

# Islamism in Germany

BRIEF INFORMATION

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# Islamism in Germany

This leaflet provides information on Islamism, a radical school of thought in modern Islam. To make the most of this information, you should know the role that religion plays in Germany:

Two thirds of the people in Germany belong to a religious community, one third has no religious ties. Half of the population belongs to one of two main Christian churches: the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church. About 5 % of the population are Muslims. Almost all of them came to Germany in the last two generations, for economic reasons or as refugees. The majority – around 60 % – are from Turkey. Others come from the Balkans, North Africa, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iran. Around 75 % of the Muslims in Germany are Sunnis. There are also Alevis, Shiites and others. Nearly half of all Muslims in Germany are German citizens. A minority of just under 1 % are Islamists.

## Freedom of religion and belief

The German Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and belief. For this reason, alongside the main churches and religions, there are also many smaller religious communities, including Muslim groups. Some of these Muslim groups combine political and religious objectives. Some of these groups live peacefully within German society. However, there are other groups that are in conflict with society and other Muslims. Why? The reasons include:

- They are opposed to the values that apply in Germany. For example, they want to change the system of government so that it reflects their own way of thinking. They are also opposed to equal rights for women.
- They disagree with the majority of Muslims, as well as among themselves, about the correct form of their faith. Some say that they are the only true Muslims.

- Such groups do not always communicate openly about themselves. To some extent, they conceal their aims in order to attract new members. This is also true of some Islamists.

## Islamism and politics

Islamism is both a radical school of thought in Islam and a political agenda. The aim of Islamists is to rebuild society and the state. They believe that Islam is the solution to all problems. Many Islamists say that they recognise democracy and the German Constitution. But this is only for practical reasons. As soon as it is possible, an Islamist system should be introduced. However, the Islamists are not agreed on what such a state should actually be like. Some think that it could be a democracy governed by Muslim rules. Others want the religious leaders to have political power, too. At the moment, Iran is the only Islamist state. Its system is based on the ideas of Shiite Islamism.

Islamists believe that most Muslims do not take Islam seriously or that they even betray Islam. For extreme Islamists, such Muslims are also considered infidels. The political enemy of Islamism is the West, in particular the United States of America and above all the Jews. Many Islamists are actively recruiting for the fight against the state of Israel, and most are anti-Semites.

## Islamist politics in Germany

The primary aim of some Islamist groups is the transformation of society in their countries of origin. In Germany, they collect money to support their fight in these countries. For this purpose, they also create and distribute propaganda.

Other groups want to give their followers in Germany greater opportunities to live in line with Islamist ideas. For example, they want their own separate legal system, and they want state-run schools to conform to Islamist ideas. To achieve this objective, they also make use of the civil rights that exist in Germany.

In Germany, however, there are no political parties with an Islamist agenda that take part in elections.

## Islamism and morality

Islamists want to force other people to live in a way that Islamists consider appropriate, also in their private lives. They believe that the rules for this come directly from God. That means that those rules are unchanging and cannot be disputed. For Islamists, the way in which most people live in the West is immoral and contrary to the will of God. But also Muslims who do not adhere to the rules of Islam are considered immoral and corrupted by the West. Nevertheless, Islamists share many features with other Muslims. They recognise the five pillars of Islam (prayer, statement of faith, charity, fasting in the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca). They adhere to Muslim rules for eating and drinking. Their ideas about family and the roles of men and women, for example, are traditionally Muslim in most cases.

## Islamism and violence

The majority of Islamists in Germany try to achieve their aims in a legal way, within the boundaries of the law.

Some Islamists also support the use of violence, in addition to other means. However, the violence is mostly directed against enemies in their countries of origin. They avoid coming into conflict with the German government.

A small number of Islamists believe that their aims can only be reached by using violence. In their opinion, all Muslims are obliged to fight against infidels using armed force. These 'jihadist' Islamists also commit appalling acts of terrorism.

## How did Islamism begin?

Islamism is not a traditional school of thought in Islam. It emerged in the last 150 years, when most Muslim countries became part of European colonies. This was also when the Ottoman Empire of the Turks – a major political and military power for many centuries – lost its power. This led to reforms in the Muslim world. They were aimed

at enabling Muslims to become independent of the West. Some of the reforms were not religious but were of a political and cultural nature. Other reforms wanted to return to pure Islam, to original Islam or to traditional Islam. In this way, they aimed to fight off the influence of the West. It is out of such religious reforms that Islamism emerged.

