



German Kristina Kamp (4th from the left) cuts her birthday cake alongside some staff at Today's Zaman. Kamp is the latest crew member in the Today's Zaman family.

GERMAN INVASION AT TODAY'S ZAMAN (1)

There are now four Germans working on the Today's Zaman's team. Bülent Keneş, the editor-in-chief, says with a smiling face "Maybe it's a natural movement like a tide. Now it's the Germans' turn to come here and get to know our country"

ERHARD BRUNN İSTANBUL

Today's Zaman was launched only in January with the aim of covering national and international developments from the perspective of national political dialogue along with the international dialogue of cultures. A current indicator of the success of this endeavor in a modernizing and more open and therefore more attractive Turkey: the "German invasion" of the Today's Zaman newsroom.

Bülent Keneş, the editor-in-chief of the paper, admits: "Yes, we were surprised as we looked around and saw so many Germans working in the newsroom. Someone started to talk about the German invasion." While laughing about it, he adds: "Maybe it's a natural movement like a tide. Now it's the Germans' turn to come here and get to know our country."

But who are those invaders? And why are they interested in working with Today's Zaman under an internship or contract? One of them looks around the German ranks.

Kristina Kamp has been working at Today's Zaman İstanbul headquarters for several months, so she is the most experienced of them all. But last Monday was a special day for her. She was offered a contract as a reporter after having served as an

intern. "I am quite happy about it," she said.

While studying sociology, she began to focus on Turkish affairs three years ago -- after taking part in summer school at Bogaziçi University. "Before that, I knew nothing about Turkey," she said. Three months ago she came back to İstanbul. "At that time I hadn't even finished my master's thesis," she says. She looks back at turbulent times. She has been working on "Modernity and Change in the Turkey of Today" and found that the modernists are the traditionalists and vice versa in this very special phase of Turkish politics. In other words: She sees much traditionalism in the ideology and acts of those modernizing Turkey in opening it up to Europe. After having finished this academic work she wanted to get closer to the people than an academic can be. So she applied to Zaman to find out whether this was possible through journalism. She feels happy at having the chance to publish -- even on the front page -- especially when it is something about politics.

What does she think about German media coverage of Turkish affairs? "I think those journalists who are living here in İstanbul understand the situation very well and write sensitive articles," she says. She sees a much higher degree of generalization in articles done in Germany trying to summarize Turkish developments. For her it is very important to counter a

picture of Turkey that is sometimes misleading, or at least not very precise. She is attempting to paint a much different picture. "It's very much worth the effort, having in mind both our huge integration debates in Germany and Turkey's development in order to become a member of the European community. One cannot help but care," she adds. "It is important for Germany."

Talking about her experiences with İstanbul she says, "Maybe I am biased and can't see the bad things. But I hate traffic. And you have a lot of it here in İstanbul, and I have a very long ride to get to the office. And the buses are always full of people. But this can happen in any big city in the world."

"You can always go your own way here in İstanbul. You can walk through a public park [like in Üsküdar] or along the waterfront all along the Bosphorus. And the people are very kind. Like here in the office. The Turkish keyboard of the computer may confuse you, and you may confuse your colleagues all the time because you ask for their help so often. But still, they are kind and cooperative. No, I don't have a real reason to complain," she concluded.

Katja Heise. She had been in İstanbul before as an Erasmus student. She says, "Nowadays an Erasmus exchange semester is part of any well-kept CV." But she didn't want to do the things that everybody else does. "I didn't want to go to

Spain or France. I was looking for a more exotic destination, an experience completely different from my life in Germany. I wanted to go to İstanbul. I wondered what it would be like to study political science here -- looking at a completely different sociological/historical background."

"Since I am an EU fan I also wanted to experience the negotiation process with Turkey right where it was taking place. Who were those Turks that wanted to be members of the EU so desperately? Last but not least I wanted to take part in the integration process myself: I wanted to get to know the Turks, and I wanted the Turks to get to know me."

Since Monday she has been working as an intern at Today's Zaman. "My reason for this decision? The European news coverage on the Turkish presidential election in May seemed very shallow and simplified. According to many European newspapers the secular Turks demonstrating on the streets were the 'good' democrats, whereas the Justice and Development Party [AK Party] members were presented as the 'evil' Islamists. But I am sure it's not that easy."

"For this reason I believe it's important for the European media to take a closer look at what is happening in Turkey. Therefore I think that working for a Turkish newspaper as a German is a very challenging and interesting task."



German Chancellor Angela Merkel meets young Germans, including Today's Zaman's new intern Kübra Yücel (green scarf), at the governments' youth integration forum in Berlin.

