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How “Islamic State” Recruits Fighters in Germany Approaches to Effectively Preventing Islamist Radicalization

Key Points

There are over 7,000 Salafists living in Germany. Over 700 people have travelled to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant “ISIL”- controlled territory in Syria and Iraq from Germany, and over 100 have died there. The number of “ISIL” returnees is on the rise.

The reasons for joining “ISIL” are varied. They can be of a psychological, political, sociological or ideological nature. Many women and converts are joining “ISIL” from Germany.

In Germany, “ISIL” is recruiting via the Internet, in the environment of some mosques as well as in youth, leisure, sports and penal organizations and institutions. Salafism is a dynamic youth and protest movement. It is important to have a coordinated program for preventing Islamist radicalization. A historical-critical exegesis of the Quran, an expansion of Islamic religious education in schools, increased use of German as the medium in which sermons are delivered in mosques, employment of more Muslim chaplains, as well as websites aimed at young people that promote tolerant Islam can counter the alarming trend of increasing Islamist radicalization.

“A crucial factor to take into consideration before starting to prepare yourself is to know yourself. More important than knowing who you are, is knowing what you can do and what you cannot do”. This exhortation does not represent words of wisdom from a philosophical textbook or an excerpt from one of the numerous books giving advice on how to live a good life in an increasingly complex world.

It is a section from an e-book that has been circulating on the Internet for months : “Hijrah to the Islamic State – What to Pack up, Who to Contact, Where to Go : Stories & more”. The Hijrah is familiar to all Muslims and the expert public as it refers to the migration of the Islamic prophet Muhammad and his early companions from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD. In Islam, the Hijrah also marks the beginning of the Islamic era and is of great significance to the 1.4 to 1.6 billion Muslims (umma) around the world. It is therefore not surprising that the self-styled caliph of the terror organization “Islamic State” (IS), Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, makes reference to the Hijrah as a religious element and that “IS” purposefully evokes religious feelings in its propaganda strategy to recruit new followers. In May 2015, Al-Baghdadi addressed the public in a video message, calling upon all Muslims to emigrate to “ISIL” territory in Syria and Iraq – in other words to follow the example of the Hijrah by leaving behind their current lives and joining “ISIL” – or alternatively “to fight in their country, wherever that may be”.

An online “Travel Guide” gives advice on how to travel to “ISIL”-controlled territory

The "Travel Guide to the Islamic State", which is available online as an e-book in English, is intended to provide useful tips for travelling to "ISIL" territory and does so in perfidiously concrete fashion. An "ISIL" follower who had made the trip to Syria describes his "emigration" to "ISIL" territory and provides practical tips that people should bear in mind before setting off. The distance from the airport in the Turkish city of Şanlıurfa to Ar-Raqqa, the secret capital of the so-called Islamic State in Syria, is stated precisely as 127.9 kilometers. There are detailed advice ranging from what to pack before setting off to rules of behavior when entering "ISIL" territory. A perusal of this travel brochure gives a frightening insight into the skills used by "ISIL" to attract new followers and the effects these recruitment strategies have in Germany as well.

This paper analyses current developments of the Islamist potential in Germany and provides concrete suggestions on potential preventative strategies to avoid a further escalation of Islamist tendencies in Germany.

Islamism is a political ideology with numerous strains

First of all, one needs to differentiate clearly between Islam and Islamism. While Islam generally advocates a holistic approach and can therefore be seen not only as a monotheistic religion but also as an ideology and a concept of law and is generally understood by Muslims to be predestined to become the all-encompassing and ultimate religion of all people, the following definition represents a fundamental description of the phenomenon of Islamism: "Islamism begins where religious Islamic precepts and norms are interpreted as binding rules for political action. Islamism is a political ideology, which claims to be universally valid and legitimizes the use of violence under certain circumstances in order to realize goals defined as 'Islamic'." In the same way as there is no one Islam, there is no single phenomenon of Islamism. While a differentiated and objective examination of the various Islamic and Islamist movements may be laborious, it is nonetheless necessary. This is because the majority of Muslims condemn acts motivated by Islamism, and in most of the countries of the predominantly Muslim regions, the majority of the victims of Islamists are, in fact, Muslims.

