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# **An Assessment of DİTİB's role in the prevention of violent radicalization**

**A crucial aspect of Turkish State Islam in Germany**

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# Introduction

The risk of homegrown radicalization inspired by extremist Muslim figures and groups, as well as the question of repatriating European foreign fighters and their families have created an urgent need to tackle the root causes of religiously-framed radicalization and to develop feasible solutions. Since the conventional “war on terrorism”<sup>1</sup> has proved to be insufficient to fight the spread of radical ideas, it was complemented by a “soft war” or “battle of ideas”. Drawing from successful Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) strategies – worth to mention in this regard the Danish Aarhus model which considers the full-life cycle of radicalization, from prevention to intervention, to rehabilitation and reintegration; and the Kosovan Gjilan model which involves local stakeholders in counter-messaging<sup>2</sup> - academics and practitioners have agreed that terrorism can be defeated only by preventing, debunking and neutralizing the *jihadi* propaganda and recruitment<sup>3</sup>. Predominantly Muslim countries like Morocco, Egypt or Jordan have promoted government-linked religious institutions as representatives of “moderate Islam” capable to defeat radical ideologies. Turkey itself engaged in this ideological battle by projecting a distinctive Turkic model of civilizational Islam,<sup>4</sup> advancing, in the meantime, its hegemonic ambitions over the (Sunni) Muslim world as an alternative to Saudi influence.

Ever since the 1970s, Turkish interpretation of Islam was preferred by Western European countries with large Muslim migrant populations to other versions of Islam; leading to the official establishment of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs) network organizations in the Europe. Considering Turkey’s Westernization process and relationships with the West, Turkish Islam was praised for being “moderate” and compatible with democracy, especially in the first years of AKP rule, and, thus, regarded as more suitable for European Muslim societies than other alternatives. After 9/11 and even more, after the emergence of ISIS, host state authorities have collaborated with Turkish imams in the diaspora in countering prison radicalization and providing assistance in prevention and de-radicalization (See Bahira Advice Center in Germany<sup>5</sup>). However, the perception of Turkish and Turkey-linked actors as reliable changed with Turkey’s slide to authoritarianism. The 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey and the spying imams scandal sparked an unprecedented crisis in Turkish-EU/German relations and resulted in the end of collaborations.

This paper assesses the potential role of institutionalized Turkish-Islam in preventing radicalization, by considering the case of DİTİB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) and examining its Islamic (counter) narratives and activities in Germany, where the largest Turkish diaspora resides. My research is based on the data compiled between

<sup>1</sup> The war on terrorism, despite tactical innovations like the absence of uniforms or a networked enemy structure, engages the same conventional war strategy: kill or capture the enemy. See Ganesh Sitaraman, “Counterinsurgency, the War on Terror, and the Laws of War”, *Virginia Law Review* 95, no. 7 (November 2009): 1745-1839 (1748).

<sup>2</sup> See Stefano Marcuzzi and Matteredo Bressan, *Targeting the de-materialised “Caliphate” Extremism, Radicalisation and Illegal Trafficking Policy Background Paper*, NATO Defense College Foundation Policy Background Paper (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2018), <http://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/NDCF-Background-Policy-Paper-Targeting-the-Caliphate-Marcuzzi-and-Bressan.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid, *Islam as a statecraft: How governments use religion in foreign policy*, The New Geopolitics: Middle East, Foreign Policy at Brookings (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, November 2018).

<sup>5</sup> See Violence Prevention Network, *Annual Report 2018* (Berlin, 31 July 2019), 11.

October 2019 and January 2020, respectively content analysis of the *khutbas* released by DİTİB over a period of four years, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders: two DİTİB personnel- a top official and an imam- (2h/interview each), a Turkish religious attaché (2h/interview), one German public official (1,5h/interview), three prevention professionals (1h/interview, and two 2h long interviews), one German expert in Islamic theology (1h/interview), mosque visits in Berlin and Cologne; participation in meetings and roundtables with Turkish, German, European diplomats and politicians in 2019 and discussing my project with CATS researchers.

Based on the data collected, the study concludes that DİTİB has the potential and was successful so far in preventing violent radicalization within its mosque communities, given the almost inexistent numbers of DİTİB-linked young people joining terrorist groups. Religious education courses, discussion groups and Friday sermons are the main tools (purposely or not) engaged in prevention. A close analyses of the Friday sermons reveal five recurring themes that can serve as counter-narratives to radical ideas: incorporating mystical Islamic values as tolerance and love in DİTİB's religious narrative; rejecting terrorism and explaining Islamic concepts used by radicals to promote violence; promoting a more inclusive *ummah*; providing religious education and encouraging scepticism regarding new religious information; and regulating Muslim conduct and speech in the diaspora.

Cooperation between DİTİB and the German state continues mostly behind closed doors, both sides making steps to improve relations. However, DİTİB's links to Diyanet, the politicization of its religious narrative and activities – i.e. redefinition of radicalization in line with Ankara's policy, spying imam crisis, prayers for Turkey's intervention in Syria etc. -, and providing religious services mainly in Turkish, and thus, its inability to reach German converts or younger migrant generations who speak little to no Turkish (categories more prone to radicalization) remain problematic and (can) hinder collaboration.

# Religion and Radicalization

The lack of central authority in Islam<sup>6</sup> and, thus, the malleability of Islamic teachings reinforced by different understandings of *ijtihad* - right to individual reasoning and interpretation<sup>7</sup> - and the potential (mis)use of religious teachings on the one hand, in justifying and/or sanctifying violence; and, on the other hand, in preventing radicalism and promoting a message of peace and tolerance, have been widely discussed by researchers, yet without reaching clear conclusions and guidance for policy makers and practitioners. In fact, these seemingly contradictory interpretations of Islam – promoting violence versus peace and tolerance - suggest that Islam could be regarded as an “antidote” to its (exploited) self.

Even though 9/11 sparked a boom in research efforts tackling radicalization, a common definition of the concept or a consensus among scholars on the role of religion is, however, still missing. As Sedgwick highlights the term “radicalization” is a “source of confusion” and, although it is overused in public debates, the apparent common ground and self-evidence are misleading, as the same term is used with different meanings in different national and institutional agendas<sup>8</sup>.

While radicalization is often seen as a deviation from the norm<sup>9</sup>, the vaguely defined “norm” as a set of common values leaves room for interpretation. Regarding the role of religion in radicalization, Rahimullah, Larmar and Abdalla identify five religious risk factors which may lead to radicalization: 1) the influence of Salafi/Wahhabi movements and of neo-Salafism- which advocates for armed resistance against the Western military and political presence in Muslim lands-; 2) the increasing attention received by radical Muslim figures like Qutb, Maududi or al-Awlaki; 3) the justification of Muslim terrorism by a particular interpretation of Islam; 4) perceived scholarly authority of some radicals and 5) transitional religious experiences, respectively sudden intensification of religious commitment or adoption of strict beliefs. Muslim identification is also listed as a risk factor when combined with a strong political imaginary based on real or perceived threats to the group or its values from an external group; generally identified with the West<sup>10</sup>. Researching Germany’s Muslim community, Sirseloudi asserts that “the more young Muslims (irrespective of their ethnic origin) identify with a global *ummah*, rather than with either the country of origin of their parents or Germany, the more open they become

<sup>6</sup> See Bernard Lewis, *Il linguaggio politico dell'Islam* (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> See Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 28-33.

<sup>8</sup> See Mark Sedgwick, „The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 4 (2010): 479-494.

<sup>9</sup> See Randy Borum, „Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories”, *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2012):7-36.

<sup>10</sup> See Riyad Hosain Rahimullah, Stephen Larmar and Mohamed Abdalla, „Understanding Violent Radicalization amongst Muslims: A Review of the Literature”, *Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Science* 1, no.1 (2013): 19-35.

to all kinds of Islamist streams”<sup>11</sup>, pointing towards the so-called “High Islamization”<sup>12</sup> process among the diaspora in the West. While the first generation migrants’ religious knowledge originated in folk Islam, respectively popular traditions and practices in the homeland, rather than in a thorough religious education, their better educated, religious, identity-seeking children (second and third generation migrants) often accused their parents of practicing Islam without understanding it. Thus, they turned to “High Islam”, or an autodidact interpretation of Islam, by reading the Quran and Sunnah on which the Sharia was developed, as primary sources of religious knowledge. “High Islamization” according to Sirseloudi is not controlled “from the top down” but initiated “from the bottom up” and it is reinforced by a Western, partly anti-Islamic discourse against which Islamic arguments need to be elaborated, often leading to extremist beliefs<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, Aly and Strieger argues that religion plays a lesser role in radicalization<sup>14</sup>, Gürbüz blames global insecurities and the legitimacy crisis of the nation-state<sup>15</sup>, while TÜSIAD’s report shows that radicalization is also linked to political aspirations to end Muslim suffering<sup>16</sup>. Roy concludes that we assist rather to an Islamization of radicalism than to a radicalization of Islam, arguing that most of the ISIS recruits were radicals before turning into observant Muslims<sup>17</sup>. Ayhan Kaya distinguishes between radicalization and extremism, based on their dynamic, respectively static nature, while radicalization is a socialization process in which group dynamics weight often more than ideology, extremism refers to the intensity of one’s political, ideological and/or religious beliefs. The two phenomena are interconnected, radicalization as a process can be caused by or produce extremists beliefs<sup>18</sup>.

