THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF RADICALISATION IN GERMANY

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Terrorism poses compelling challenges to societies and how to prevent terrorist acts has become a key question. In Germany, terrorism and radicalisation are often debated highly emotionally. In many cases, discussions are characterised by alarmism and uncertainty, leading to claims for a stricter security policy. Several political parties make questions of internal security a key aspect of their parliamentary work. However, security measures alone cannot be the answer to radicalisation. The pathways to becoming an extremist are very complex and individual, therefore a holistic framework is essential (European Institute of the Mediterranean [IEMed], 2017; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2017). Besides security measures, such a framework must include preventive approaches.

Schools play a key role in the field of prevention of radicalisation (Kiefer, 2015). This policy brief outlines the status quo of radicalisation in Germany and states, step by step, why and how prevention of radicalisation should be implemented in schools. The main thesis is that schools can contribute tremendously to preventing anti-pluralist and anti-democratic attitudes and behaviours if they engage in prevention multidimensionally. Lastly, this paper gives policy recommendations that could help schools to fulfil the drafted expectations. First and foremost, the presented recommendations apply to the educational context of schools, emphasising the transfer of the specific models to other state governments of Germany or other EU countries. The ideas and characteristics appear to be applicable to all contexts and environments in which school plays a major role in socialisation of young people. Moreover, the recommendations could be adapted to and by any other institution located in the field of youth work in the social sphere, neighbourhood and quarter management. In particular the networking as well as the coordination of partners could

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function as a starting point for international organisations and donors to build on. The content of this policy brief is mainly based on the approach of the German organisation ufuq.de, which works on the topics of Islam, anti-Muslim racism and the prevention of Islamism and is set at the interface between political education, pedagogy and science (ufuq.de, 2016).

The Status Quo in Germany

Until July 2017, more than 940 people left Germany for Syria or Iraq to affiliate themselves to extremist groups. One fifth of them were female, one eighth converts, and minors were also sporadically involved (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz [BfV], 2017). It goes without saying that this "exported" Jihadist terror is a huge threat to the countries in which the Jihadist Salafists are rooted. Even though the departures stagnate, more and more people in Germany affiliate themselves to Salafism (BfV, 2016). It is important to state that Salafists challenge societies not only when they are prepared to use violence to proclaim their convictions. In Germany, Salafists are also considered to be a major challenge when they are non-violent but declare their Islamic understanding of the world to be the only truthful way to live as a Muslim. In such cases, they denigrate Muslims and non-Muslims who think differently and may threaten our democracy in vehemently opposing the liberal-democratic constitutional order of Germany (ufuq.de, 2016).

It is not only the Salafist movement that is on the rise in Germany. There is also a huge increase of right-wing motivated offences. In 2016, 907 extreme right-wing motivated criminal acts were committed against accommodation centres for asylum seekers (BfV, 2016). This policy brief is not limited to one specific form of radicalisation. However, since this policy brief is mainly based on the approach of ufuq.de, which works in the field of Islam, anti-Muslim racism and prevention of Islamism, some of the mentioned strategies tend to be more focused on the prevention of religiously motivated radicalisation.

To respond to acts of violent extremism that are either politically or religiously justified, the Federal Government of Germany acts in diverse fields. Apart from security measures, a wide range of steps have been taken, even though prevention of radicalisation is a rather young discipline in Germany (Kiefer, 2015). At this point, not all the actions taken can be listed. Examples include the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). It set up an Advice Centre on Radicalisation in 2012 to support people who notice that a person in their surroundings is becoming radical (BAMF, 2017). Furthermore, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) launched the federal programme *Demokratie Leben!* (Live Democracy!). This programme supports many initiatives at various levels that are "actively working towards their aim of a diverse, non-violent and democratic society" (BMFSFJ, 2017). Currently,

44 pilot projects aiming to prevent religiously-motivated radicalisation are funded (BMFSFJ, 2017). Exemplarily, the *Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft religiös begründeter Extremismus* (BAG RelEx, National Working Group on Religious Extremism) was established in this framework in 2016. Among other things, they aim to encourage the cooperation of diverse civil society organisations and strengthen their exchange of expertise (BAG RelEx, 2017a). In addition to projects aiming to prevent radicalisation, many more are funded within the framework of *Demokratie Leben!* to be able to proceed across phenomena in promoting a diverse, non-violent and democratic togetherness. Projects targeting group-focused enmity or the promotion of democracy and diversity in the work place are an example (BMFSFJ, 2017).

