The German Islam Conference

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

Presentation for the Plenary Meeting of the German Islam Conference

April 19, 2012

Berlin
1. Preamble

Preventing extremism, radicalisation and social polarisation is one of the key topic areas under discussion by the German Islam Conference (DIK). The DIK working group, "Prevention work with youth", set up for this purpose and which has been meeting since September 2010, is taking the approach of looking at these phenomena simultaneously and is looking at the topics of anti-Muslim prejudice, anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth and Islamism in the sense of religious extremism amongst Muslims. The working group's objective is not only to develop practical recommendations by 2013 but also to initiate and support preventative measures for youth work in particular. The key topic area of prevention will be the focus of the DIK plenary meeting in 2013.

The following report builds on the Interim Report produced by the working group for the DIK plenary meeting on 29 March 2011 (Reports see www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de). The working group completed the second phase of its three-stage working programme in its meetings held between the DIK plenary meetings in 2011 and 2012. In this phase, the working group was concerned with approaches to prevention work. It also developed an overview of existing measures.

The following comments do not claim to be general descriptions or exhaustive definitions rather they summarise the most important outcomes of past meetings from the working group's point of view and thus form the basis for the working group's ongoing activity.

2. Terminology and approaches to prevention work

The term "prevention" is multi-layered. "Prevention" in common usage is only used if measures concentrate on a group of people, e.g. a particular group of young people, in which an actual risk of deviant behaviour can already be detected (secondary or selective prevention). Added to this are measures that are aimed at already radicalised individuals with the aim of de-radicalising them (indicated or tertiary prevention).
In contrast, there is the broad range of measures in "universal" or "primary" prevention that relate to risks which are assumed or probable. Many measures in this area have, therefore, a universally supporting role and benefit all youth and not just one specific group. They directly enforce skills and support the ability to deal with conflicts and complex problems with rationality and with empathy. During the process of developing measures, one aspect to note is that these measures aim to reduce risk factors and strengthen protection factors on the one hand and that their effectiveness can be verified on the other.

In this context it must be mentioned that the use of the term "prevention" can result in negative reactions from potential providers of measures and target groups as it always indicates an actual or assumed risk. In particular, in universally preventative measures aimed at religious extremism amongst Muslim youth the impression can be given that simply belonging to Islam can be a risk.

- Against this background the working group has reached the following conclusions:

  1. In the universally preventative area in particular the use of terms such as "promote" or "strengthen" is often more appropriate than the use of the term "prevention" because "promote" or "strengthen" do not label the target groups as risk groups and often describe the specific objectives of the measures more clearly. In order to motivate potential providers and target groups to work on projects more actively, the working group recommends that in general positive terms be used when setting goals.

  2. Based on its broad structure (see www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de), the working group will place its own focus of activity particularly on measures that have a universally supporting character - which also includes supporting participation - and on training / education, with the long-term aim of preventing the three phenomena it has discussed.

  3. Evaluation of measures

In the period between the two DIK plenary meetings of 2011 and 2012, the working group discussed various approaches of prevention work with youth using
examples of measures and programmes at government, regional and local authority level. In addition, the associations involved in the working group and selected civil society organisations presented their activities, including the activities of mosque communities carried out by the Muslim umbrella groups DITIB, VIKZ, IGBD and ZMaD [Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs, Association of Islamic Cultural Centres, Islamic Community of Bosnians in Germany and the Central Council of Moroccans in Germany]. In this context, the work of the Clearing Office of Prevention Co-operation, located in the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, was discussed. It had been set up as an initiative of the German Islam Conference’s former Security discussion group in the previous legislative period with the purpose of supporting co-operation between security authorities and Muslim organisations. In the period July to September 2011 a survey was also carried out concerning the projects and measures in prevention work looking at the phenomena tackled by the working group.

Achieving a full overview of existing programmes and measures of the prevention work carried out with young people in the areas of anti-Muslim prejudice, anti-Semitism and Islamic extremism - if at all possible - involves an enormous amount of effort. Independently of this, an evaluation will always be incomplete due to the varying use of the term prevention when looking at youth work.