While there are numerous different Islamist movements and manifestations, one common feature is the rejection of national sovereignty and strict adherence to the Islamic holy texts as representing God's commands that must not be questioned. Islam expert Christine Schirrmacher states: "But when the way of life of 7th century Arab society, the model provided by Muhammad and the interpretation by sharia scholars living up to the 10th century are declared to be the generally applicable ideal for the present day, which has to be reinstated by political means, that is an ideological and totalitarian demand. Such political Islam is not compatible with democracy."

Salafist movements show the most dynamic development of the different forms of Islamism

One manifestation of Islamism, and the one that is currently showing the fastest rate of growth, is Salafism. Its name refers back to the "pious predecessors" (as-salaf as-salih) – the first three generations of Muslims – and it aspires to a particularly strict way of life modeled on that of the early period of Islam. As in Islamism in general, there are essentially three groupings in Salafism as well. Purist Islamists/Salafists themselves live according to the fundamental rules of sharia (a collation of the Quran and the Sunnah, i.e. the corpus of the reports on the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, which have not been combined in a consistent overall body of text), but are largely apolitical and opposed to militancy. Political Islamists/Salafists seek to bring about a turning away from democracy and the establishment of a theocratic form of government. Jihadist Islamists/Salafists

form the smallest grouping, but a particularly dangerous one because of their militant intentions. The distinctions between these three forms of Islamism/ Salafism are somewhat fluid. While Islamism does not necessarily entail violence, a purist or quietist or even political Islamic attitude by itself embodies antidemocratic thinking. Its proponents reject the free and democratic constitutional system and despise authorities representing the rule of law.

The "ISIL Travel Guide" provides practical tips and advice on making the trip – the messaging service Twitter plays an important role

The 50-page "ISIL Travel Guide" mentioned above, which journalists have already dubbed "Lonely Planet: Islamic State", describes in detail what would-be emigrants should bear in mind and relates the experiences made by others, including some women, who have already travelled from the UK, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. The mere fact that the document has been published in English illustrates that it is intended for an international audience – the travel guide is meant to be accessible anywhere in the world and understood by all. The content provides some important background information about the "ISIL" rationale and the methods used to try and attract new recruits.

One specific piece of advice, for instance, is that they should not discuss the planned trip to "ISIL" territory with family members before setting off so as not to attract attention and that it is better to book a return ticket to a nearby holiday destination such as Greece or Spain. Only then should they book another ticket to Turkey, from where they can then travel on to Syria via the Turkish-Syrian border town of Akçakale. And they would need to expect to have to pay a bribe to Turkish border guards. The traveller should also wear unremarkable clothes – preferably "casual" clothes – and avoid looking religious so as not to attract attention unnecessarily in Turkey. The advice takes on a particularly cynical tone when describing what to pack for the journey to "ISIL" territory. The "brother", who has made the trip already and wishes to recruit new "ISIL" followers by describing his experiences and is even mentioned by name with his Twitter account for potential queries, advises people to take care to pack the most important pieces of equipment. Besides clothing and toiletries, people should also take along a solar charger for the journey, for instance, as electricity regularly is a big problem in "ISIL" territory. More crucial than the practical advice on entering Turkey, on suitable places to stay (particularly for single women travellers) and on ways of making contact with potential people smugglers – this could be done most safely by using Twitter – the actual message of this dubious travel guide is this: each and everyone is welcome in the territory of the "Islamic State" as long as they follow the Salafist ideology of "ISIL" unconditionally and are prepared to serve the Islamist cause.

The "ISIL" message is simple: everybody is needed, come and join us!

By being aware of their strengths and weaknesses, all those willing to emigrate would make a direct contribution to help the "ISIL" succeed through their skills. At one point, the author stresses explicitly that while "ISIL" does need fighters and soldiers, the Islamic state of the time of the Prophet Mohammad was not built solely by fighters and warriors, but complemented and thereby made to prosper by merchants, women and children, as well as by people with different skills. That is a model that one should try and emulate. Engineers, doctors and other professionals are needed to consolidate and advance the building of the Islamic state. The latest sociological findings about the makeup of the departing "ISIL" followers do, in fact, indicate that those setting off to Syria and Iraq are by no means restricted to sympathizers from poorly educated sections of society.