## Different schools of thought

There are three schools of thought in Islamism:

- The first school of thought says that Islam must be cleaned of false traditions. Only the original statement of faith (Tawheed) and the original legal system (Sharia) should be considered valid. According to this school of thought, Islam will then fit in the modern world. Muslims can then adopt modern technology and science. This Islamist school of thought can be called 'modern'. It even believes that the foundations for modern scientific findings were established in Islam. The most important 'modern' group is the Muslim Brotherhood.
- The second school of thought says that Islam must separate from the modern world. This applies to technology, science and Western education. From this point of view, Islam must once again return to the ways that were supposedly practised by the 'pious forefathers'. This refers to the first three generations of Muslims. This Islamist school of thought can be called 'anti-modern'. It includes extreme Salafists. (For the most part, traditional Salafists are not Islamists.) The terrorist organisation Boko Haram in Nigeria is a proponent of such radical, 'anti-modern' ideas. It considers itself part of the terrorist army 'Islamic State' (IS).
- The third school of thought says that Islam must return to what it was 200 or 300 years ago. From this point of view, Islamic culture was superior to Western culture at that time. For Turkish Islamists, for example, the Ottoman Empire was the peak of Muslim culture. They say that it was destroyed by the influence of the West and by un-Islamic forces. This Islamist school of

thought can be called 'traditional'. The Milli Görüş movement is 'traditional'. However, it also contains some 'modern' ideas.

## How many Islamists are there in Germany?

It is estimated that just under one percent of Muslims are members of Islamist organisations. This is equivalent to 50,000 persons. More than 30,000 belong to the Turkish Milli Görüş organisation. Many of them are viewed as Islamists. Extreme Salafism has around 9,000 adherents. With the recruitment of many young Muslims, this number is growing. Even young non-Muslims are converting to Islam and becoming Salafists.

The 'Islamic Community of Germany' (Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland, IGD) is a proponent of the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. It has connections with several other German and European organisations that share similar objectives. The number of adherents is around 1,000.

Several political organisations with an Arab background have connections in Germany. They include Hamas and Shiite Hezbollah, as well as the terrorist organisation 'Islamic State' (IS).

It is not only organised groups that represent ideas of Islamism. Many Muslims share similar ideas without being radical Islamists. For example, 'traditional' Islamism is widespread among Turkish Muslims. This is also true for Muslims from India and Pakistan.

## Salafism in Germany

The word Salafism derives from the Arabic word 'salaf', meaning 'forefathers'. It refers to the companions of the prophet Mohammed and their successors. For extreme Salafists, only their own version of Islam is valid. They only know right and wrong, Islamic and un-Islamic (halal and haram). They dictate how to dress, what to eat and drink, and what to say and think. Extreme Salafism calls for armed struggle (jihad) against infidels. It is mainly young people that are attracted to this movement. They are looking for

recognition, a sense of belonging and community. They want to experience a feeling of strength and power. They also want to dedicate themselves to a just cause. This can result in them joining Islamist terrorist organisations.

## Useful information

Islamist organisations, above all Salafists, promote their ideas on the Internet. In this way, they reach young people in particular. Islamist groups and preachers can also be found in some mosques. Likewise, there are Islamists who promote their ideas in the accommodation facilities for refugees and asylum seekers. Sometimes, they try to enforce their ideas in an aggressive manner.

In Germany, political organisations and religions are allowed to promote their ideas in public and on the Internet. This also applies to Islamists unless their organisation is banned. However, they may not promote their ideas on the premises of asylum seeker facilities or residential homes without permission. Unless invited, no one may enter private rooms or apartments. It is not permitted to promote ideas among children without the approval of their parents. However, people in accommodation facilities are permitted to invite other people.

You should not respond aggressively if there are problems because Islamists promote their ideas, or if people of other faiths (including Muslims who are not Islamists) are harassed or threatened. Please inform the people who are responsible for the accommodation facility or the premises.

If you notice that relatives or friends have contact with Islamist groups, you should ask for help. Most social workers and psychologists will be able to direct you towards somebody who is familiar with Islamism. Often, it is Muslim clerics who can warn of the dangers of Islamism. You can also talk to the Protestant Church and the Catholic Church. For example, you can search on the Internet using the words 'Flüchtlingshilfe' (refugee aid) and 'evangelisch' (Protestant) or 'katholisch' (Catholic), including the name of a town or city. You will then find addresses where you can get more information.

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