Out of those 44 pilot projects more than a quarter are, at least partially, implemented in the context of education institutions (BMFSFJ, 2017). This clearly proves that schools and staff can be considered key actors in the field of prevention. This fact was acknowledged in 2015 by the member states of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations (UNESCO) Executive Board (UNESCO, 2015). The next section will examine the question of why prevention in schools is important and how ideally it should be shaped.

The Importance of Schools within a Comprehensive Approach

Radicalisation of any kind is a threat to our safety; moreover, it is a global threat to democracy. Therefore, the relevance of putting more effort into prevention is evident. As mentioned before, schools play a key role in this field (UNESCO, 2015). Even though teachers may not be able to prevent an individual young person from committing a terrorist attack, education is a strong tool to prevent the proliferation of anti-democratic and anti-pluralist ideologies (ufuq.de, 2016). Schools are not only important because young people – who are most at risk of radicalisation – spend much of their time there but also because schools per se are actors in the field of political education and democracy building. Furthermore, they constitute a very important social setting outside of the family (ufuq.de, 2016; UNESCO, 2017), the only social setting in which all young people can be encountered over a long period of time (Kiefer, 2015). In the last two decades, teachers have seen themselves challenged by an ever growing range of responsibilities. Today, teachers are asked to become involved in the upbringing of their students because some families cannot provide appropriate education. Of course, the traditional task of knowledge transfer should not be neglected. This poses a huge challenge to most schools (Kiefer, 2015). Additionally, Germany's education system is complex because the responsibility for education lies with the states (*Länder*). Therefore, measures must be taken at state level or school level and the federal government can only play a minor role.

Psychological research has shown that there is neither a specific social background pattern nor a specific personality profile that could serve as a checklist indicating how much a young person is at risk of radicalisation. The radicalisation process itself is not consistent and radicalised persons differ from each other to a vast extent. In other words, it is not possible to define a single cause of radicalisation (Bjørgo, 2011; Bokhari, Hegghammer, Lia, Nesser, & Tønnesen, 2006; Horgan, 2003, 2014; Monahan, 2012, 2015; Sarma, 2017). To react to multiple causes, preventive approaches must be shaped multidimensionally. Following Gerald Caplan (1964), three levels of prevention can be differentiated: 1. universal or primary prevention; 2. secondary or selective prevention; 3. tertiary or indicated prevention. These three levels matter in schools to a different extent. The next section will discuss how prevention in schools should ideally be conducted on the different levels so as to contribute to the prevention of liberticidal and anti-democratic ideologies. A clear focus in this section is on universal prevention because teachers have most of their skills in this field of action.

Universal Prevention

Universal prevention does not target any specific group but addresses everyone. It is less a matter of impeding the negative than of encouraging the positive. It aims to help each young person regardless of his or her specific background to withstand radicalisation or ideologisation of different kinds (Kiefer, 2015). In the context of violent extremism, young people need to be taught to resist simplistic approaches offered by extremist groups, approaches that contradict a pluralistic and tolerant society (ufuq.de, 2016). Even though it is self-evidently important to make the different violent extremist ideologies a subject of discussion, one major goal of universal prevention is to increase the bond between the members of a society and the society itself. Following this definition, universal prevention overlaps to a large extent with the area of democratic and political education (Nordbruch, 2017). To engage in democracy building and to promote a democratic togetherness, schools need to foster pluralism, respect for diversity and a tolerance towards ambiguity. Furthermore, it is very important to enable young people to become active global citizens and to realise the advantages of a democratic society. Therefore, educators should make participation tangible, empower them and make them capable of facing those challenges that might have a negative impact on their well-being – emotionally and physically (ufuq.de, 2016).

In terms of religious radicalisation, religious education at schools could additionally help prevent the affiliation to an extremist group. Many radicals spreading violence in the name of Islam use religion to justify violence – often without possessing more than a superficial knowledge of their own religion. Salafists offer youth-oriented answers to questions concerning religion or life that perhaps no one else has taken care to answer before – neither the community nor the family nor a religious educator.

