

Middle East Policy: “The 15 million Muslims of the European Union—up to three times as many as live in the United States—are becoming a more powerful political force than the fabled Arab street.” That France and Germany alone have nearly 10 million Muslims and only 700,000 Jews helps to explain Europe’s different perspective on the Middle East.

Muslims in Europe have seen their clout increase with their growing enfranchisement. Nearly half of the five to seven million Muslims in France (population: 61.4 million) are already citizens. Germany, which began granting citizenship on the basis of birth rather than ancestry in 2000, counts a half-million Muslims among its 82 million citizens, and is adding 160,000 a year. Newly enfranchised “German Turks” gave the incumbent Social Democrat-

Green coalition vital support in last September’s close election.

Turks, Algerians, Moroccans, Tunisians, and Pakistanis came to Europe as invited “guest workers” during the 1950s and 1960s, when European countries wanted to ease their post-war labor shortage. But when recession hit in the 1970s, the workers stayed, often joined by their families. Today, Taspinar notes, the Muslim birth rate is three times the non-Muslim rate. By 2015, if current trends continue, the Muslim population in Europe is expected to double, while the non-Muslim population is projected to shrink by 3.5 percent.

“Whether Brussels, Berlin, Paris, or Washington likes it or not,” concludes Taspinar, “Europe’s Muslim constituencies are likely to become an even more vocal foreign-policy lobby.”

Where Politics Is All Too Local

“Decentralization and Political Parties” by Christopher Sabatini, in *Journal of Democracy* (Apr. 2003), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 800, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Political power has shifted massively to the local level in Latin America in recent decades. New local political parties and leaders have sprung up, neglected wants and needs are being addressed, and many more citizens now feel part of the political process. There’s just one problem: Decentralization has been undermining the established *national* political parties that are critical to the long-term prospects of these countries.

That wasn’t supposed to happen, says Sabatini, senior program officer for Latin America at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington. Take the Andean countries—Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, and Peru. When they adopted decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, providing for the transfer of money and responsibilities from the national governments and for the direct election of mayors and governors, “most decision makers and foreign donors [such as the World Bank and U.S. Agency for International Development] expected to see a reinvigoration of party systems as national parties sought to respond to local constituents, issues, and leaders. In practice, however, national parties have often floundered.”

Latin America’s national political parties

have never been particularly strong. Economic woes and austerity measures after 1986 cost many parties public confidence and many of the patronage jobs they had used to sustain their power. Venezuela’s two major parties, Acción Democrática and COPEI, embraced state decentralization after riots shook Caracas in 1989. In Colombia, leaders hoped that direct election of mayors and governors “would re-legitimize a political system battered by years of civil war.”

But “decentralization struck squarely at long-favored means of maintaining party discipline and cohesion,” Sabatini notes. Local leaders no longer need the help of party higher-ups in the capital to satisfy their constituents or run for higher office. And the creation of thousands of locally elected positions has brought many new politicians, movements, and parties to the fore.

But “the lack of coherent links to national-level issues, institutions, and candidates,” says Sabatini, has made it harder for the national governments to govern and to be held accountable. His remedy: decentralize the national parties themselves, making them better able to meet local demands and establish the missing “links.”