There is no mention in the pamphlet of the extent of the abductions, intimidation, raping and killing endemic in the lived reality in the areas controlled by the terror

organization "ISIL" in Syria and Iraq and of the ruthlessness with which opponents are treated. In July 2015, 26-year-old Ebrahim B., who had returned to Germany from "ISIL"-controlled territory in Syria and has since been arrested, attracted attention in an interview with the ARD program Panorama. He summarized his three-month stint in "ISIL" war territory as follows: "If you go there, you're either dead or dead." According to him, you only have the choice of becoming a fighter or a suicide bomber in "ISIL" territory and that as a European jihadist in particular you are merely cannon fodder. New arrivals in "ISIL"-controlled territory would have their passports as well as all their personal possessions taken away. And if there was any suspicion that the person may be a Western spy, they would be executed as a warning to others.

In Germany, over 43,000 people are thought to be Islamists – the majority of them legalistic Islamists

The proliferation of the booklet "Hijrah to the Islamic State" and the picture painted by the "ISIL" returnee correspond depressingly to the figures of the latest Report on the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutzbericht) published in the summer of 2015. According to the BfV, the domestic intelligence service of the Federal Republic of Germany, there were 43,890 persons living in Germany at the end of 2014 who could be considered potential Islamists – an increase of 1.6 per cent on the previous year and of 3.14 per cent on 2012. While the number already stood at 42,550 in 2012 and rose to 43,190 in 2013, it increased by a further 700 in 2014. This worrying trend appears to be continuing as a result of the ongoing atrocities perpetrated by the terror organization "ISIL". As the high level of brutality, intransigence and radicalness of "ISIL" is attractive particularly to young would-be emigrants, the pulling power is likely to increase with every further act of destruction of historic sites by "IS" in countries of the Middle East and with every further inhumane atrocity perpetrated by the terror organisation. To prevent this, it will require a concerted, country-wide prevention strategy in order to be able to sustainably counter an increase in Islamist machinations in Germany.

The figures from the BfV provide a clear picture. Most of the over 43,000 Islamists in Germany are considered to be legalists. Legalistic Islamists officially observe law and order, but they do promote Islamic thinking. Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görü e.V. (IGMG) including its affiliated associations is considered to represent the largest group of legalistic Islamists in Germany; its membership has remained constant at approximately 31,000 for several years. However, the authors of the Report on the Protection of the Constitution stress that IGMG is currently undergoing a process of change and that not all its members have Islamist views. That said, the actual number of followers of the Milli Görüş movement in Germany is probably far higher than the official membership of 31,000 as not all visitors of the over 300 IGMG mosques in Germany officially register as members and the BfV does not appear to have included sympathizers in its figures either. Associations with links to the Muslim Brotherhood are also amongst the legalistic Islamists in Germany. The organization Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland (ZMD) acts as the umbrella organization for many such associations, including Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (IGD), for instance. While legalistic Islamists do not call for violent acts and purport to be against militancy, their engagement remains driven by an Islamist and therefore anti-constitutional world view.

There are over 7000 Salafists living in Germany – and the number is still rising.

One particularly worrying trend is the steady rise in the number of people with a Salafist affiliation in Germany. Since 2012 until the beginning of 2015, the number has increased from 4,500 to over 7,000, and it is still rising. The Salafist ideology, which is becoming increasingly popular among German Islamists, harks back to the supposed "golden age" of Islam. Accordingly, Salafist movements strive to establish

