German Islam Conference (DIK):

Interim report on the work of the
working group "Prevention work with youth"

Presentation for the 2nd Plenary Meeting
of the German Islam Conference

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1. Introduction

In its second phase, the German Islam Conference has put the prevention of extremism, radicalisation and social polarisation on its agenda as one of its central topics. Its aim, with the consensus of representatives from all levels of government and representatives of Muslims living in Germany, is to develop practical improvements for living side-by-side in peace and respect. The German Islam Conference has set up the working group "Prevention work with youth" to tackle the various specific aspects of this topic detailed in its programme of work. It has taken on the topic in stages and initially looked at establishing a common understanding of the phenomena of hostility towards Muslims / "anti-Muslim prejudice", anti-Semitism amongst Muslims and "Islamism" / religious extremism amongst Muslims. The result of this work is summarised below in an expanded glossary.

The descriptions chosen to describe the phenomena do not claim to be general descriptions applicable in any other contexts or final definitions of the respective phenomenon. Rather, they form the basis for the ongoing task of the "Prevention work with youth" working group which should enable the group in a second phase to initiate and support specific preventative measures for youth work. This will take into consideration existing experience in the area of prevention of extremism and promoting tolerance amongst young people.

2. Hostility towards Muslims[1]

People in Germany sometimes feel rejected by the majority society because of their (actual or sometimes merely assumed) affiliation with the Muslim religion. This rejection can range from displaying underlying reserve through to massive resentment and go as far as direct exclusion or even verbal attacks or, in isolated cases, violent attacks. It is encountered particularly in schools and in the work environment and is also expressed explicitly on the internet.

 The different attitudes experienced and any related actions can only be appropriately defined with suitably differentiated

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[1] Results of the first meeting of the working group on 6 September 2010.

vocabulary. Nevertheless, it makes sense to find a generic term to make it possible to refer to the overall syndrome in general and to which other specific terms can be related. The "Prevention work with youth" working group of the German Islam Conference has presented various suggestions and has discussed their respective advantages and disadvantages.

The term "Islamophobia" has the advantage of being already well established in the international debate. However, there are two disadvantages with this word: the "phobia" suffix could give the impression that it refers to a mere pathological phenomenon. In addition, it is not entirely clear whether the negative attitude described refers to Islam as a religion or to Muslims themselves. Although there are many overlaps between the two aspects, it is important to keep them separate because the secular constitutional state cannot generally comment on theological issues. It has no authority to decide which image of Islam as a religion is "true", "less true" or is a distorted picture. By contrast, it is one of the state's genuine tasks to represent people living here in Germany and to publicly address sweeping negative perceptions with the aim of overcoming them.

It can be argued in the case of "**hostility to Islam**" that the term is relatively current in German. Linguistically in German, it is close to the terms "hostility towards strangers" or "hostility towards foreigners, each of which describes another phenomenon. However, as in the term "Islamophobia" it remains unclear as to whether the negative attitude refers primarily to Islam as a religion or to the people themselves. Only in the latter case is the secular constitutional state authorised and required to intervene.

The term "**anti-Muslim racism**" has the advantage of making clear from the outset that the issue is not associated with a religion as such but refers to specific people (namely Muslims or people who are considered to be Muslims). Combating this attitude clearly falls within the genuine remit of the secular constitutional state which is also obliged under international law to act against all forms of racism in society. The fact that in the case of Islam as a rule no "biologistic" view points are involved is not an argument against using the racist term. For exclusion on grounds of racism can be based on supposed or actual "cultural" differences if a wall is built between "us" and "the foreigner", so to speak. However, the concept of "anti-Muslim racism" can only be used for the "severe forms" of negative attitudes. Using this phrase in an excessive way

would not only result in hopelessly polarising the public debate but would also be inappropriate in this case. Many people, who perhaps feel a vague uneasiness about Muslims, would surely consider it unjust if they were considered to be almost racist from the outset.

On the other hand, the concept of "**anti-Muslim resentment**" makes it possible to address a very broad range of phenomena. The disadvantage, however, is that the urgency of the problem is conveyed too cautiously. The situation is similar (or perhaps more acute) for terms such as "anti-Muslim behaviour" or "anti-Muslim attitude" because they lose the emotional components contained in "resentment".

Terms such as "**anti-Muslim hatred**" or "hate propaganda" represent a further increase in the level of intensity compared with "anti-Muslim racism". They can therefore only be used for (possible criminal) extreme acts but are not suitable for expressing the entire syndrome.

