



Bundeskriminalamt

HERBST-
BKA TAGUNG 2015
AUTUMN
CONFERENCE

International Terrorism: How Can Prevention and Repression Keep Pace?

BKA Autumn Conference, 18 - 19 November 2015

Prevention of international terrorism in Germany - stocktaking

Abstract

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With the growth of the "Islamic State" and the current wave of particularly young people leaving for Syria and Iraq, international Islamist terrorism is currently at the centre of public and security-policy attention. Within Islamism, Salafism is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing movements. It still represents, admittedly, a minority view, which is, moreover, highly multi-faceted and heterogeneous. At present, only about 7,500 of the 4 million Muslims in Germany can be linked to this spectrum. However, almost all persons with links to Germany who joined the jihad, had invariably been in contact with Salafist structures before. In addition, Salafism dominates the offers regarding Islam on the Internet. And it is predominantly youths and young adults who are attracted by this form of Islamism.

Since the challenges posed by Islamist terrorism cannot be sufficiently tackled by repressive measures alone – sustainable success can neither be achieved by criminal prosecution nor the protection against threats to public safety – **prevention** plays an important role. This implies active and co-ordinated co-operation of many social forces and disciplines with the aim to prevent or reduce crimes or to minimise their consequences. As regards the prevention of Islamist terrorism, it is the primary objective to prevent radicalisation in the first place – by means of preventive-educational approaches and intervention, such as information and awareness-raising measures, youth work or social work within and outside schools – or to achieve de-radicalisation by approaches targeted at activists willing to exit the scene or at their (family) environment.

The prerequisites for successful prevention are, however, manifold – and they remain far from being fulfilled in the case of youths or young adults, who are radicalised or at risk of being radicalised by Islamist ideology. It is particularly a solid basis of knowledge which is lacking: Empirical and reliable information, which could provide explanations for Islamist radicalisation processes, is rare. The state of knowledge about their causes – and consequently about potential preventive approaches – is insufficient. This also applies to the transferability of concepts, for instance from the work against right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism, to the prevention of Islamism. In addition,

different disciplines are conducting their research efforts in isolation from each other; this is exacerbated by the fact that the German-speaking research landscape and, as a consequence, prevention, is strongly influenced by the security-policy debate. All in all, prevention work in the area of Islamism and Salafism is still at a very early stage. Numerous projects are underway now, mainly at local level, but they are hardly ever - only in exceptional cases - co-ordinated and carried out on an interdepartmental basis.

This means that the lack of a framework concept which embraces society as a whole and is co-ordinated at national level, i.e. a comprehensive national strategy, also has adverse effects on the prevention of Islamism. The situation of the prevention of Islamist terrorism once again shows that it is imperative to establish an independent interdepartmental National Centre for Crime Prevention to generate, transfer and implement at federal level the knowledge indispensable for prevention.