- In the time and with the resources available the working group has provided the best possible overview. Based on this information, the following central points are noted with a view to universally preventative measures, in the area of youth in particular:

1. Numerous stakeholders and support structures have created a heterogenous project landscape in accordance with Germany’s federal structure. This has the advantage that at short notice detailed responses can be made to current, various regional and local or target group-specific needs. In addition, projects have the option of trying out new methods. The co-existence of numerous measures can however also have disadvantages. It can be problematic in relation to sustainability and to potential synergies when a cross-regional exchange concerning the findings and results achieved (brochures, handouts, etc.) in the projects does not take place.
Irrespective of this is the fact that long-term sustainable effects can be achieved mainly through the intercultural openness of school and extracurricular work.

2. Youth work providers and providers of political education work for young people are frequently confronted with the question of how to reach young people in general and Muslim youth in particular. In this context, the projects known to the working group favour directly addressing young people and their parents or addressing other relevant socialisation multipliers within the area of school (e.g. teachers or representatives of school administration and government) on the one hand, and those who operate outside the remit of school (e.g. social workers) on the other. By contrast, the approach of working with representatives of peer groups has rarely been taken. This is seen in practice as a promising method of reaching young people effectively. Using the internet including social networks and television as resources to reach target groups of young people effectively has been relatively weak so far.

3. To date, Muslim (youth) organisations are only recognised in a few cases as independent providers of youth or political education work. And in only a few cases are they integrated in existing higher level structures of youth and political education work, such as the Association of Alevi Youth in Germany (BDAJ) within the German Federal Youth Council. Thus the conditions for promoting youth work at federal level for example are primarily focused on traditional youth associations. At the same time, there is frequently a lack of a sufficient qualified staff in Muslim (youth) organisations in Germany as is also the case in many migrant organisations. In addition, they have fewer networks to allow them to use existing programmes in political education work. The associations co-operating in the working group,

---

1 Peer groups are groups with members of a similar age, usually with similar backgrounds and often of the same sex. Peer groups undertake important socialisation tasks with children and youth when leaving the parental home, for example.
AABF, DITIB, TGD and VIKZ have already been able to expand their activities in the area of preventative/supportive youth work and in organisational qualification, also with the help of project-related funding from the government.

4. **Anti-Muslim prejudice** is only just beginning to become a topic of specific topic-related prevention work. This also involves preventing anti-Muslim prejudice by promoting positive attitudes in the majority society towards cultural and religious diversity and specifically in relation to Muslims. Also with regard to measures against right-wing extremism sporadic work has also only just begun in looking at "anti-Islamisation campaigns" in right-wing extremist parties and groups. According to their own information, Muslim organisations' own existing measures, for example, raising awareness, do not reach the general public or the relevant multipliers to an adequate degree. In addition it should also be noted that beyond the specific topic-related prevention work addressed here, the existing anti-racist, intercultural, interreligious and diversity-promoting (project) work often includes the area of anti-Muslim prejudice.

5. **Anti-Semitism** in the migration society and amongst Muslims with a migrant background has been a topic of target-group specific and practical prevention work at project levels for some years now. Above all, some specialised civil society organisations in political education have gained experience in this area. The materials produced as part of these projects however appear not to have been widely used throughout the country in schools or out of school contexts. In addition, "Anti-Semitism in Germany", a report which was published in November 2011 by the Independent Expert Group on Anti-Semitism confirmed that to date there was no reliable scientific evidence for the actual dissemination of anti-Semitic stereotypes amongst Muslims.

6. **Islamism meaning religious extremism amongst Muslims** has become an important issue in practical prevention work, above all since 2001, and constitutes a majority of the preventative measures related to Islam. Here, in the preventative areas, measures can be found that deal with sensitisation, early recognition and education approaches to tolerance and co-operation between Muslims and the security authorities. In contrast, measures of public, argued discussion with religious extremist positions both amongst Muslims
and Salafists are comparably rare. Muslim organisations can offer a particularly valuable contribution in this context, but only in isolated cases to date have they developed measures that go beyond the sphere of their own communities and focus on Muslims and Muslim youth in general.

Against this background, the working group has reached the following conclusions for its own work in the future.

7. The working group will continue to deal with the issues related to the phenomena of anti-Muslim prejudice, anti-Semitism and Islamism/religious extremism amongst Muslims. In doing so, the working group will particularly tackle anti-Muslim prejudice - also in view of other existing initiatives in the other two areas specified outside the remit of the German Islam Conference.

8. Until the Plenary Meeting in 2013, the Prevention working group will initiate practical measures for the three specified areas taking the above-mentioned focus into consideration. These are intended to represent added value to existing projects and to reflect the national character of the German Islam Conference. The findings specified in the evaluation will flow into the design of these measures.