After long, heated discussions the members of the working group agreed on the working term of "**hostility towards Muslims**". The fact that this term is not yet established in the public debate is seen more of an advantage than as a disadvantage. The term does not have its own "baggage" and could pique curiosity. In a similar way to the already established German term of "hostility towards foreigners" (compare the express recording of offences committed by those hostile to foreigners in the area of politically motivated criminality), it covers a large area of phenomena. On the one hand, it sounds much more severe than "anti-Muslim resentment" and in this respect clearly highlights a political problem. On the other hand, it is softer than "anti-Muslim racism" which can only be used with caution for the reasons already given. Finally, "hostility towards Muslims" has the advantage of setting out clearly at the beginning that it is not a question of resentment towards a religion, but of an inimical attitude towards a specific group of people. Therefore the secular constitutional state is also in the position to and obliged to contribute towards overcoming these attitudes.

But also under the theme of "hostility towards Muslims" the other terms mentioned maintain their meaning. In this way, the diversity of the individual phenomena can and must be addressed within the overall syndrome of hostility towards Muslims with the appropriate terms in order to deal appropriately with the individual phenomena.

- "Anti-Muslim resentment" or "anti-Muslim attitudes" describe a rather vague unease towards Muslims. The fears behind this and which are shared by many people must be brought into the light so that they can be allayed. Therefore, people who are full of various resentments, should express their concerns openly.
- "Racism", by contrast, already exceeds the limits of a legitimate discourse. Racist stigmatisation must not be encouraged but must be rejected (and in extreme cases, if necessary, be subject to criminal penalties). Precisely for this reason therefore, the term "racism" must not be used in an excessive manner under any circumstances.
- "Anti-Muslim hate propaganda" is also subject to criminal penalties. Therefore it is all the more fitting that accusations are appropriate only in extreme cases.

Moreover, the working group agreed that criticism of Islam, as of any religion, i.e. a criticism of the religion itself, is acceptable in a free society and if necessary should be understood as a call for discussion.

3. Anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth[2]

Anti-Semitism and hatred of Israel occurs both in the majority population as well as in migrant groups. It is therefore not a problem specific to Muslims. There are in fact various sources and reasons for anti-Semitic views and hatred of Israel. For example, anti-modernism and its function as an ideology of community belong to the major and universal elements of anti-Semitism in its modern forms. These variants arose in Europe almost contemporaneously with the rise of nation states in the 19th century. Anti-modern positions and the idea of a society to which Jews are apparently opposed are also the core motives of anti-Semitic attitudes amongst Muslims. These are currently to be found amongst Muslim youth and young adults comparatively more often than in the overall population in Germany.

Islam is not a cause of anti-Semitism amongst migrants of Arabic, Turkish or other Muslim backgrounds, even if followers of extremist movements in Islam draw their anti-Semitic positions from

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[2] Results of the second meeting of the working group on 22 November 2010.

specific religious sources to legitimise them. In mobilising and reproducing generalised anti-Israel positions (in contrast to legitimate criticism of Israel) that also provide connecting points for anti-Semitic stereotypes, the Middle East conflict plays an important role amongst Muslims much more often. Foreign media are important multipliers in this regard. Anger against and hatred of "the Jews" or the state of Israel also exists amongst Muslim youth who have little direct involvement with the conflict in the Middle East.

Having a common idea of an enemy such as Israel or "the Jews" can convey a sense of belonging to a group to young people and young adults. This is particularly true if they do not feel sufficiently acknowledged in society. Young adults and youth who perceive themselves as being weak in their everyday lives feel stronger by denouncing and putting down other people (in this case the Jews). In the final analysis, sometimes a self-biased victim perspective explains and excuses one's own situation and absolves one from one's own responsibility. "The Jews" can then always fulfil the role of scapegoat if there is already a tradition of latent and openly anti-Semitic stereotypes. By fulfilling these functions, anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth does not differ from anti-Semitism in other contexts where young people are involved.

According to scientific evidence, having a steadfast anti-Semitic world view is somewhat rare amongst Muslim youth. Therefore, possible approaches for pedagogical intervention and prevention of anti-Semitism include:

- supporting media literacy;
- analysis of the Middle East conflict from various angles;
- a critical and general analysis of community ideologies
     i.e. thinking in terms of "us" and "them"
- addressing Muslim youth in a religious manner. Religion can also help to dismantle concepts of the enemy and to open doors to a tolerant concept of the world and its people;
- creating a balance in the pedagogical encounter between the necessary recognition of young people and clear boundaries/confrontation to anti-Semitic and other positions that disparage people;
- the corresponding continuing and further education of teachers and youth leaders.