GERMAN INVASION AT TODAY'S ZAMAN (2)

I think the Western world did not and does not have much respect for the Muslim world. And as the world was dominated until recently by Western media other parts of the world didn't have much of a say in the interpretation of world events

ERHARD BRUNN ISTANBUL

The third "invader" is Kübra Yücel, another newcomer and an intern at Today's Zaman. The young Turkish-German woman is capitalizing on the holiday her parents are taking in their home country and the time until she decides where to study journalism in Germany to learn about the Turkish media. But of course she is not a real beginner. "I am one of two editors of a youth journal in my hometown of Hamburg," she says.

Different from Kristina and Katja, Kübra is a Muslim woman who wears a headscarf. When talking about the failed integration of Turkish immigrants in Germany, she doesn't like to blame German society: "Both sides have made mistakes in the last decades. Turkish immigrants thought they would be going home to Turkey soon; and the Germans thought the same. So nobody really cared." But she is keen to emphasize that what is called the building of a parallel society has not been done purposely by the immigrants. But, she emphasizes with the optimism and energy of a young woman of 19 years: "Those problems have been solved. Both sides know about their faults now."

So the young lady with a warm smile and a lot of self-consciousness approached the world and was welcomed by it. "I have been a representative for my class, then school, then region, up to the national level." She traveled a lot, and on coping with administration representatives, she says, "I was never treated just

as a girl with a scarf, but always by virtue and therefore fairly." Along with her openness and charm, she wins the sympathy of the people she talks to. Like Chancellor Angela Merkel, whom Kübra met recently at the youth integration summit with German government and integration organizations. "It was a great experience to feel that we -- the citizens -- create society. And that our chancellor really cared about the immigrants' opinion." She has learned that she may not be able to change the world in an instant, so nowadays she optimistically takes on the issues she thinks are realistically changeable by her.

Kübra Yücel: A case on its own?

"There are many young Turkish Muslim women like me in Germany, only they are not looking to be journalists, but physicians or teachers," she says. Except her sister: "Oh yes, Seyma wants to be a journalist, too. She already appeared on the front page of a big daily in Germany with an article of hers about positive developments concerning the integration of Turkish people in her hometown of Hamburg." She landed an internship with the Feza Media Group, the European partner of Today's Zaman.

Lastly, the author of this article himself: Erhard Brunn, historian and journalist, active in international Christian-Muslim dialogue for about 15 years. Most of these years I worked in Africa, both East and West. I saw Christian-Muslim conflicts and I saw religious leaders there and elsewhere coming together to solve those problems, or at least minimize the dam-

age. I think the majority of both Christians and Muslims all over the world are not interested in conflict, but they do not know enough about the others' views and interests.

In this situation the media play an important role in the communication between those parts of the world dominated by Christian and those dominated by Muslim traditions. It is therefore of great importance to get more journalists involved in intercultural dialogue with those parts of the world influenced by Islam. Everybody should learn to know the others' perspective, and those who dare should try to work within structures of different orientations.

I think the Western world did not and does not have much respect for the Muslim world. And as the world was dominated until recently by Western media, other parts of the world didn't have much of a say in the interpretation of world events. This has changed a lot in the past five to 10 years, especially with Al-Jazeera and many other media productions, such as Today's Zaman. Many media bosses, at least in Germany, are more and more aware that they should find new ways to cope with the phenomenon of the lack of integration of immigrants from the Muslim world as much as the growth of Islam itself both in their structures and their coverage. To this end, we recently founded a roundtable of editors from the German Rhein-Main region around Frankfurt where not only many German media houses are situated, but also the Catholic and the Protestant churches. It's the center of Turkish-European journalism, too, the location of the

headquarters of both Dogan Media (Hürriyet and Milliyet) as well as Feza Media Group with their television studios and printing equipment. In this new, open way of interacting internationally, I thank the prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, for writing a preface to my book "Christianity and Islam -- a new dialogue of DEEDs."

But in all seriousness, it is not only a German invasion. Representatives of other nations are here, like Pınar Vurucu, who was born and raised in Canada, who says, "I enjoyed many of my summers in Turkey with my family. My father moved to Canada from Turkey over 30 years ago and my brother, sister and I were all born there. My siblings and I always wanted to try life in Turkey because we enjoyed it so much during vacations, so we picked up and moved here about nine months ago."

So what do they have in common, the Germans and the other expats in Today's Zaman's newsroom? Of course, besides the fact that they are all here on their own without being supported by any big foundation or church institution? The feeling that something special is going on in today's Turkey. That there is something moving -- and moving in the right direction. It is the place to be right now for people who love to be where important new developments are taking place. Of course, try to help out bit, whether you wear a scarf or not. As Kübra says, "It's the active citizen who creates society." Listening to this, Kristina nods in agreement and smiles: Yes, let's move something!