Those initial answers, often simplistic ones, are quite attractive to young people. It is therefore important that young people develop the ability to think independently and learn how to reflect religious statements. To be familiar with one's religion can contribute to resisting Salafist ideologies. Besides, religious education could still the curiosity young people feel about their religion. Moreover, it would be a sign of approval because the right of religious education should be granted to every student (ufuq.de, 2016).

Adolescence is characterised by questions such as "Who am I?" and "Whom do I belong to?" Since the need for identity and the need to belong have been identified as vulnerability factors among terrorists (Borum, 2004), it makes sense to look at both constructs in the context of schools. The answers to questions of identity and belonging are no longer as clear as they used to be because the social environment of the young is becoming more heterogeneous. Today young people usually find themselves in a globalised classroom and hence in the company of young people of different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. Many feel that their choice of whom they want to belong to must be exclusive. These feelings can be the product of either intrinsic or extrinsic processes of identity building. Questions of belonging are embedded in broader discussions about integration policies. With Germany not being considered an immigration country until recently, the feelings of exclusion are mirrored onto youth by society and the media. Compared to other countries (e.g. Canada), nationality and belonging are still questioned even if you are born in Germany. As an example, Muslim youths often find themselves confronted with the question of whether they adhere to "the sharia" or "the constitution". It is the teachers' task to explain that more than one affiliation is consistently possible and that being Muslim and a democrat is not mutually exclusive. As schools are understood as protected spaces, it is important that educators take into account the variety of living environments, interests and religious beliefs of their students – without stigmatising any of them. In doing so, they can open up new perspectives and incite new thoughts. Being able to develop their thoughts and express them freely protects young people from simplistic and exclusionary world views, just as it protects them from simplified explanatory models that tolerate violence. Instead of telling them how they should live, teachers should ask them how they would like to live and motivate them to advocate their positions. It is hardly possible to demand tolerance as a learning goal if students themselves do not experience tolerance regarding their life plans. Although questions of identity and belonging matter to young people to a great degree, they often do not find enough opportunities to put them forward, either in society or in their families. It should become a priority for teachers to provide time for such questions. If they do not, others might come in – possibly extremists – to fill the vacuum and offer easy solutions and answers. Teachers should show signals of acceptance, appreciation, belonging, as well as true and honest interest in the thoughts of a young person. Aiming to promote democracy, one of the key objectives of education should be to build

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resilience among young people and to foster a positive sense of identity and belonging (ufuq.de, 2016).

Moreover, sensitivity is very important within the classroom. Many young people are particularly sensitive with respect to the use of language – especially when it comes to discussions that cover topics of "us" against "them" (for example "us, the Germans" against "them, the Muslims"). Inclusive language can signalise young people with migrant background and Muslims in particular that they are undoubtedly seen as part of Germany and that being German is not opposed to being Muslim. Even though it may not be the intention of the educator, language often has exclusionary effects. Teachers should be sensitised adequately and pay attention to not intensifying feelings of disorientation and disintegration (ufuq.de, 2016). Furthermore, educators should not define particular pupils as representatives or experts of particular ethnic or religious groups that form minorities in class; similarly, they should not demand that they position themselves clearly. Muslim pupils, for instance, should not be asked to explain why terrorism exists or even be asked to dissociate themselves from it. Attributions and accusations can be harmful (Kiefer, 2015).

It is important to point out that universal prevention does not have the task of identifying individuals who might radicalise in the future. Teachers must avoid creating a culture of suspicion in the classroom or stigmatise specific groups or people. Sensitivity instead of alarmism should be the status quo. Despite all uncertainties and open questions, a tenor like "the kids are all right" should predominate when working with them (ufuq.de, 2016).

Secondary Prevention

As mentioned above, there are no factors that allow us to assess how much a person is at risk of radicalisation (Borum, 2004; Sarma, 2017). Nevertheless, secondary prevention approaches target specific groups of young people that are more vulnerable to, for example, Salafist ideologies and already show initial signs of a radicalisation process. To a certain degree, schools can provide secondary approaches outside of the regular lessons – the focus is in fact on schools that are located in social flashpoints where many Salafists are actively missionising, or on schools that already show manifest problems. Some advisable steps could be further training for teachers or school social workers, as well as information events for students. Among other things, such information events could include inviting former Salafists who would report on their experiences within the scene (Kiefer, 2015).

