

# Turkish family success story, one of few in Germany



By Celine le Prioux | AFP News - Mon, May 30, 2011

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Turkish-born Germans, whose fathers or grandfathers began arriving in Germany 50 years ago, still find it hard to move up the social ladder and success stories are few.

But one such exception is that of the Aygun family of Berlin.

Mehmet Aygun arrived from the Black Sea coast in the 1970s at a time when Germany's economic boom attracted tens of thousands of low-skilled immigrants, mostly from Turkey.

But instead of working in a factory, Mehmet opened a fast-food restaurant in the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, a working-class area which soon turned into a Turkish hub, slap up against the Wall then dividing East from West Berlin.

Family lore has it he was the first to dream up the doner kebab -- a snack in which wafer-thin strips of meat from a spit are placed in open pitta bread, with salad and lashings of sauce.

This staple of students and late-night revellers has since become a German favourite, as popular as the home-grown currywurst (sausage sprinkled with curry powder).

"There are now more than 15,000 kebab shops in Germany, employing some 74,000 people," according to Tarkan Tasyumruk, president of the Association of Turkish Doner Producers in Europe (ATDID).

In Germany, with a population of some 82 million, some two million doner kebabs are eaten daily, according to ATDID.

For the Aygun family, the humble doner proved a gold mine.

"We serve kebabs 24 hours a day," says 28-year-old Aylin Arslaw who runs one of their restaurants in Berlin.

The Aygun family now own six kebab restaurants in Berlin, and have branched out into the hotel business, creating a chain called "Titanic" -- a name hard to forget -- with pictures of the luxury liner which met an icy death in 1912 displayed in every bedroom.

"The secret of the family's success -- work, and more work," says Aytac Aygun, 24, one of Mehmet's sons, who rarely saw his father at weekends as he was growing up.

"That and the fact that the family sticks together", including those who stayed in Turkey, says Aytac who now runs the family's first Berlin hotel.

The Ayguns have five more hotels in Turkey, including a 600-room establishment in Antalya, on the Mediterranean.

In summer, the place is full of German tourists; in winter it is home to German football teams who go there for training.

Next year, they plan opening a five-star hotel in the German capital.

Aytac believes that any immigrant can make it in Germany.

"This country is full of possibilities," he says.

The young man considers Berlin "home", but he carries a Turkish passport and has not intention of asking for a German one.

"I don't see the point," he says.

In Germany, some 15.6 million people are foreigners or foreign-born, a ratio of about one in five.

The Turkish community exceeds 2.5 million, with 180,000 living in Berlin, the largest Turkish community outside Turkey.

But for many, integration has proved difficult.

And even second and third-generation Turks born in Germany sometimes find it hard to break out from a background of poverty.

For ethnic Germans and ethnic Turks, "opportunities and education are still not yet equal", according to Yunus Ulusoy from the Centre for Turkish Studies and Research into Integration.

"Young people with an immigration background are strongly handicapped when it comes to deciding which vocational training they will get, especially when they have low school grades," Ulusoy said in a study.

Some 30 percent of students of Turkish origin do not have a school leaving certificate, and just 14 percent pass their final secondary school examinations, according to another study by the Berlin Institute for Population and Development.

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