For the purpose of the present paper I will deal specifically with Islamic/Islamist and Islamized radicalization, respectively, with forms of radicalization inspired and motivated by certain religious interpretations or rather, as more commonly occurs, rationalized with reference to religion. I also chose to use the term of radicalization instead of extremism, focusing on the process of socialization into violent religious beliefs. While, there is no single road to radicalization, irrespective of individual or group motives, religious beliefs and related ideologies, no matter how distorted they might be, are critical in the process as long as people identify with them or are persuaded to do so by radical actors or groups. To convey the role of religion in radicalization without excluding, minimalizing or overstating it, I will use the concept religiously-framed radicalization throughout the paper. And, since religious interpretations do play a key role in radicalization – whether they represent the source of extreme beliefs or the rationale used to express and explain dissatisfaction, frustration and anger of various origins (i.e. economic, political, psychological etc.) and to justify violence – counter-narratives have been increasingly used in prevention strategies.

<sup>11</sup> See Matenia Sirseloudi, „The Meaning of Religion and Identity for the Violent Radicalisation of the Turkish Diaspora in Germany”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 24, no. 5 (2012): 807-824 (818).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 814.

<sup>14</sup> See Anne Aly, Jason-Leigh Striegher, „Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 12 (2012): 849-862.

<sup>15</sup> See Mustafa Gürbüz, *The “glocal” effect: rethinking religious nationalism and radicalization*, Brookings Report (Washington, DC: Brookings: Brookings, 3 June 2016), <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-glocal-effect-rethinking-religious-nationalism-and-radicalization/>.

<sup>16</sup> See *Turkish Foreign Policy and Homegrown Radicalization in the Post-Arab Uprisings*, Boğaziçi University - TÜSIAD Foreign Policy Forum (Istanbul: TÜSIAD, 10 June 2015), <https://tusiad.org/en/reports/item/10007-turkish-foreign-policy-and-homegrown-radicalization-in-the-post-arab-uprisings>.

<sup>17</sup> See Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*, (London: C. Hurst&Co, 2017), 41-44.

<sup>18</sup> See Ayhan Kaya, *Extremism and Radicalization: What makes the difference?* Bilgi Prime Youth ERC Blog, 12 February 2020.

When studying religiously-framed radicalization one should bear in mind that “religion” as a concept and a phenomenon is historically and socially constructed<sup>19</sup>, thus, arguably there is no holistic or universal approach to Islam. Furthermore, according to Dreßler “religionization and practices of religion-making” and „secularization and politics of secularism” are constitutive of each other<sup>20</sup>. Following these approaches, I argue that in order to understand the relations between Islam and radicalization we must deconstruct and thus contextualize the concepts of religion and radicalism. To this aim, the research deals strictly with DİTİB’s changing understandings of Islam and radicalization in the German Turkish diaspora, shaped by the particularities of Turkish-Islam. Comprehending DİTİB’s insight on radicalization and taxonomy of religious concepts is critical, since its Turkish “mother organization”, Diyanet is already an important actor in P/CVE efforts in Turkey<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, Diyanet was established as a state institution and used as an administrative tool to indoctrinate and propagate official ideology regarding Islam. Throughout its modern history, the Turkish state governed Islam and also governed through Islam, aiming to categorize people, mobilize constituencies, contain ethnic conflicts and organize social life<sup>22</sup>. The Directorate’s claim to promote authentic knowledge indicates an essentialist approach, distinguishing between categories of legitimate and illegitimate religions<sup>23</sup>. Non-state Islamic actors –religious orders and communities- were either declared illegal and persecuted by the state (prevalently in the early Republican era) or, depending on ruling elites’ needs (especially in the case of centre-right government parties) co-opted in transactional alliances for electoral support. In each of these cases, however, there was a clear division line between state Islam, respectively the Diyanet, and non-state religious actors. This distinction became more blurred after the AKP’s rise to power, as the party incorporated previously separate religious orders and communities in state institutions. While the state resources invested in Diyanet have doubled and its attributes were extended under the AKP rule, the Directorate is today a pillar of the governments’ extensive religious networks.<sup>24</sup> Not only Diyanet’s domestic range of activities and network but also its foreign policy duties were extended<sup>25</sup>, aspiring to assume a double function abroad: maintaining Turkish-Islamic identity in the diaspora, by instilling the religious and national values promoted by the official Turkish national ideology of the time; and projecting itself as a representative of (some form of) Euro-Islam by imposing a Turkish model<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See Andrew M. McKinnon, „Sociological Definitions, Language Games and the "Essence" of Religion”, *Method & theory in the study of religion* 14, no. 1 (2002): 61-83.

<sup>20</sup> See Markus Dressler, *Modes of Religionization: A Constructivist Approach to Secularity*, Working Paper Series of the Centre for Advanced Studies “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”7 (Leipzig: HCAS, February 2019), 5.

<sup>21</sup> See OHCHR, *Turkey’s Contribution to the Report to be Prepared in Accordance with Resolution 30/15. Human Rights In Preventing And Countering Violent Extremism*, (2015), <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/RuleOfLaw/PCVE/Turkey.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> See Sinem Adar, “Understanding Religion in (New) Turkey”, *Jadaliyya*, 18 March 2018, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/36307>.

<sup>23</sup> See İřtar Gözaydın, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *Management of Religion in Turkey* (London: Turkey Institute, November 2014), 14.

<sup>24</sup> See [Salim Cevik](#), *Erdogan’s Comprehensive Religious Policy Management of the Religious Realm in Turkey*, SWP Comment no. 12 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2019), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/erdogans-comprehensive-religious-policy/>

<sup>25</sup> See Raja M. Ali Saleem, *State, Nationalism, and Islamization: Historical Analysis of Turkey and Pakistan*, (London: Palgrave Studies in Religion, Politics, and Policy, 2017): 181-182.

<sup>26</sup> See Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, „Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 27 (2018), <http://journals.openedition.org/ejts/5944>.

# (Why) Is Turkish Islam Different?

“Turkish Islam” and, especially “Turkish model” have been concepts widely used after 9/11 by intellectuals and policy-makers, lauding Turkey for its unique fusion of secularism, democracy and Islam in the first years of AKP rule. While in the literature the “Turkish model” mostly encompasses political aspects, “Turkish Islam” relates also to the ways of practicing religion and theological views in the Turkish space.

Theologically, Turkish Islam differs from other cultural/historical Islamic interpretations by combining three areas/dimensions<sup>27</sup>. These areas are: the Maturidi theological school, the Hanafi legal school<sup>28</sup> and Sufism. The Maturidi approach is known for defining faith as „expression by tongue and assent by heart”<sup>29</sup>. According to this theological tradition, knowledge is validated by the use of reason, not by scriptural revelation alone<sup>30</sup>.

Maturidites reject the superiority of religious sciences over natural sciences, since knowledge is considered an attribute of God, and is less strict in matters of apostasy or membership to the *ummah*, leaving God the power to decide over these issues<sup>31</sup>.

The Hanafi jurisprudence is defined by its flexibility and ability to address a wide range of problems across ages and cultures, considering that Islamic universality is not attainable through strict and rigid principles. In the Ottoman period, the Hanafi influence was evident in the legal system, which combined secular law, used predominantly to deal with financial and administrative issues, with Islamic law (Sharia), which especially starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century was mostly implemented in the area of family matters. In fact, Ottoman sultans sometimes enacted legislation in conflict with the commands of Sharia, rendered compatible with Islam by the *Sheikh al-Islam*, the highest Islamic authority in the empire<sup>32</sup>.

As for Sufism, despite the fact that Sufi orders and brotherhoods (*tarikats*) were outlawed in 1925 in Turkey, and, thus, the state-controlled new religious authority, Diyanet, distanced itself from Sufism, Sufi orders continued their activities underground and organized their meetings secretly until 1950 when the state softened its secularist structures<sup>33</sup>. Later, especially after 9/11 and AKP’s rise to power, some theological aspects of Sufism, such as the teachings of love and tolerance of Ibn Arabi and Rumi<sup>34</sup> and their

<sup>27</sup> See Etga Uğur, „Intellectual roots of ‘Turkish Islam’ and approaches to the ‘Turkish model’”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2004): 327-345.

<sup>28</sup> See Soner Cagaptay, „Secularism and Foreign Policy in Turkey New Elections, Troubling Trends”, *Policy Focus* 67 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2007), 8.

<sup>29</sup> See Yasin Ramazan Basaran, „The Idea Of Subjective Faith In al-Maturidi’s Theology”, *Journal of Islamic Research* 4 (2011): 48-54 (48).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>31</sup> See Etga Uğur, *op. cit.*, 330f.