a Muslim society modeled on the first community of Medina from 622 AD on a global scale. Their ultimate goal is to merge religion and state (din wa daula) on the basis of God's unchanging law, the sharia. The ideas underlying the mind-set dramatically. While the national security authorities were aware of 270 people departing Germany in January 2014, the number had risen as high as 600 by January 2015 – an increase of 122 per cent. These are official figures from the BfV. When one considers the detailed description of possible travel scenarios in the "ISIL" travel guide and the routes described or recommended in it, which involve crossing third states masked as holiday destinations to get to Turkey to then travel on to Syria, one can assume that the number of undetected cases of people traveling from Germany to "ISIL"-controlled areas is considerably higher than the officially recorded number. In July 2015, the German Minister of the Interior assumed that the number of people departing Germany for "ISIL" – controlled territory had already exceeded 700. In August, reports emerged that over 100 persons from Germany had already lost their lives for the "ISIL" cause. These figures, which are still on the rise, prompted the president of the BKA, the Federal Criminal Police Office, to give the following prognosis in the spring of 2015: "If the current trend continues, we may see 1000 jihadists departing the country within a year".

Salafism is considered a dynamic youth and protest movement

Even though there has been no empirical study conducted about the typology of the emigrants, there are indications of varying motivation. Besides people acting out of ideological conviction, who justify their decision to travel on the basis of religious principles, there are also adventurers and criminals who want to live out their phantasies about killing and violent acts in "ISIL"-controlled territory with impunity. There are further a small number of people who appear to wish to travel to Syria and Iraq for humanitarian or solidarity reasons in order to assist their "siblings in faith" in the civil war there. Yet others can be classed as hangers-on, who are hoping that their emigration will help them satisfy their wish for a feeling of comradeship and belonging and a sense of security as well as giving meaning to their lives; some of these people also consider themselves part of an Islamic avant-garde or of a superior generation. The sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani recognizes the characteristics of a youth and protest movement in Salafism, which he believes to be attractive to many young people because of the way it combines asceticism with nostalgia. He has the following to say on this subject: "A strict dress code, regulation of sexuality and anti-consumerism – to our eyes that should be pure poison to a youth movement, but today, asceticism and nostalgia combined with a self-confident collective demeanor denote rebellion." In addition, the impression of increasing Islamophobia in Western societies appears to be driving young people in particular into the arms of Islamist extremists.

The national security authorities work on the assumption that at least a third of the persons departing Germany for "ISIL" territory have returned to Germany by now. These returnees could constitute a further threat to Germany's security situation. As it is, there is legitimate concern about certain circles who consider Germany a safe haven and fertile ground for recruiting new members.

Over 700 people have left Germany to travel to "ISIL"-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq – including a large number of converts and women

It is also interesting to see that those departing from Germany are not exclusively "German-born Muslim males with a migration background", but that some 10 per cent are converts and further 10 per cent women. The rise in the number of women making the trip is particularly significant. There are various reasons motivating women to take the decision to leave. Many – and young women in particular – make a very conscious and voluntary decision to go and live in "ISIL"-controlled territory at the side of a mujahidin, a fighter for God, and submit themselves unconditionally to

the supposed rules of nascent Islamic society of the early 7th century. This phenomenon, frequently referred to with the term “jihadi brides”, is resulting in ever greater numbers of young girls from Germany and other European countries taking the decision to abandon their existing environment and travel to Syria. Most initially make contact via social media and other online digital plat-forms. Without alerting those in their immediate surroundings, young girls abandon their existing lives and travel to Turkey overnight, from where they then proceed secretly to Syria. The widely publicized picture of a seemingly strong “ISIL” follower fighting fearlessly for the good cause, the feeling of “being-accepted-as-you-are” (including the hijab and living your life according to Muslim principles) as well as clear rules for living your life according to the principles of sharia, all this appears to have added to the attraction for many girls who have made the journey. Women living at the side of “ISIL” fighters who get killed also gain fame and respect within the Islamist scene as widows of supposed martyrs. Within the “ISIL” structure, women probably also have special responsibility for recruiting further women, for “education” work and for professionalizing the propaganda activities. Holger Münch, president of the BKA, the Federal Criminal Police Office, stated in July 2015 that one had to assume that at least 100 women had left Germany to join “ISIL”.