One exemplary secondary prevention project that aims to prevent affiliation to the Salafist scene is *Wegweiser* (Guides). It supports young people who might be about to radicalise and have already sought first contact with the Salafist scene but who do

not yet directly belong to one specific group. Furthermore, Wegweiser gives advice to the social environment of the affected person (Ministerium des Innern des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen [MIK], 2017a). All persons who need specific support in this context can apply to them, so for example parents who fear that their child is radicalising, friends who notice significant changes they cannot categorise or teachers who might not be clear about whether the student is merely acting provocatively or based on an ideological conviction. Once consulted, Wegweiser staff closely examines and contextualise the reported details in order to categorise the case and eventually plan the next steps. In relevant cases, Wegweiser tries to reach the persons concerned as early as possible to develop specific, tailor-made and feasible measures. Because they consider prevention to be a macrosocial task, they network themselves with relevant local actors, for instance with social associations, youth welfare services, mosque communities, municipal offices, family counselling, job centres, schools or the police. As mentioned before, the radicalisation process itself is not consistent and there are various reasons why people become involved in violent extremism. Therefore, the relevant network partners get involved on a case-by-case-basis. Currently, the Guides are to be found in 13 cities in North Rhine-Westphalia. Implementation is planned in five additional cities (MIK, 2017b).

Tertiary Prevention

In order to stop or reverse the radicalisation process, tertiary prevention targets individuals who are already indoctrinated to a much higher degree and clearly adhere to Salafist convictions as well as being committed to a specific group or circle. In respect of such persons there is a certain risk that they will be a danger to themselves or to others, such as by perpetrating violent acts. Multistage clearing procedures in which young people and their relatives are supported over a long period might possibly stop this process. Expert advice as well as police support is indispensable – teachers should not try to analyse the specific case alone because this is beyond their skills. It is advisable to proceed with caution (Kiefer, 2015).

In 2016, a pilot project aiming to stop the process of radicalisation was launched. The project *Clearingverfahren und Case Management: Prävention von gewaltbereitem Neosalafismus und Rechtsextremismus* (Clearing procedure and case management: prevention of violent neo-Salafism and right-wing extremism) is currently set up in six schools. So far, it is the only one of its kind in German schools (Redaktion Infodienst Radikalisierungsprävention, 2016). Furthermore, the German Violence Prevention Network (VPN) is specialised in assisting in de-radicalisation or disengagement. Contrary to Wegweiser, VPN works with young people whose degree of radicalisation is very advanced. Their task is to "speak to members of these scenes," to "establish dialogues with them," to "motivate them to change" and to "trigger processes of becoming distant from inhumane ideologies." Furthermore, they provide counselling

for the parents of the persons concerned and include them within the de-radicalisation work (VPN, 2017).

Enabling Schools – What are Political Opportunities?

Within the German education system, democracy building is contained in the curriculum – the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs repeatedly emphasised its importance. Acknowledging that extremism is a current threat to our society, it also defines empowerment and the promotion of democracy as the superordinate goal of German schools (KMK, 2009). Unfortunately, such official statements quite often stand in contrast to the existing possibilities within the school routine – the discrepancy between theory and practice is apparent. These statements are welcome but not sufficient – they must be put into practice. Even if public expenditure on education was increased (Creutzburg, 2017), the funding is not yet sufficiently prioritised. 2013, Germany's total public spending on education was – relative to its total public expenditure and to its gross domestic product (GDP) – still below the OECD average (OECD, 2016, p. 224). Doubts arise as to whether the consisting framework conditions allow schools to face the current challenges and engage in prevention appropriately and sustainably (Kiefer, 2015). To allow teachers to meet the requirements and to implement the aforementioned strategies, certain preconditions must be established. Therefore, this section will provide policy recommendations.