<sup>32</sup> See Ergun Özbudun, „Antecedents of Kemalist Secularism: Some Thoughts on the Young Turk Period”, in Ahmet Evin, *Modern Turkey: Continuity and Change* (Oplden: Leske und Budrich, 1984), 27.

<sup>33</sup> See Ahmet Yükleven, „Sufism and Islamic groups in contemporary Turkey”, in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Washington DC: CambridgeUniversity Press, 2008), 382.

<sup>34</sup> See Serafettin Pektaş and Johan Leman, *Militant Jihadism. Today and Tomorrow* (Leuven: Leuven University Press., 2019), 199.

understanding of Islam through personal experience with God were integrated in the official religious discourse, to promote the Turkish version of Islam as a model for the Muslim world and Muslim diasporas in the West. While references to philosophical Sufism convey a seemingly apolitical message of love, peace and tolerance, the history of institutionalized Sufism<sup>35</sup>, respectively of Sufi orders and brotherhoods, documents their engagement with politics, stricter rules of membership and even use of violence. For example, one of the most influential Sufi orders, the Bektashis, competed with the Ottomans for the political control of Eastern Anatolia<sup>36</sup>, and eventually became the official order of the Janissaries. Moreover, members of Turkey's conservative elite including former prime minister and President Turgut Özal and current president Erdoğan are linked to the Nakshibendiyya Sufi order, which is considered to be at the root of political Islam in Turkey<sup>37</sup>.

Two of the dimensions cited above - the Maturidi tradition prioritizing reason and mysticism promoting tolerance and forgiveness - were mentioned in an interview with a DİTİB top official, as essential elements of "Anatolian Islam", making this interpretation of Islam more compatible with modernity. It is noteworthy that all three interviewed religious officials used the term "Anatolian Islam" instead of "Turkish Islam", distancing themselves from a more nationalist approach to Islam, which dominated the Turkish stage, especially in the 1980s and it is still powerful today in the conservative nationalist circles (see MHPp/c party).

Sunni Muslim belonging has been the most important element of both Ottoman and modern Turkish identity. The Ottoman Empire was a Muslim empire, however, in its early years it allowed for religious hybridity as documented by the existence of inter-confessional sanctuaries. Religious boundaries started to emerge concomitantly with the Ottomans' increased control over local populations and confidence regarding the loyalty of existing local religious, ethnic, economic and status networks. Loyalty was won by bringing different groups together through brokerage and alliances, by recognizing the value of rivals and co-opting Byzantine and Balkan aristocracies into Ottoman administration<sup>38</sup>. Non-Muslim populations were rather incorporated than excluded. While many scholars assume that this policy of tolerance was the result of the Islamic belief according to which the People of the Book, respectively Jews, and Christians are protected under Islam<sup>39</sup>, it is highly probable that practical reasons prevailed, like the need to organize different communities, maintain peace and ensure the loyalty to the state<sup>40</sup>. Religious identification was strengthened by the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire, which recognized religion as a key component of differentiation between groups and granted a certain degree of autonomy to Non-Muslim communities<sup>41</sup>. However, some historians disagree with the establishment of the millet system following the conquest of Constantinople, arguing that such an institutionalized system of managing diversity was set up as late as the nineteenth century and all earlier relations between the state and conquered populations were organized ad hoc<sup>42</sup>. Although the "policies of toleration", the

<sup>35</sup> See Mark Woodward, Muhammad Sani Umar, Inayah Rohmaniyah and Mariani Yahya, „Salafi Violence and Sufi Tolerance? Rethinking Conventional Wisdom”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 6 (December 2013): 58-78 (61f).

<sup>36</sup> See Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, *The rise of political Islam in Turkey* (RAND Corporation, 2008), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid..

<sup>38</sup> See Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 63f.

<sup>39</sup> See Bassam Tibi, *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe. Democratic Peace and Euro Islam versus Global Jihad* (London: Routledge, 2008), 206

<sup>40</sup> See Karen Barkey, *op.cit.*

<sup>41</sup> See Ceren Lord, *Religious Politics in Turkey. From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>42</sup> See Karen Barkey, *op.cit.*, 115f.

*millet* system and *Ottomanism* which conferred equal rights to all Ottoman citizens regardless of their religious or ethnic belonging, were considered an example of Islamic tolerance and openness towards multiculturalism, there was a hierarchy which positioned the Muslim community at the top of the Ottoman hierarchy. Islam has maintained its key role in the Turkish identity formula even after the foundation of modern Turkey in 1923. Muslim membership continued to be a strong identity element even in the Kemalist era despite (or rather, thanks to) the secularization project. As Zürcher explains “secularism meant not so much the separation of church and state as the subjugation and integration of religion into the state bureaucracy.”<sup>43</sup> Under the Kemalist regime, Islam was modernized and Turkified since religion was the strongest link between citizens. Hence, Islam was placed under state control and used to produce and enhance patriotic sentiments and devotion of citizens to the state, an example in this regard is the recurring motif of *şehitlik* or martyrdom in state propaganda materials, stating that those who die for the homeland go to Islamic heaven<sup>44</sup>. From the 1950s, political parties used religious sentiments to mobilize conservative voters, relaxed secular policies and enjoyed support of unofficial Islamic movements<sup>45</sup>. The transition to the democratic system allowed for the re-emergence of previously suppressed Sufi orders and Islamic communities. Furthermore, in time, depending on the political forces in power, relations between official (Diyanet-preached) Islam and „unofficial Islam”, the main representatives in Turkey being the *Nurcu*, the *Süleymancı*, *Milli Görüş*, and the *Fethullahçı* (followers of Fethullah Gülen), all stemming from the Nakşibendi Khalidi Sufi order, had changed and boundaries became blurred. There have been collaborations between the political centre-right and religious communities, for electoral support, but also between Diyanet and some of the religious movements, as admitted by former Diyanet president Mehmet Görmez, according to whom between the 1950s and 1970s many of Diyanet’s religious personnel were graduates of non-state *medrese* (Islamic seminaries)<sup>46</sup>. Islamists officially entered the Turkish political scene in the late 1960s with Necmettin Erbakan’s *Milli Görüş* (National View), an anti-Western, Islamic and nationalist political movement<sup>47</sup>. The movement established several parties which came to power as part of coalition governments and were eventually banned from politics by the secular establishment and labelled as radical<sup>48</sup>. The AKP too is one heir of *Milli Görüş*, having its ideological roots in the movement. The political polarization and social fragmentation of the 1970s, which brought Turkey to the brink of civil war ended with a military coup on 12 September 1980. The military introduced government adopted the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as official ideology of the state to ensure the unity of the nation and prevent radicalization.

<sup>43</sup> See Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 233.

<sup>44</sup> The idea that military service is not only a civic duty but also a religious responsibility was propagated through the *Askere Din Kitabı* (The Book of Religion for Soldiers) written by Ahmet Hamdi Akseki in 1925, see Doğan Gürpınar and Ceren Kenar, „The Nation and its Sermons: Islam, Kemalism and the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey”, *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 1 (2015): 1-19 (8f).

<sup>45</sup> See Erik J. Zürcher, *op. cit.*, 234,

<sup>46</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, *Governing Islam abroad. Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Western Europe*, The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy (Basingstoke: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2019), 24.

<sup>47</sup> See Ihsan Dagi, „Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization”, *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 1 (2005): 21-37.

<sup>48</sup> See Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

# Turkish State Islam Abroad

Islamic movements and orders outlawed in Turkey expanded their activities in Western European countries with large Turkish diaspora, where they filled the religious void in Turkish migrant communities and enjoyed more freedom. Almost contemporaneously, Turkish state Islam became active abroad with the purpose to prevent what was perceived by Ankara as religious radicalization and to provide state controlled religious services. This section outlines the history of DİTİB in Germany, its relations with the German and Turkish states and its perspective on radicalization, including excerpts from interviews taken with DİTİB personnel, a Turkish religious attaché, prevention professionals, a German expert in Islamic theology and a German public official, as well as my observations based on the mosque visits in Berlin and Cologne.