Without wishing to overdramatize the situation, one can speak of a new dimension of Islamist activities in Germany. Never before has the number of people forming part of the Islamist potential in Germany been so high ; the number of Salafist Islamists in Germany has experienced a significant increase of 55 per cent over three years, and the number of people travelling to Syria and Iraq from Germany has risen dramatically with an increase of 122 per cent within one year. The BfV is right when it points out that ““ISIL” is pursuing a global agenda” and is by no means limiting itself to the Islamic world in its activities and recruitment efforts. “ISIL” is clearly focusing its propaganda and recruitment activities on Europe and Germany. According to the BfV, the terror organization has “developed into the most important port of call for would-be jihadis from Germany”. Yet another rea-son why there is an urgent need for devising a comprehensive concept for preventing Islamist radicalization. The great majority of approaches to date have been too vague, and hardly any empirical investigations have been carried out to examine their chances of success.

A national agenda for countering Islamism is crucial: five potential courses of action.

The following ideas for a successful strategy are intended to further a debate that needs to take place in society on how to prevent the number of Islamist followers in Germany from rising further.

1. Promote a historical-critical exegesis of the Quran

One central challenge for Islamic theology is the development of a historical-critical exegesis of the Quran so that misguided extremists will no longer be able to justify their atrocities with the Muslims’ holy texts. At the center of such historical-critical work there should be efforts to place the passed-down written records of Islamic tradition into the context of their formation, both in place and in time. It should be possible to interpret passed-down statements from the early seventh century for application to societies of the 21st century. Of course, the initiative for such textual criticism of the Quran within Islam will have to come from Muslims. Some isolated examples of such interpretation of the Quran already exist in the Muslim world.

That said, one should be permitted to state the hope that departments of Islamic theology at German universities in particular will focus on this task and devote greater resources to it. Concerted efforts must be made to support voices within Islamic theology circles who are engaged in such historical-critical exegesis of the Quran and to defend them against the partly dogmatic arguments of the critics from

the Islamic associations. The head of the Centre for Islamic Theology at Münster University, Professor Mouhanad Khorchide, and the Islam scholar Abdel-Hakim Ourghi from Freiburg have been promoting an open-minded interpretation of Islamic texts for years.

After the attacks on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo and on a Jewish super-market chain in early January, which were motivated by Islamist ideology, Khorchide stated that he did not rate “the statement that Islam and Islamism have nothing to do with each other” and demanded that Islamic theology should take a more critical look at parts of Islamic tradition that were totally outdated. For his part, Ourghi, who is a recognized Quran expert, explained: “Ever since the eighth century, attempts have been made to reform Islam, but the reformers frequently paid for their efforts with their lives. A reform in the European context requires a historical-critical reading of these sources, for instance to question Islam’s claim for dominance and to revitalize its ethical and humanistic force.”

As long as it is impossible to discuss problematic sections of Islamic texts and these have not been subjected to a historical-critical analysis, there will always be religious illiterates who misinterpret the texts (intentionally) in order to misuse them for their extremist purposes. One can only concur with Ourghi’s demand that the “freedom of the individual must be firmly established as “summum bonum” (highest good) in Islam as well” and that consequently “constructive criticism of the religion (...) (should) no longer be considered an insult so that Muslims will no longer be pushed unwittingly into the role of victim”. The fact that constructive criticism of religions is permitted is considered a matter of course in a secular constitutional state and is consequently also in the interest of Muslims themselves. There is basically a need for raising awareness about Islam’s diversity. As long as the heterogeneity of Islamic schools of thought and the different manifestations of Islamic interpretations of past centuries are not being openly discussed, there will be room for a perverted interpretation of Islam.

2. Expand Islamic religious education and interreligious projects at schools

The majority of the Islamists/Salafists taking the trip from Germany to “ISIL”-controlled territory can be described as religious illiterates. Only very few of them appear to be capable of understanding the complexity of the Islamic texts in their entirety – let alone in Arabic, the holy language of Islam. As the Salafist movements tend to operate using the local language (French in France and German in Germany), such movements are finding it easy to convert young people to their cause using simple – supposedly religious – messages.

The introduction of religious education geared towards Muslim pupils by teaching staff educated in Germany and in the German language is therefore a necessary step in taking preventative action against a strengthening of Islamist movements. Young Muslims in particular must be encouraged to engage in a considered, historical-critical interpretation of their faith and become familiar with the diversity of branches of Islam and different possible interpretations. Approaching their religion confidently and being able to articulate opinions about Islamic principles of faith as well as being familiar with the theological content of Islam will make young people more self-assured when faced with potential recruitment attempts by Islamists.