Schools need more staff and more time – both are clearly missing in the current school routine. In fact, many teachers are at the limits of their endurance. Because Germany's curriculum is highly streamlined, teachers do not usually have enough time to include the aforementioned points (Kiefer, 2015). In terms of universal prevention, democratic education and personality development must be implemented in the curriculum to a greater extent to allow teachers to provide room for socio-emotional development – as described above in the section Universal Prevention. Furthermore, the personnel resources have to be increased sufficiently as this has not happened in the past, even though there is a new scope of duties (Kiefer, 2015). Apart from that, teachers' training must include the aforementioned strategies and also promote migration-specific skills, among others. Especially in the globalised classroom, the outlined challenges require better qualifications in the fields of religion and democracy building (Schreiner, Otte, & Staffa, 2017). At a higher level, reflections should also take place on whether the states' jurisdiction in education matters should be called into question.

Because the prevailing requirements currently exceed teachers' possibilities and skills, many civil society organisations step in. They develop prevention approaches and, in doing so, they actually bear most of the prevention work provided in Germany.

Compared to other European countries, the active role of such civil society providers is rather prominent. Today, programmes are funded not purely on a national level but even on a local level with a view to reacting to local contexts. However, there is currently a controversial discussion on policy level about whether the prevention programmes should be nationalised or not. A nationalisation of the implemented measures might weaken the effects because civil society institutions, more than any national institutions, have direct access to the target group, are networked locally and are significantly more trusted than national governmental sources. The multitude of prevention approaches in Germany is one important strength allowing the multitude of causes of becoming an extremist to be countered (BAG RelEx, 2017b). Ufuq.de is one example of such a civil society organisation (*ufuq* is Arabic for horizon). Amongst other services, ufuq.de provides peer-teamed workshops in secondary schools and youth institutions in Germany, turning the question "How do we want to live?" into a subject for discussion. In doing so, questions or subjects that are often embedded in the context of religion are translated into questions of norms and values that concern all youths in the same way. This specific approach is also providing a basis for teachers to further investigate the topic without being afraid of not being capable of discussing theological or religious issues. Additionally, Muslims or, speaking more generally, religion-affiliated young people are thus not stigmatised as the object of concern at the workshops. The main goal is to encourage a reflected self-concept and more constructive way of dealing with religious and non-religious values and norms, as well as to offer alternatives to Islamist and anti-Islamic world views (ufuq.de, 2014).

The work of ufuq.de and similar providers developing and road-testing prevention approaches contributes immensely to preventing radicalisation of young people. It provides room for various topics that are crucial for identity-building processes and offers options to experience self-effectiveness and participation. It is therefore highly positive that such organisations are now being funded to a much larger extent than in the past. However, bringing off new projects and approaches only makes sense if schools have the resources to implement the lessons learned into their everyday life; that is, in the long term. Education policy should not fail to invest sustainably in schools – prevention programmes cannot compensate for inadequate equipment and curriculum, particularly if the programmes are of limited duration. In most cases, the project funding is limited to three years. As a result, a sustainable transfer and management of knowledge as well as an analysis of the root causes are made difficult. More long-term financial support is needed from all potential contributors (e.g. federal and state governments, the EU, international and national organisations) in order to reach an adequate number of young people and to be able to evaluate the projects effectively. In principle, prevention approaches as defined in this paper are applicable to other countries. However, it is of huge importance to adapt the approaches to the specific contexts. Societal circumstances that might allow or

encourage radicalisation must be identified urgently as they may vary even within one region.

As a matter of course, schools alone cannot overcome all the different causes of radicalisation. It is therefore highly appreciated that Germany does not focus only on schools in its prevention work. There are a multitude of fields of action providing prevention: youth welfare, community work, family counselling, education in leisure time and sports. To network and consolidate – but not nationalise – the different approaches is the condition for engaging sustainably with prevention work. The BAG RelEx, for example, is currently developing guidelines and quality standards in order to promote a purposeful and resource-efficient implementation of the different approaches to prevent religious radicalisation. Politics should support this consolidation structurally and in the long term. Only if all the different approaches are consolidated can prevention be successful (BAG RelEx, 2017b).

List of abbreviations

BAG RelEx   Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft religiös begründeter Extremismus
(National Working Group on Religious Extremism)

BAMF   Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
(Federal Office for Migration and Refugees)

BfV   Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz
(Domestic Intelligence Service of the Federal Republic of Germany)

BMFSFJ   Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
(Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)

KMK   Kultusministerkonferenz
(Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs)

MIK   Ministerium des Innern des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen
(North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry for the Interior)

OECD   Organisation für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung
(Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development)

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VPN   Violence Prevention Network

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