As early as 1971, Diyanet began to transnationalize its activities, ensuring religious services for Turkish citizens abroad. Host countries became aware of the religious needs of the large Turkish migrant communities who came as *Gastarbeiter* in the 1960s and decided to stay. Diyanet was chosen as a suitable and reliable actor considering Turkey's secular tradition and moderate understanding of Islam<sup>49</sup>, and it started to send imams abroad for Ramadan, while Diyanet's network of organizations abroad started to be active from 1978. However, at this stage the Ministry of Labour was in charge of sending imams proposed by the Diyanet<sup>50</sup>. In 1984, DİTİB was officially founded in Germany, one of its main functions being to counter the influence of Turkish-origin Muslim groups that were considered radicals home: the Islamic Community Milli Görüş (today IGMG) and the Federation of Islamic Cultural Centers (VIKZ)<sup>51</sup>. In the meantime, European countries preferred Turkish-Islamic interpretation over other Muslim countries' influences. In the view of the former Diyanet president, Ali Bardakoğlu, "Asked what Islam and Sharia means to him, a man from Saudi Arabia will repeat: having a thief's hand cut off. Asked what Islam and Muslimdom represents for him, a Turk will answer: sincerity and moral conduct"<sup>52</sup>. Thus, according to the Diyanet official, what distinguishes Turkish Islam from Saudi and other fundamentalist interpretations is its flexibility and adaptability to modernity, opposed to the dogmatism and rigidity of the others. As seen in the previous section, the legacy of Maturidi theological school, Hanafi jurisprudence and Sufism renders the Turkish interpretation of Islam more flexible. However, an important step in adapting Islam to modernity and regulating state-Islam relations was the secularization of the legal realm in the early years of the Republic, which deprived Islamic actors of their power to enact Sharia and subjected religion to state control. The mission was not solely

<sup>49</sup> See Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>50</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, *op. cit.*, 81.

<sup>51</sup> See Sinem Adar, *Rethinking Political Attitudes of Migrants from Turkey and Their Germany-Born Children- Beyond Loyalty and Democratic Culture*, SWP Research Paper 2019/RP 07 (June 2019), 9.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Günter Seufert, „Religion: nation-building instrument of the state or factor of civil society? The AKP between state- and society-centered religious politics”, in *Turkey beyond Nationalism. Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, Hans-Lukas Kieser (I.B. Tauris, 2006): 140.

to “tame” religion but also to “establish Islam differently” with the intention to modernize it, respectively “to transform religion into a set of rational beliefs far from superstitions and false beliefs”<sup>53</sup>. Turkey’s secularization and Westernization process enhanced the perception of Turkish Islam as “moderate” and compatible with modern Western societies and with Western secular law while proposing it as a safe and pragmatic solution for Europe.

While today DİTİB’s understanding of radicalization, or rather, of who is a radical, has changed, its mosques were successful to keep the community away from radicalization. To illustrate, only one quarter of radicals in Germany were of Turkish origin at the end of 2015<sup>54</sup>, the peak year of ISIS recruitment. This is a small number if we consider that around three quarters of all Muslims in Germany are of Turkish origin, forming a community of 3 million. And even these radicalized Turks belong not to DİTİB mosque circles but to other Muslim communities and groups, as shows the 2018 Report on the Protection of the Constitution, published by the German Domestic Intelligence service. Three Turkish organizations are mentioned under the section of Islamist terrorist/extremism, IGMG leads with the greatest share of members -10.000-, followed by Turkish Hezbollah<sup>55</sup> with 400 followers and Furkan Gemeinschaft, the German branch of the Turkish Furkan community, with 290, the latest being declared an official intelligence target in the year of the report<sup>56</sup>. The Furkan community follows the teaching of the Muslim Brotherhood’s founder, Hasan al-Banna and of its leading theologian, Sayyid Qutb. The community’s leader Alparslan Kuytul calls for the establishment of an Islamic state, declaring Islam incompatible with democracy and considering the West as the “source of all evil”<sup>57</sup>. Kuytul, was arrested for “inciting hatred” and “insulting the president”, most probably because of his opposition to the AKP’s military operations in Syria<sup>58</sup>. The decision of Turkish authorities seems to be less a reaction to the groups’ Salafi overtones (unlike in Germany) but rather, it confirms the AKP’s policy of carrots and sticks regarding religious orders and communities, rewarding those who support the government, and repressing those who oppose or criticize it, like the Furkan community<sup>59</sup>. It should be also noted that the largest group labelled as extremist in the German Domestic Intelligence service’s report, the IGMG, does not use violence to reach its goal- which is the creation of a just order based on Quranic revelation- but its understanding of Islam is more conservative and uses anti-Semitic discourse<sup>60</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Chiara Maritato and Luca Ozzano, „Patterns of Political Secularism in Italy and Turkey: The Vatican and the Diyanet to the Test of Politics”, *Politics and Religion* 12 (2019): 457–477, 463.

<sup>54</sup> See „Jeder Vierte Ausgereiste Islamist Ist Türkischstämmig”, *Spiegel Online*, 17 August 2016, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/islamischer-staat-jeder-vierte-ausgereiste-islamist-ist-tuerkischstaemmig-a-1108074.html>

<sup>55</sup> The Turkish Hezbollah (unrelated to Lebanon’s Hezbollah), is an Islamist militant organization of Kurdish origin, established in Eastern Anatolia in the 1980s, which allegedly cooperated with state security forces in fighting the PKK at the time. The main goal of the Turkish Hezbollah is to establish an Islamic state on Turkish territory and then, expand it globally. The group considers the use of violence as legitimate to achieve their goals. In Germany the Turkish Hezbollah attracts new members, collects donations and organizes religious and cultural meetings. See Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2018* (Berlin, 2018), 217, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2018.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 202f.

<sup>58</sup> Alex MacDonald, “Turkish Islamic groups face state crackdown for speaking out”, *Middle East Eye*, 12 June 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkish-islamic-groups-face-state-crackdown-speaking-out>.

<sup>59</sup> See *Salim Cevik*, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Antisemitismus im Islamismus* (Berlin, June 2019), 33-34, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/publikationen/pb-islamismus>

According to Olivier Roy, there are more German converts to Islam among the jihadist than German Turks<sup>61</sup>. A reason why converts radicalize is their exposure to Salafi ideologies. Salafist imams in Germany usually hold their sermons and lectures in German, attracting Muslims of German origin as well as 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation migrants<sup>62</sup>. Additionally, many of these preachers grew up in Germany and understand the problems young people face in the country. This makes them more appealing than imams who come from Turkey and preach in Turkish. According to German Intelligence services, Salafism in Germany cannot be labelled as imported extremism, rather, it is produced and propagated by German Salafists<sup>63</sup>. "German Islam is Salafism" according to a prevention professional working for a state-financed organization. "So far, most Germans [n. converts] who claimed to represent Islam, were Salafists. They struggle with identity crisis and promote a reactionary form of Islam". As for the Turkish community, he added, that DİTİB's presence contributed significantly to the attenuation of such an identity crisis (Interview, prevention professional).

From the experience of a prevention professional interviewed there are three main reasons why converts are more prone to radicalize: "(1) they are easier to manipulate since they have limited knowledge about Islam; (2) converts think they lived all of their lives in a wrong way, and that they discovered the meaning of life [n. in Islam]. Now they want to do it the right way, they are over-motivated; (3) they don't really fit in, they don't look like a Turkish or Arab person in the mosque, so some of them want to prove themselves to others, and they cannot just be like the rest, they have to prove double or three times more that they truly belong there, that they are good Muslims. I see this in many German Muslims. When a former nonbeliever discovers (what he believes to be) the meaning of life, religion can be like a drug, it pushes them into an optimistic view of life and afterlife." (Interview, prevention professional) Consequently, access to German language quality religious education and services could be a solution for preventing radicalization of German converts.

According to an expert in Islamic theology DİTİB is neither radical nor fundamentalist, thanks to its "heterogeneous community, in DİTİB mosques you can find believers who go to clubs, drink alcohol, as well as people who go to pilgrimages or who are very conservative. That's an advantage." (Interview, expert in Islamic theology) The diversity of the Turkish community, consequently, through its variety of ideas and lifestyle preferences does not allow for standardization of religious thought. DİTİB must negotiate differences in order to stay relevant.

Political situation in the home country might be, paradoxically, another reason why the Turkish community is more immune to radicalism. Comparing Turkish Islam to interpretations of Islam of other national groups in the diaspora, a prevention professional of German-Arabic origin believes that the main difference lies in home country politics and situation: "Turkish Islam has a very non-violent approach; Turkish-Muslims are much more grounded, not so politically motivated. I think it has to do with Turkish democratic and secular experience at least until recently, while most people coming from Arab countries are filled with anger, because of the situation back home. I think it has to do with experiencing war, violence and oppression".

If this perception is true, the undergoing deterioration of social and political life in Turkey should alert countries with large Turkish diaspora. Experience shows that home country

<sup>61</sup> See Eren Güvercin, „Interview with French extremism researcher Olivier Roy: They love death as we love life: jihad and the roots of terror”, *Quantara*, 19 July 2018, <https://en.qantara.de/content/interview-with-french-extremism-researcher-olivier-roy-they-love-death-as-we-love-life-jihad>

<sup>62</sup> See Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Salafismus in Deutschland Missionierung und Jihad* (Berlin, May 2019), 19, <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/publikationen/pb-islamismus>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid..

conflicts, including the ones taking place on the Turkish stage, do spill over to host countries. After all, the transnationalization of the Turkish state's and ruling elites' opponents - i.e. of IGMG and PKK - was precisely one of the reasons why Turkey started to engage with its diaspora. However, looking strictly at the risk of Islamized radicalization, a more realistic scenario would be that civil and political unrest in home countries can religiously radicalize nationals living abroad only to the extent to which the exported conflict includes radical ideas and actors.