It will also strengthen the important feeling that Muslims too are entitled to religious education in German schools and are therefore granted opportunities to discuss religious issues at school like their Christian and Jewish fellow pupils. Islamic religious education at German schools can also prevent contents that are not in accordance with the free and democratic constitutional system being taught in dubious backstreet mosques. Greater efforts can also be made to enhance competences in interreligious dialogue in order to stress the numerous common

elements of the monotheistic religions. However, as education policy is a matter dealt with at the federal state level in Germany, there are large differences in the 16 federal states where Islamic teaching is concerned. States such as Hesse and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) have been offering Islamic religious education at schools for a number of years. In NRW, parents submit an application, with the minimum class size being 12. In the new federal states, there has so far not been any demand for Islamic religious education on account of the low numbers of Muslim residents.

One remaining question is which body can act as contact for the state with respect to drawing up the curriculum for Islamic religious education. As Islam does not have structures comparable to those in Christian Churches and the great heterogeneity of Islam is also evident in Germany (74% Sunni, 13% Alevites, 7% Shia), it is difficult to identify partners with legitimisation to take part in the collaboration. With the exception of Ahmaddiya-Gemeinde, which is recognized as a statutory corporation (KdöR) in Hesse and Hamburg, no Islamic communities recognized in Germany have attained that status. The obvious route is therefore to cooperate even more strongly than before with scholars from the departments of Islamic theology at the universities when drawing up the curriculum. One ideal partner to involve in the work on the curriculum for Islamic religious education in schools would be "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Islamisch-Theologische Studien" (DEGITS), which was founded in June 2015 and comprises Muslim scholars from all universities in Germany where Islamic theology is taught.

In any case, in a society that is becoming increasingly more heterogeneous in terms of people's religion and ethnicity, it makes sense to think about how basic knowledge about Islam could be conveyed in existing subjects, such as Social Studies (German: Gemeinschaftskunde). That would be a way to reduce prejudice and counter Islamophobic attitudes in Germany.

3. Work towards establishing use of German to deliver sermons in mosques as a matter of course

Arabic is the holy language of Islam. According to Islamic tradition, the uncreated Quran came down to the Prophet Muhammad from Allah directly in Arabic. To Islamic thinking, the beauty and complexity of the Arabic Quran by themselves are proof of Allah's existence. Throughout the predominantly Muslim regions of the world, recitation of the Quran in Arabic and the muezzin's call for prayer in Arabic are considered links joining all Muslims. Arabic is therefore to be acknowledged unquestioningly as the language of Islamic practice.

The majority of the 2000 Islamic prayer rooms in Germany are organized along ethnic-cultural lines under various umbrella associations. The sermons in the DITIB mosques with links to Turkey, for instance, are mostly delivered in Turkish and those in mosques linked to the ZMD mostly in Bosnian or Arabic. The contents of the sermons dictated by the traditional and mostly conservative associations overwhelmingly fail to take sufficient account of the changed social reality in Germany.

Particularly third-generation Muslims living in Germany see themselves as German citizens of Muslim faith and therefore rightly as a natural part of Germany. Young German Muslims of this generation do not necessarily understand the language of their immigrant forebears and have difficulty following theological sermons delivered in Turkish, Arabic or another language.

Salafist movements turn this to their advantage. Salafist activists make a point of using the language of the country in which they operate. Campaigns such as the distribution of copies of the Quran in German cities, under the motto "LIES!" (Read) or members of the self-styled "sharia police" patrolling the streets are conducted consistently in German, for good reason. It has become known that many of the

Germans travelling to “ISIL” territory first came into contact with the Salafist milieu at the stands of the “LIES!” campaign.

