

Barbara John, “With Each Other, Not against Each Other” (1982)

Abstract

The “Living Together in Berlin” campaign was one of the first government-sponsored advertising efforts to promote multiculturalism, depicting foreigners working in harmony alongside Germans on posters throughout West Berlin’s bus and subway system. Barbara John (b. 1938) was Commissioner of Foreigner Affairs at Berlin’s senate from 1981 to 2003.

Source

Dear fellow citizens,

Those of you who live in districts like Kreuzberg, Schöneberg, Tiergarten, Neukölln, Wedding, Charlottenburg, or Spandau – districts where particularly high numbers of foreigners live – may feel somewhat overwhelmed or disadvantaged.

Feelings of this kind are entirely understandable. Sometimes they arise out of the dynamic of a fleeting encounter, while at other times they are based on negative experiences. It is, however, a mistake to remember only the bad experiences and to see the good ones as merely a matter of course. Each of you can think of a number of positive encounters. Why do we constantly fail to acknowledge the kindnesses we encounter? We should be talking more about these issues in public arenas.

If mutual understanding is not successful right off the bat, it is because we know too little about each other. Many of you come across Turkish citizens on a daily basis and have been doing so for years – on the way to work, on the street, when shopping, in your apartment building. I know from conversations with you that many behaviors of the Turkish population still remain foreign to you. This is often the case simply because we do not see or discover anything familiar in these ostensibly unusual images.

Given the limited scope of this pamphlet, I will not be able to bring you closer to the Turkish culture. By way of a few examples, I would like to encourage you, however, to be more open when coming in contact with others. I know that it is precisely at such moments when great effort is necessary from both sides. But it is worth the trouble.

Turkish citizens are simultaneously receiving a similar pamphlet. In it, I have explained why it bothers the German population when a familiar neighborhood becomes an almost foreign milieu within a short period of time.

In the past few months, I have experienced great hospitality in Turkish families and have been consistently astounded by the openness of our conversations. My eyes have been opened time and again; I had seen things in a much different light before. I continue to discover how easy it is to build bridges when both sides wish to do so.

The fact that there are people who have explicitly xenophobic convictions is shameful for us and painful for foreigners. We would all do well to take the time to bring stories of successful attempts at neighborliness into the public eye and to encourage one another by example. [...]

In order to continue this dialogue about our successful stories of living together, it would be helpful if you would tell me about your experiences.

With best wishes from your Commissioner of Foreigner Affairs,

Barbara John

Source of the German original text: Informationsblatt der Ausländerbeauftragten des Berliner Senats, November 1982, in Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes und Andreas Langenohl, Hrsg., *Transit Deutschland. Debatten zu Nation und Migration*, München: Konstanz University Press, 2011, pp. 364-365.

Source of English translation: Deniz Göktürk, David Gramling, Anton Kaes und Andreas Langenohl, eds., *Germany in Transit. Nation and Migration 1955-2005*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 251-252.

Translation: David Gramling

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