## **DİTİB and the German and Turkish States**

“From a theological and religious point of view DİTİB is not problematic; the problem is the political pressure from Turkey.” (Interview, prevention professional and former DİTİB mosque volunteer) This political pressure, respectively the relations with Turkey's state controlled Diyanet is one of the reasons of the awkward image of DİTİB in the German public. State interference was also the reason for the decision of two former DİTİB volunteers to leave their respective mosques. In both cases the religious attaché sent by Turkey after the failed coup attempt played a crucial role: “A new attaché came, and he wanted the *sohbets* [n. theological lessons/ discussions with youth in the mosques] to be organized by DİTİB employees and not by volunteers. Volunteers were left with the mosque tours only.” (Interview, former DİTİB volunteer) After volunteering for more than 10 years in a DİTİB mosque another former volunteer added “I have seen many attachés some were better some were worse, some of them weren't very happy for example about the cooperation with the police, some of them didn't care, some of them were open. But almost always they were interested in our work mostly to the extent to which it could hinder their careers. That changed with the coup. Turkey was afraid that there will be Gülenists [n. followers of Fethullah Gülen] everywhere. So I think they gave orders like: whatever happens in any mosque anywhere take a good look at it, and they were getting stricter, they started to question our work since we were not DİTİB employees or imams.” He added that they were not expelled, but volunteer activities were limited, they were not allowed to conduct theological lessons anymore although the lessons proved to be successful and popular within the local mosque community, so much that a group of youth attending their programs decided to leave the mosque when the volunteers left and asked them to continue discussions elsewhere. Today, after more than three years some of them still meet and continue their *sohbets* on weekly basis at the office of one former volunteer. The religious officials sent by Turkey can be divided along three axes, according to Bruce: length of stay (short term vs. long term); hierarchical position (imam hatip; coordinator imam; attaché; counsellor); and geographical region. Counsellors and the attachés serve for four years abroad, “long-term religious officials” (*uzun süreli din görevlisi*) spend five years in Germany, while “short-term religious officials” (*kısa süreli din görevlisi*) stay for two years. Additionally, Diyanet sends short-term delegations for Ramadan and Eid al-Adha. The religious officials are overseen by attachés, the latter being supervised by the religious services counsellors (*din hizmetleri müşaviri*), who are members of the Turkish embassy<sup>64</sup>. According to Gazi Erdem, former religious attaché in New York, the counsellors and the attachés abroad were previously appointed through a decree signed by the state minister in charge of supervising Diyanet, the minister of foreign affairs and the prime minister, which had to be approved by the president of Turkey.<sup>65</sup> From July

<sup>64</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, *op.cit.*, 186-188.

<sup>65</sup> See Gazi Erdem, „Religious Services in Turkey: From the Office of the Şeyhülislam to the Diyanet”, *The Muslim World* 98, no. 2-3 (2008): 199-215 (210).

2018 as a result of 2017 constitutional changes, respectively the adoption of presidential system of governance in Turkey, Diyanet came directly under the Presidency, and thus, now it reports to the president of Turkey<sup>66</sup>.

All religious personnel sent from Turkey go through an extensive written examination followed, if successful, by interviews. Candidates must be well-prepared not only on Islam-related topics, like Quran and hadith, but also knowledge of other religions, especially of Christianity, the exam including questions of Turkish, Ottoman, and European history, as well as geography, psychology, and sociology. Only candidates who hold university degrees can apply for positions to serve abroad. On the other hand, the interest in these positions is extremely high, making them very competitive. The selection process takes between one and one and a half year and is managed by the Directorate for Turks Abroad<sup>67</sup>. Despite the fact that Turkish religious officials are well-prepared, their lacking or limited knowledge of German language as well as the fact that most of them are not informed about the German realities and problems faced by diaspora communities make them an easy target for criticism.

While “import-imams” are seen as an evil that prevents integration in German society, the perspective from DİTİB’s side is very different. A top DİTİB official asserted: “If now Turkey would not send religious officials to Germany - we counted a yearly budget of 60-70 million euros (...) not Turkey but Germany would suffer. When the number of radical individuals will rise in our mosques and we will not able to provide religious staff to give appropriate answers and teachings, Germany will face increased radicalization, it will be a chaos. Thus, this criticism is very inaccurate, not all religious officials coming from Turkey are enemies, Turkey is not the enemy of Germany, some politicians can yell at each other as much as they want, but we should not turn people against each other.” (Interview, DİTİB top official).

Imams trained abroad will continue to be needed in Germany, considering that there are around 2,600 mosques (as for 2017) in the country and even with the new imam training programs launched by Osnabrück University there will be a shortage of imams in the following years. However, foreign imams have troubles with integrating into the German society first and foremost because they do not speak German, know very little about the German social and cultural norms, lifestyle, and challenges faced by Muslim migrants in daily life and are poorly informed about local public affairs. There are even more issues when these religious service leaders come from countries with a very different social and political organization, from authoritarian regimes, lacking or dismantling democracies. In these cases, there is a risk that they would base their interpretation of Islam on the non-democratic understanding of the state from which they come from. The risk is even higher if we consider importing Islamic officials from countries in which religious authority is subjected to state control, as they can be turned into carriers and supporters of the state ideology, even abroad. This can also be the case of Diyanet imams sent from Turkey, since Diyanet is controlled by the Turkish state, and reports to the Turkish president. Thus, it is possible that (some) Turkish imams disseminate a politicized Islamic narrative – as it already occurred via the *khutbas* targeting the followers of Fethullah Gülen or the prayers for Turkey’s victory in Syria for example- and potentially authoritarian understanding of Islam, respectively deeming illegitimate all non Diyanet-approved interpretations of Islam (including moderate interpretations). In such cases the solution proposed by some observers is publicly subsidized additional mandatory training<sup>68</sup>.

<sup>66</sup>See Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, *Kurumsal Tarihçe*, <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay/1#>

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin Bruce, *op.cit.*, 191.

<sup>68</sup> See Ehrhart Körting, Dietmar Molthagen and Bilkay Öney, *What is to be Done? Germany between Islamic Extremism and Islamophobia*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017), 20, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/14101.pdf>

Osnabrück University announced the launching of an imam training course starting summer 2020, with the support of the German interior ministry. The so-called imam college will be supervised by academics, and German Islamic organizations. However, Germany's largest Islamic groups, DİTİB and IGMG, running together almost half of the mosques in the country refused to participate, because of the risk of state interference. While six other German universities offer Islamic theology programs, there is a lack of practical imam training courses, leaving graduates jobless<sup>69</sup>.

DİTİB is also aware that they must change gradually the language of their services to German if they want to stay relevant. "If we continue to speak only Turkish in our mosques I can guess how DİTİB will look in 15-20 years, we will be left with only 20-30 mosques in Germany, the rest of them will be closed down". As for January 2020, however, there were only 25 DİTİB mosques to run German language *sohbets*, aiming to reach 100 mosques until the end of 2020. As a consequence, they started a religious official training program on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020 in Cologne, Germany, aiming to complement Turkey's International Theology Programme (UIP) designed for Turkish-origin foreign citizenship holders<sup>70</sup>. While UIP prepares religious scholars, the Cologne program provides 2 years long practical training for future religious officials, imams and mosque guides. In the first round they accepted 22 students, some of them UIP graduates while others finished Islamic theology in Germany. They all hold at least Bachelor's degree and around half of the students have Master's degree too. All of the current students are German citizens of Turkish origin, but in the future they want to recruit students of different ethnic backgrounds, including Germans too. (Interview DİTİB top official) IGMG has also established an imam training institute, but their admission requirement include only high school diploma, while Osnabrück University and DİTİB's courses require academic qualification. However, as Rauf Ceylan from Osnabrück University admits, imam training programs will not solve the problem of who is going to pay imam salaries<sup>71</sup>. Thus, some communities will most probably strive to pay (low salaries) to imams, since they rely mostly on community donations and there is no church tax (yet) for Muslims, the state might contribute - however state interference is not approved - or they will remain dependent on foreign financing.

In the opinion of a DİTİB official, DİTİB is apolitical and its relations with Diyanet are justified by the lack of Islamic expertise in Germany and also by its theological adherence: "Our origins are in Anatolia, Turkey. If you cut our connection to Diyanet, this organization will fall apart. I cannot know how things are going to look in 20 years. But my guess is that in 20 years (...) in a globalized world our relations with other organizations will be diversified, maybe we will cooperate with other countries too, but all of these relations will be based on spiritual collaboration. Of course in the long term DİTİB needs to stand on its own feet in terms of administration".

DİTİB's relation with Diyanet has been harshly criticized in the German public space. Many German politicians like the Federal Minister of Health in the CDU cabinet or Green party politician Katrin Göring-Eckardt, called for ending the practice of importing foreign imams<sup>72</sup>. While, as seen, DİTİB has taken some (small) steps in this direction, there is not so much to be done when it comes to public debates whether Islam is part of Germany or not. Even former Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich, who presided over the German

<sup>69</sup> See Zia Weise, „Wanted: Imams made in Germany”, *Politico*, 17 December 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-imam-training-islam-in-society/>

<sup>70</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, "Imams for the diaspora: the Turkish state's International Theology Programme", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2019): 1166-1183.