To young people in difficult domestic situations, to those looking for guidance and meaning, German-speaking, charismatic imams, such as Pierre Vogel alias Abu Hamza or Ibrahim Abou Nagie, who make clever use of youth jargon, represent an attractive and most importantly comprehensible alternative to the partly dogmatic imams of the established mosque associations, whose sermons have little to do with their daily lives. According to El-Mafaalani, young Muslims regard the large Islamic associations in particular as “institutions of the adults – conventional, defensive and boring”. As far back as 2012, taz journalist Wolf Schmidt stated in his analysis: “The success of the Salafist movement is due not only to a failure of the social majority, but also of the large Muslim associations, from the DITIB to the VIKZ, the Association of Islamic Cultural centers, to the ZMD, the Central Council of Muslims in Germany. They have not succeeded in engaging sufficiently with the second and third generation of immigrants, nor with the young converts from a German ethnic background, who are frequently seeking guidance. Instead of hearing imams imported from Turkey drone on, they prefer to listen to what the Salafist instant imams tell them in German, at public events, on the Internet or at Islam seminars that frequently last several days”.

The phenomenon of the “imported imams” coming mainly from Turkey, most of whom still have a poor grasp of the German language, is another reason why ever larger numbers of young Muslims may be attracted to Salafist movements with their simple answers to complex circumstances, with their division of the world into good and evil, into the permitted and the forbidden.

It may therefore well be worthwhile to consider offering German in addition to the obligatory liturgical language of Arabic for delivering sermons in mosques. If anybody who is interested can visit a mosque and follow the sermon in German, this will make it easier to reduce existing prejudice against “the religion of Islam”, and young Muslims, who generally have better German language skills than their parents and grandparents, will ideally not seek out Salafist activists to find simplistic answers if they can follow theological sermons.

If the associations overseeing mosques in Germany were to commit themselves voluntarily to hold their sermons predominantly in German, this would not only have a preventative impact but also a huge signaling effect in encouraging integration. Visitors to mosques who do not speak German might find a model realized by the DITIB communities attractive. For several years, sermons have been delivered in both German and Turkish and can therefore be understood by a broad public. Thanks to opportunities for students to study Islamic theology at German universities, a new generation of imams will make their mark on the local mosque landscape anyway in the future.

4. Employ more Muslim chaplains in prisons

Muslim chaplains play a central role for prevention in an Islamist context. Prisons represent an ideal breeding ground for Islamist radicalization. During a phase when people are looking for stability and orientation, for meaning and re-socialization, increasing numbers of prison inhabitants are coming into contact with other inmates who have already been radicalized and are hoping to find an alternative to their previous way of life in Islamist circles. Sociologist El-Mafaalani described how serious the situation is by stating that “some prisons are recruitment offices”³³. Denis Cuspert alias Deso Dogg, a former rapper who grew up in Berlin-Neukölln, converted to Islam – or more precisely to Islamism – during his time in prison and ended up travelling to “ISIL” -controlled territory in Syria via Egypt in the spring of 2014. Today, Cuspert is one of the most influential jihadist Salafists from Germany, who is

attracting attention particularly through his propaganda videos posted online and attempting to recruit new jihadists.

Besides radicalization in prisons, there have been increasing reports of Salafist activities in the vicinity of prison buildings throughout Germany. Small groups of Salafists are frequently waiting outside prisons with the specific intention of offering newly released prisoners help and assistance with reintegration into daily life. The Salafists provide support with finding a place to stay and find work, introduce the ex-prisoners to a “new” circle of friends and give them practical advice and help. The Münster sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani coined the following phrase for this: “Salafists are better social workers.” They look after other people’s interests; they are there when they are needed, and they provide the feeling of a replacement family, a community and sense of belonging.

It is therefore a matter of urgency for the number of positions for Muslim chaplains in prisons to be increased substantially. More Muslim chaplains should also be employed in the military and the police. There is a need for greater sensitisation to Muslim concerns in all public authorities and for greater attention to be paid to the needs of specific religious groups. Once again, as in the case of Islamic religious education, choosing the right contacts for collaboration is of great importance. The obvious solution here as well is to cooperate with university departments of Islamic theology to provide training for specialist personnel to ensure that Muslim chaplains working in the sensitive penal environment are law-abiding and feel committed to the free and democratic constitutional state and a historical-critical interpretation of the Quran. An evaluation of the first few projects in this area – e.g. a campaign entitled “Verantwortung übernehmen – Abschied von Hass und Gewalt” (English: Accepting responsibility – abdicating hate and violence), conducted by the Violence Prevention Network (VPN), which has been doing good work for a number of years – clearly demonstrates that the number of recidivists has gone down.