As part of its work with the issue of anti-Semitism, the German Islam Conference's "Prevention work with young people" working group looked carefully at the terms "**Islamic**" and "**Muslim anti-Semitism**",

"Islamised anti-Semitism" and "***anti-Semitism in the migrant society***". As the German Islam Conference is looking at the topic of anti-Semitism with the aim of launching projects and initiatives that take specific causes into account to prevent anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth, the term "**anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth**" appears as the most usable working title for the working group's further endeavours in respect of the issue described here.

4. Islamism / religious extremism amongst Muslims[3]

Issues

Religious extremism is not restricted to one specific religion. The German Islam Conference's "Prevention work with youth" working group is concentrating in this area on the types of Islamic extremism. An effective protection of our constitution requires as close a definition as possible of the issues that are directed against the German legal and constitutional order and those which are still within the bounds of what is deemed permissible and must be the subject of social discourse. This is also true for the boundaries between Islam as a religion and its instrumentalisation in the sense of a politically extreme ideology that focuses on a special understanding of Islam against the free democratic order of our nation and whose aim it is to replace the whole national and social system with a totalitarian system based on this special understanding of Islam.

The central characteristic of this ideology is the absolute, religiously legitimised claim to power made by its followers. According to their understanding of unity between the religious and political sphere ("al islam din wa daula"), the teachings of Islam offer answers to all the questions posed by private and public life and should therefore also determine the whole social and state order. Islamic law (sharia) is seen as the central source of legislation. In this context, one should note that "sharia" as a complex system of Islamic religious and legal standards includes numerous matters that are compatible with the German constitutional and legal system (e.g. concerning practice of religion, which enjoys the protection of the generally applicable freedom of worship). However, there are

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[3] Outcomes from the third and fourth meeting of the working group on 24 January and 28 February 2011.

also interpretations which conflict with the German constitution. In regard to using the term "sharia", we must examine precisely if the specific content and basic interpretations abide within the framework of the German legal and constitutional system or are in conflict with it.

This ideology that aims to set up a religiously legitimised system of power conflicts with the free democratic structure of the Basic Law specified by the Federal Constitutional Court. For followers of this ideology reject central constitutional principles, such as, above all, the sovereignty of the people, the separation of powers and central human rights also specified in the Basic Law, and strive for their abolition.

The ideology described above is heterogenous in itself and not necessarily associated with exercising violence. Its spectrum ranges from terrorism to "legalistic" Islamism, striving for long-term change of power structures and in doing so then fully utilising legal options (see below for general terminology).

For the ongoing work of the working group, it is important to differentiate which of the following examples are variants of this ideology and which are not.

This demarcation seems to be somewhat important in respect of terminology such as "***Islamic fundamentalism"*** or in reference to the various movements within ***"Salafism",*** which can be found in both non-political and political guises, and recently in terrorist guises, too. Consequently, Salafism also represents a manifestation of the ideology described above if its followers strive with an activist approach to penetrate society and it is organised against a free democratic system. It goes without saying that every religious community may claim to having the exclusive truth. A way of behaving based on a particular understanding of religion that claims the exclusive sovereignty of interpretation for social interaction and attempts to enforce it is, however, not acceptable within the constitutional order of the Basic Law.

Various forms of Islamic "traditionalism" that adhere to an interpretation of Islamic standards established for centuries are not manifestations of the ideology described above because they do not make a claim to national power, and respect the given legal and constitutional system.

Term

Whilst within the German Islam Conference there is, generally speaking, agreement as to which behaviours derived from Islamic sources are no longer acceptable on legal grounds, there is not yet to date any agreement about what these should reasonably be called.

In particular from the state's point of view and in large areas of academia and public life, the term "**Islamism**" has become the norm in recent decades for the ideology described and is widely established. Frequently the terms "**Islamic**" and "**Islamist** extremism" are used synonymously At the same time it allows a clear distinction between the ideology of "Islamism" and the religion of Islam. This could also be advantageous to Muslims themselves if used differently.

The term "Islamism" is particularly controversial amongst Muslims and is fiercely rejected by some of them. According to them there is no adequate differentiation made in its use by the public and in the media. In addition, the suffix "ism" does not only describe ideologies but also religions, for example. Moreover, the term connects the term "Islam" - contrary to its own understanding of religion - with extremism and violence. Instead, the term "religious extremism amongst Muslims" was proposed by some Muslim participants, particularly Muslim associations, in the working group.

Result

Agreement was reached amongst the participants of the working group concerning phenomena and definitions of the ideology described above. As a result an important basis has been achieved for the ongoing work of the working group "Prevention work with youth". By contrast, it appears it is less important that to date a consensus concerning the name of ideology has not been achieved.