<sup>71</sup> See Zia Weise, „Wanted: Imams made in Germany”, *Politico*, 17 December 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-imam-training-islam-in-society/>

<sup>72</sup> See „How Seehofer is pushing to 'replace foreign influence' at Islam Conference", *The Local*, 28 November 2018, <https://www.thelocal.de/20181128/interior-minister>.

Islam Conference (Deutsche Islam Konferenz, DIK)<sup>73</sup> publicly doubted Islam's belonging to the country.

Research on policies concerning Islam in Western countries, including Germany, indicates an increasing securitization of governments' approach towards Muslim migrant communities. Governmental actors perceive Islam as a potential threat and regard integration also as means to ensure public security<sup>74</sup>. Muslim organizations are expected to distance themselves from violence committed by Muslims all around the world and become part of the public discourse on religion. A similar situation occurred when IGMG was excluded from the second round of DIK because of its alleged links to a charity that supported Hamas and an ongoing prosecution. Muslim organizations in Germany were expected to condemn publicly the IGMG and cut ties with it<sup>75</sup>. According to an IGMG member, many DİTİB officials were reticent to join the second phase of German Islam Conference because of IGMG's exclusion. Allegedly the problem was solved after a discussion between the German interior ministry and Turkish diplomatic authorities, which "ordered" DİTİB to participate<sup>76</sup>.

Cooperation between German-Turkish authorities regarding DİTİB is also evident in a report on the first round of DIK published by the German federal ministry of interior, that shows that alongside the consultations in the German Islam Conference, the interior ministry started an "intensive dialogue" with Turkey and it cooperated closely with the German federal foreign office in this regard. The aim of these discussions was to provide information about the German Islam Conference, its goals and about the requirements of the German constitutional law in the field of religion - especially with regard to DİTİB. They also exchanged information about the relationship of state and religion in Turkey and talked about the training of religious officials. Two meetings were held in Istanbul (2007) and Berlin (2008) with the participation of public officials from Turkey and Germany, academics and the then deputy head of Diyanet, Mehmet Görmez<sup>77</sup>.

Bruce asserts that the nationalization of Islam in Western European countries [n. attempts to create German, French Islam etc] by receiving states has paradoxically resulted in even closer collaboration between home states and receiving states, many times sacrificing the autonomy of local associations<sup>78</sup>. A reason for this voluntary interstate cooperation was the lack of local religious capital at the time. These "agreements" or discussions usually happened behind closed doors and contradict the official discourse of politicians who criticize foreign states' interference in German religious affairs. The divergence between official discourse and action can be noted in the "import imams" controversy. While most German politicians declare themselves against this practice, the process of receiving Turkish imams was institutionalized and normalized by the bilateral diplomatic relations<sup>79</sup>. Of course, in the last decade, and especially after 2016, social and political circumstances have changed in both countries and Turkish-German relations came to a

<sup>73</sup> DIK was established by Wolfgang Schäuble in 2006, then Federal Minister of the Interior, as a dialogue platform between state actors, security agencies and Islamic organizations. Some have claimed that DIK was initiated for security reasons. See Tobias Müller, "Engaging "Moderates" Against "Extremists" in German Politics on Islam", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 15 no. 2 (2017):55-65 (56).

<sup>74</sup> See Matthias Kortmann, "Debating the 'integration of Islam': the discourse between governmental actors and Islamic representatives in Germany and the Netherlands", *Comparative Migration Studies* 6, no. 24 (2018), 5-11.

<sup>75</sup> See Tobias Müller, *op. cit.*, 60.

<sup>76</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, *op.cit.*, 140

<sup>77</sup> Bundesministeriums des Innern, für Bau und Heimat, *Drei Jahre Deutsche Islam Konferenz (DIK) 2006 – 2009* (Berlin, 2010), 358f,

[https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/dik/bilanz.pdf;jsessionid=F01D2E5F465B3BE0900F3D6E8FCD6A53.2\\_cid364?\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/veroeffentlichungen/themen/heimat-integration/dik/bilanz.pdf;jsessionid=F01D2E5F465B3BE0900F3D6E8FCD6A53.2_cid364?_blob=publicationFile&v=1)

<sup>78</sup> See Benjamin Bruce, *op.cit.*, 140.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*.

halt. However, there is evidence that DİTİB's affairs were partly decided between states, while on the other hand, under the AKP DİTİB started to work as an interlocutor of the Turkish state in Western Europe<sup>80</sup>.

Asked about what the German state could do to improve cooperation with DİTİB, a DİTİB top official's answer was: "More sincerity. German public officials recognize in all our meetings the positive impact of DİTİB and its Turkey-sent imams in society, but they also say that from now on imams should be German born and raised, and I agree. However, the same officials, when they talk to the press, they express only a part [n. of what we discussed] that imams should be German, but they forget about the rest, they don't say that they have benefited a lot from our imams so far." He also complained that many times the positive developments and projects of DİTİB are left in shadow, while some of its actions or discourses are distorted.

A religious attaché confirmed the high-level cooperation in managing religious affairs in Germany: "The foundation of DİTİB was the result of an agreement between two countries. Fundamental changes in DİTİB have to be agreed between these countries." He also said that negotiations continue even if the public is unaware. As for the state's decision to exclude DİTİB from its "Moscheen für Integration" (Mosques for integration) program, the interviewee believes that the state probably wants to wait to publicly engage with DİTİB until the public opinion is ready.

DİTİB's image suffered a lot after the spying imam's controversy. In a private conversation with a German civil servant, she told me that her mother refused to participate in the activities organized during the Open Mosque Day by DİTİB even though she usually enjoys multicultural events, on the grounds that the association serves Turkish president, Erdoğan. This perception seems to be widespread in German society and is confirmed by the religious attaché: "we have to admit that Erdoğan has an influence [n. in the perceived change of DİTİB], he's a charismatic leader, and this leader makes Europe uncomfortable. I should add, though, that he's not interested in giving direct orders and instructions to DİTİB's president and religious attachés. This perception is mostly the result of the spying imams-crisis after the attempted coup in Turkey. Turkish society went through a trauma, otherwise our religious personnel don't have such missions abroad. We don't receive instructions from the Turkish state. We are here as religious employees. But whether we like it or not within the group, there might be people with strong political beliefs. But I think the main issue is Erdoğan's charisma. (...) When you associate DİTİB with Erdoğan, people tend to forget all the good things we're doing."

DİTİB was also accused of not showing enough willingness to prevent radicalization, but for "promoting" it. In this regard, the city of Cologne stopped its collaboration with DİTİB in the project Wegweiser in September 2016, because the local government considered that DİTİB was not distancing itself enough from a Diyanet flyer that glorified martyrdom in Islam. Moreover, in April 2018, the Herford DİTİB mosque was strongly criticized, after videos of theatre play in the mosque showing children dressed up in Turkish soldiers re-enacting First World War battle was released<sup>81</sup>. Moreover, following the Turkish invasion of northern Syria in January 2018, some DİTİB mosques prayed for the victory of Turkey, even though DİTİB denied any centralized appeal for such prayers<sup>82</sup>. Indeed the Friday sermon on 26 January 2018 included no mention of Turkey's Syrian operations, but

<sup>80</sup> See Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, *op. cit.*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> See Behnam T. Said and Hazim Fouad, *Countering Islamist Radicalisation in Germany: A Guide to Germany's Growing Prevention Infrastructure*, ICCT Policy Brief (The Hague: ICCT, September 2018), <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ICCT-Said-Fouad-Countering-Islamist-Radicalization-in-Germany-Sept2018.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> See Richard A. Fuchs „Are German imams praying for Turkey to beat Kurds in Syria?", *Deutsche Welle*, 26 January 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/are-german-imams-praying-for-turkey-to-beat-kurds-in-syria/a-42327276>

ironically it called on believers to “stay away from useless things”<sup>83</sup>. Nor did the *khutba* after the launch of the Operation Peace Spring in October 2019, however, there were some isolated cases of mosques (see Herne mosque) which read prayers for Turkey’s victory<sup>84</sup>. In fact, in a meeting with a German public official, he stated that DİTİB started to engage in confidence building measures with the German government, bringing as an example in this regard the association’s attempt to control the situation of political prayers. DİTİB also attracted criticism due to its refusal to take part in a manifestation organized by Muslim associations in Cologne against terrorism. In the same year, the complete board of the national DİTİB youth organization (BDMJ) resigned, accusing the association of unwillingness to further liberalize. These developments led the German government to cut the funding of the association from 1.5 million euro in 2017 to about 300,000 euro in 2018<sup>85</sup>.