5. Strengthen education about Islam on the Internet – provide more alternatives to Islamic websites

Anybody who wishes to seek information about Islam on the Internet these days will quickly find themselves on one of the numerous Islamist websites. In a world characterized by rapid digital change and at a time when young people in particular obtain most of their information from the Internet and only rarely from books, information about Islam that is accessible online is becoming increasingly important. Islamist and Salafist organizations are continuously increasing their online presence and most of them have their own Facebook and Twitter profiles, professional-looking websites and some even their own YouTube channels. “Online jihad” has been a reality for some time now and represents one of the central challenges of our times because of its dynamic nature.

Today, it is more important than ever to be proactive and offer alternatives to Islamist websites using promotional videos and websites about an Islam that is considered and lived peacefully. One should, for instance, consider producing informative video clips about Islamic religious content and issues of daily Muslim life in collaboration with the university departments of Islamic theology and Islamic studies in a manner to be easily understood and appealing to the young and marketing these effectively through the media with the assistance of prominent models of Muslim faith. Initiatives such as that by the bpb, the German Federal Agency for Civic Education, which has recently launched a project involving YouTube star LeFloid, should therefore be welcomed and supported at the political level. Successfully reclaiming the Internet for the purposes of promoting a peaceful interpretation of Islam will require more forceful online action and measures to provide practical answers to issues of daily life in comprehensible (youth-friendly)

language, thus denying Islamist/Salafist movements one of its most important recruitment and propaganda platforms.

Summary and Outlook

Islamist and Salafist radicalization has been increasing steadily in Germany for years. There are a number of reasons for people to succumb to this radicalization, including political, ideological, sociological and psychological ones. Several factors frequently reinforce each other and lead to radicalization irrespective of gender and social and religious origins. Concepts to counter Islamism aim at nipping radicalization tendencies in the bud or at stopping or even reversing them. Young people demonstrating a commitment to the free and democratic constitutional system and the rules of the secular state in Germany should remain of crucial importance to society as a whole. It is essential to show greater self-confidence in promoting a “value-defending culture” in Germany, aimed at safeguarding our fundamental liberties and basic rights. Anybody who has consciously decided to embrace an Islamist world view, thereby placing God’s sovereignty over national sovereignty, rejecting gender equality and wanting to introduce sharia instead of Basic Constitutional Law, will be very hard to resocialise. Prevention is therefore crucial.

To date, there is no comprehensive, well thought-out preventative concept in place in Germany. Drawing up a national concept for preventing Islamic radicalization involving a partnership of responsibility between security, education and social welfare authorities would set an important signal. Efforts should also be made to bring on board the mosque associations, the university departments of Islamic theology as well as web-savvy Muslim youth groups as additional partners. While such models have already been initiated in some federal states, there is still no country-wide campaign for the prevention of Islamist radicalization. More efforts will have to be made to educate imams as ambassadors of democracy and to expand projects of encounter and exchange between Muslims and Jews. In any case, projects to pre-empt anti-Semitic tendencies should be furthered particularly strongly. Country-wide measures such as “Demokratie leben!” (Live Democracy!), which has been allocated 40.5 million euros for projects for the prevention of extremism at community level for 2015 alone, are pointing the way. Within the European Union, approximately one billion euros will be available for de-radicalization programs between now and 2020.

The prevention of Islamist radicalization is a challenge for society as a whole. A historical-critical exegesis of the Quran, the expansion of Islamic religious education in schools, more widespread use of German to deliver sermons in Mosques, employment of more Muslim chaplains, and the setting up of websites promoting considered Islam that will appeal to young people will be able to curb the alarming tendency of increasing Islamist radicalization.

Muslims are part of Germany. Islamists should realize that they are up against an alliance of free-thinking democrats self-confidently defending the free and democratic constitutional system – not dictated by any religion.