuation of its discourse on this issue will depend on how strong the German far-right (Alternative for Germany, AfD) will become and how many of the voters with a migrant background, especially Turks, will turn to the SPD.

Conclusion

The aim of social democracy, which is an ideology that emerged with the claim of being a third way between capitalism and socialism and tries to do this by spreading welfare and peace, is to ensure social peace. Therefore, such an ideology must evolve its discourse and actions according to the path to preserve social peace, which it prioritizes in theory, rather than having rigid and unshakable practices.

Due to this practical ability of social democracy, path dependency is used as a theoretical framework in this study, which also questions its universality based on the example of immigrant discourses in two different countries. As a result, although their methods differ depending on the conjuncture, as seen in the example of CHP and SPD, social democratic parties try to do three things at the same time. i-) Suggesting a way to prevent currents that will harm social peace, ii-) Channeling the possible hatred towards the weak in other areas, iii-) Avoiding only morally superior discourses that ignore social sensitivities due to their goal of increasing social welfare by coming to power.

It can be stated that the discourses of the social democratic parties that seem to contradict each other actually serve the same purpose, protecting social peace in accordance with the path of the country in which they are located. Therefore, discourses that seem to contradict each other show the universality of social democracy due to the fact that there are parties

servicing the same purpose in different countries according to different paths. It is possible to see these concerns in the evolution of the discourses of the social democratic parties of these two countries, one of which is the center and the other of the peripheral countries, according to the path.

Ethical Statement Information of the Article Titled As “How Social Democrats Have Reacted to Migrants: Turkish and German Samples”

	This study has been prepared in accordance with the values of “Research and Publication Ethics” and checked in a plagiarism control software. All responsibility of the article belongs to the author(s).
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Conflict of Interest Statement	There is no conflict of interest in the study titled as “How Social Democrats Have Reacted to Migrants: Turkish and German Samples”
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Support	Not any.
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