This “stigma” affects not only DİTİB but also people and organizations which previously collaborated with DİTİB, an example in this regard being one of the prevention professional I interviewed, who told me that mentioning the name of the organization he works for and DİTİB together, would lead to public accusations of collaborating with “extremists”.

However, according to my guide at Şehitlik Mosque, they organize around ten tours per week, each group having between 11 and 30 participants, I myself had to book a tour one month in advance because all the spots were already booked. A quick check of their online calendar (as for the end of February)<sup>86</sup>, shows that there were tours every weekend in February, and all weekends were booked in March and April (except from one Saturday), while in March only 9 days out of 31 there was no organized tour in the mosque. The guide told me that besides individual curious Germans, they organize tours for German schools, universities and police. The same goes for the Cologne Central Mosque I visited in January, the guide told me that a week before I went there, they had a tour for the local police and while I was there, I saw two different school groups. The tours themselves demonstrate that there is cooperation between German public authorities and DİTİB. Furthermore, in a meeting in autumn 2019 asked about his opinion on DİTİB’s work, a German senior diplomat declared that he has a positive opinion citing its important role in providing religious education and services to Turkish people in Germany, however, he added that does not approve political interference of the Turkish state.

## DİTİB’s definition and response to radicalization

DİTİB’s understanding of radicalization has followed the official policy line pursued by Ankara. Besides providing religious service to the increasing number of Turkish migrants in Germany, the rationale for establishing Diyanet umbrella associations abroad was to counter the influence of Turkish religious organizations, which were outlawed in Turkey, in the diaspora. While in the early 1980s the groups deemed radical by the Turkish state were IGMG and VIKZ, nowadays not only the “enemies” changed, but also DİTİB’s understanding of radicalization changed. These changes took place concomitantly with

<sup>83</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Faydasız Şeylerden Uzak Durmak*, 26 January 2018, [http://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=390&lang=en](http://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=390&lang=en).

<sup>84</sup> „Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger: Gebet in DİTİB-Moscheen für Sieg der türkischen Armee in Syrien Scharfe Kritik von Volker Beck: Staatspropaganda mit Religion als Mittel zum Zweck - DİTİB weist Vorwürfe zurück“, *Presse Portal*, 11 October 2019, <https://www.presseportal.de/pm/66749/4399091>

<sup>85</sup> See Daniel Heinrich, “Erdoğan in Germany: What you need to know about DİTİB mosque association”, *Deutsche Welle*, 28 September 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/Erdoğan-in-germany-what-you-need-to-know-about-DİTİB-mosque-association/a-45676937>.

<sup>86</sup> See „Cami ziyareti“, [http://sehitlik-moschee.de/?page\\_id=518&lang=tr](http://sehitlik-moschee.de/?page_id=518&lang=tr).

Ankara's reassessment and redefinition of who are the Turkish state's enemies and of who is a "terrorist". Counter-narratives have been directed against the Gülen community, - heavily after the 2016 coup attempt, less evident lately -, and Salafi groups. Not surprisingly, some old "enemies" of DİTİB, such as the IGMG, turned into new friends, with the rise to power of AKP, a party stemmed from the *Milli Görüş* movement. While IGMG and DİTİB competed for decades over influence in the diaspora, today there are many joint initiatives of the former rival organizations<sup>87</sup>, an example in this regard being their cooperation in fighting Islamophobia in Europe. The rapprochement between the former competitors was evident in the joint press release<sup>88</sup> of DİTİB, IGMG and ATİB (Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations in Europe – represents a version of Turkish Islamo-nationalism, former member of the hardline Turkish nationalist organization, the Grey Wolves<sup>89</sup>) in which they call for closer Turkish-German relations and for more solidarity with Turkey on the first commemoration of the attempted coup, showing dissatisfaction with Europe's response. The organizations also make common front against whom they regarded as Turkey's "foe" or the "sectarian parallel state"<sup>90</sup> referring to Gülen community. The proximity between IGMG and DİTİB was confirmed by a DİTİB religious official, claiming that *Milli Görüş* changed a lot, is less radical and anti-statist with regard to Turkey, making thus, collaboration possible. (Interview, Religious official) However, it is safe to assume that changes in political leadership in Turkey – the power is held by the AKP, a party with roots in the movement previously deemed as radical by the Turkish state – and, subsequently, in the religious policy, led to this rapprochement.

Asked about what radicalization means a DİTİB imam answered "interpreting the Quran and hadith in a way that celebrates or leads to violence. Islam is the religion of peace. They [n. radicals] interpret Islam as they wish, in a wrong way because they lack basic Islamic knowledge". While the imam cited violence as necessary condition in calling someone a radical, according to a DİTİB top official radicalization is a process that happens in phases, a first alarming sign is having radical ideas and beliefs, the second phase is trying to persuade radical ideas on others (by sharing and justifying radical ideas), the next phase is forcing others to adopt radical ideas, while the last one is what we define today as terrorism, respectively using violence and punishing those who do not adopt radical ideas, (just like ISIS and al-Qaeda does). Radicalization, in his opinion, is a belief in absolute truth and rejection of pluralism and pluralist ideas. A radical will try to change by means of words or violence others' lifestyle, ideas and religious belief. He jokingly said "If you are trying to bring people to the "right path" by force you are a radical".

On the other hand, he believes that "DİTİB is a religious community, its main mission is not to prevent radicalization, but to provide religious service and Islamic education to people, but when these [n. duties] are properly done, they are, in fact, the most important means of preventing radicalization." While there were no case of youth radicalizing in DİTİB mosques, he admitted that there might be radicals attending religious services, but they "don't like our preachers, they call them *kravatlı hoca* (tie wearing preacher), and criticize them saying that they [n. the preachers] don't tell the truth."

Many Islamic terms came to be associated with radicalization, the most popular one in this regard is the concept "jihad". According to Islamic theology *jihad* means "struggle, strive,

<sup>87</sup>See Lorenzo Vidino, "Erdogan's Long Arm in Europe", *Foreign Policy* 7 May 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/07/erdogans-long-arm-in-europe-germany-netherlands-milli-gorus-muslim-brotherhood-turkey-akp/>.

<sup>88</sup> See DİTİB, IGMG, ATİB, *Zum Jahrestag des Putschversuchs: Kehrtwende in deutsch-türkischen Beziehungen möglich*, 13 July 2017, <http://DITIB.de/detail1.php?id=610&lang=de>.

<sup>89</sup> See Faruk Şen, "Euro-Islam: Some Empirical Evidences", in *Islam and Muslims in Germany*, eds. Ala Al-Hamarneh and Jörn Thielmann (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 38.

<sup>90</sup> See DİTİB, IGMG, ATİB, *op. cit.*

exertion” and it has two dimensions: the first is the mental, spiritual struggle, known as “greater jihad”, and the second one is the physical “holy war”, or the “lesser jihad”<sup>91</sup>. “[n. *jihad*] is one of the concepts that Euro-Islam wants to eliminate. But ignoring *jihad* is not a right approach. When we look at Prophet Muhammed’s understanding of *jihad*, we need to modernize it. Leaving the Mecca period aside, since there, Muslims were under pressure, tortured and suppressed, compelled to fight some wars, but actually none of these wars were started by the Prophet, in some cases Muslims had to defend themselves or their rights. Prophet Muhammed struggled not to kill but to keep [n. the community] alive. *Jihad* means struggling against one’s own ego, bad thoughts and wrongdoings.” (Interview, religious attaché)

A 2019 study based on computer-assisted qualitative analysis of the perception of the word *jihad* in the public space, classified the opinions of Muslim and non-Muslim Facebook users, regarding the different prevalent meanings of the concept of *jihad*, by using 4,630 Facebook comments and replies to relevant posts about the meanings of the term *jihad* as data. The results of the study show that the vast majority of non-Muslims 62.4% associate *jihad* with terrorist attacks, thus, with the concept of lesser *jihad*, 23% believe that *jihad* is a combination of lesser *jihad* and greater *jihad*- according to the authors many of these commenters’ Facebook profile reveal that they study or studied Islamic or Middle Eastern studies in university-, and only 14.6% consider *jihad* a purely spiritual struggle. The findings are very different in the Muslim comment-sphere, especially the English language comment-sphere shows a clear preference for greater *jihad*- 68.6%, while the vast majority of Muslims in the Arab comment-sphere 71.2% see it in both its greater and lesser dimension- violence being accepted only as self-defence. Only around 6% of Muslims, Arabic and English commenters alike, express radical sentiments about *jihad*. The study suggests that a majority of non-Muslims perceive Muslims as radicals<sup>92</sup>. The research does not bring any evidence for Turkish<sup>93</sup> sentiments about *jihad*. However, it can be partly drawn from a PEW survey taken in November 2015 which measures the opinion of Turks (from Turkey) towards ISIS, showing that only 8% of Turks were favourable to ISIS, and consequently, favoured an understanding of *jihad* as lesser *jihad*.

Asked about the state-funded projects in the field of prevention the religious attaché expressed his scepticism “I don’t think radicalization can be prevented through these projects, these projects remain mostly on paper, we should provide young people with a healthy religious education. And we are doing this, through long-term religious education programs and the *sohbets* (discussions)”.

DİTİB is reluctant to work actively in the field of extremism, according to a German public official, asserting that they already do prevention in mosques, on the one hand, and fearing that too much involvement in the field of radicalization could strengthen the idea that Muslims are the problem and, as a result, aggravate Islamophobia, on the other hand. As British counter-intelligence and security agency MI5’s Behavioral Science Unit reported, most of those who engage in terrorist activities do not practice their religion on daily basis, they are not religious zealots; on the contrary they could be regarded as religious novices, since they lack religious literacy<sup>94</sup>. Converts or previously non-practicing Muslims – who constitute the main recruitment pool for terrorist organizations

<sup>91</sup> See Gahl Silverman & Udi Sommer, “Prevalent Sentiments of the Concept of Jihad in the Public Commentsphere”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2019): 5.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

<sup>93</sup> See Jacob Poushter, *In nations with significant Muslim populations, much disdain for ISIS*, PEW Fact Tank (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 17 November 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-isis/>.

<sup>94</sup> Report conclusions cited in Necati Anaz, Ömer Aslan and Mehmet Özkan, “Turkish foreign terrorist fighters and the emergence of a new kind of radicalization”, *Turkish Studies* 17, no 4 (2016): 618-642 (626).

- assimilate, without questioning, beliefs that promote violence as a result of their exposure to radical ideas. Their lack of Islamic knowledge makes them an easy target to manipulation. Consequently, knowledge can be used to dispel absolute “truths”, as a solution to radicalization. However, religious education can have an impact only if it is provided by sources rendered as legitimate, respectively Muslim preachers and theologians. As Marwan Abou-Taam, expert in international terrorism, remarked in a Deutsche Welle interview: „If violence is rationalized with religion, then the religion can only fight back if it develops a counter narrative which comes from the congregations. This means that it's more believable if an Imam says, 'No, what you're learning isn't Islam,' than when a social worker says it”<sup>95</sup>. It is not a surprise, thus, that many German organizations engaged in prevention work employ former imams or religious educators of mosque communities. This was also the case of the prevention professionals I interviewed.

Imams do play an important role in prevention and radicalization, but one should note that radicalization does not usually happen in mainstream mosques. A research including 35 Turkish ISIS returnees and their first-degree family members found that individuals joining ISIS radicalized outside the official state controlled Diyanet mosques and they isolated themselves from mainstream Islamic teachings and practices, instead they followed a very orthodox interpretation of Islam, joined Friday prayers led by radical imams in cell-like mosques and watched ISIS propaganda videos online<sup>96</sup>. In case of young 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation European Muslims, losing touch with the moderate narratives of Islam and dissociating themselves from the local mosque community of their parents might direct them towards radical solutions. Thus, part of the problem is the declining attractiveness and integrating drive of moderate mosque when it comes to the vulnerable youth.

Considering the fact that youth radicalization processes usually take place outside recognized mosques, Muslim communities have limited possibilities in taking action to de-radicalize youth already engaged in Salafi groups. De-radicalization, however, is generally less effective not only if undertaken in/by mosques, but, as confirmed by all the interviewed prevention professionals, it is extremely challenging, requires years of work with a single individual and the outcome is unpredictable even for organizations that work in the field. Prevention, on the other hand, is usually more successful and sustainable. Thus, action should be taken before losing youth to radical groups. To this aim, mosques can play an important role in prevention, through “immunizing” religious education and sermons and influence in often marginalized neighbourhoods. For these reasons, mosques should be perceived as partners in prevention instead of seeing them as breeding ground for radical ideologies.<sup>97</sup>

Consequently, mosques could prepare counter-narratives to radical ideas. Counter-narratives were defined by Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) as “attempts to challenge extremist and violent extremist messages, whether directly or indirectly through a range of online and offline means”<sup>98</sup>. Counter-narratives must be integrated as long term strategies to prevent radicalization. Such a strategy could be norm setting against terrorism, as proposed by Bjorgo, or a concentrated effort of different actors, including

<sup>95</sup> Kate Brady, *op. Cit.*

<sup>96</sup> See Necati Anaz, Ömer Aslan, Mehmet Özkan, *op. cit.*,625.

<sup>97</sup> See Rauf Ceylan and Michael Kiefer, “Mosques as Partners in Prevention”, *Hikma*, 7, no. 2 (2016): 143-158 (145).

<sup>98</sup> Cited in Alex P. Schmid, *Al-Qaeda's "Single Narrative" and Attempts to Develop CounterNarratives: The State of Knowledge*, ICCT –Research Paper (The Hague : ICCT, January 2014), 1.

political, ideological and religious leaders, to delegitimize terrorism<sup>99</sup>. In the next section of the paper I will analyse the *khutbas* released by DİTİB to test their counter-narrative potential.

<sup>99</sup> Tore Bjorgo, *Strategies for preventing violent extremism and terrorism*, Conference: Preventing Radicalisation. Towards resilient societies ( Berlin: Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 13-15 November 2017), 12.

# Friday Sermons as Counter-narratives?

The *khutba* is the formal public preaching in the Islamic tradition, occurring every Friday and with the occasion of the two major Islamic holidays *Eid al-Fitr* and *Eid al-Adha*<sup>100</sup>. Inspired by the Quran and the Prophet's Hadiths, the *khutbas* tackle religious, social and political issues faced by the Muslim community. The *khatib* (preacher) interprets the Islamic law and teachings to the modern world, acting as a mediator or cultural broker between Islamic tradition and contemporary realities<sup>101</sup>. In the early years of Islam, participating in the Friday sermon was both a political and a religious act, since it symbolized the adherence to the *ummah* or Muslim community. Attendance was obligatory for every free adult Muslim male<sup>102</sup>. Historically speaking, the *khutba* has been an instrument of communicating the ruling elite's policies, programs and ideas<sup>103</sup>, thus, it reaffirmed the official stance of the state or, in some cases, criticized it. Considering the absence of a formal institutional authority within Sunni Islam, the *khutbas* foster public deliberation and reflection upon their message<sup>104</sup>.

Even Atatürk, the father of modern Turkey and mastermind of the secular reforms, recognized the importance and potential role of the *khutbas* to "enlighten and guide" Turkish citizens, in the sermon he delivered in the Zağanos Paşa Mosque in the west-Anatolian town of Balıkesir, in 1923, adding that "sermons should and will be totally in Turkish and suitable to the requirements of the day"<sup>105</sup>. Later, in 1927, the language of the sermons was changed from Arabic to Turkish, with the publication of the book entitled *Türkçe Hutbe* (Turkish Sermon) by Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, vice-chair of Diyanet at the time, and distribution to *müftüs* (local Diyanet administrators) all over the country<sup>106</sup>. The prayer was not devoted anymore to the "peace and happiness" of the Caliph, but to the "nation and the Republic" and the new sermons emphasized the importance of the national service as holy duty. Religion was never separated from the nation<sup>107</sup>, and the Kemalist regime used the sermons to instil and spread national sentiments. Hakan Övünç Ongur shows that the AKP followed a similar path, by using Diyanet mosques' to enact a performance of a new type of nationalism, more inclusive and religious, with reference to

<sup>100</sup> See Richard Martin, *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 394.

<sup>101</sup> See Emad S. Awad, "Intertextuality in Friday Khutba", *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 5, no 1(2017): 59-75 (59f).

<sup>102</sup> See Hadia Mubarak, „Khuṭbah“, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0461>.

<sup>103</sup> See Hakan Övünç Ongur, "Performing through Friday khutbas: re-instrumentalization of religion in the new Turkey", *Third World Quarterly* 41, no. 3(2019): 434-452.

<sup>104</sup> See Mazen Hashem, *The Muslim Friday Khutba: Veiled and Unveiled Themes*, ISPU Report (Washington, DC: Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2009), 9, [https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2009\\_The\\_Muslim\\_Friday\\_Khutba.pdf](https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2009_The_Muslim_Friday_Khutba.pdf)

<sup>105</sup> See Atatürk's sermon cited See Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey. Kemalism, Religion And The Nation State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 51.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid..

<sup>107</sup> See Umut Azak, "Secularism in Turkey as a Nationalist Search for Vernacular Islam", *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 124 (2008): 161-179, : <http://journals.openedition.org/remmm/6025>

the Islamic *ummah* and former Ottoman geography<sup>108</sup>. No wonder mosque attendance has been directly linked to increased political participation in a recent study<sup>109</sup>.

The function or objectives of state-approved *khutbas* is not limited to gaining and maintaining political legitimacy, but also to contain terrorism and radical ideologies, as Errihani demonstrates in his study on Moroccan management of Friday sermons in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca terror attacks<sup>110</sup>. In its attempts to counter violent extremism Turkey relies on two main programmes: an outreach programme of the police, which targets the risks of radicalization in vulnerable communities, and a special programme coordinated by Diyanet which aims to counter jihadist propaganda, through the *khutbas* and publications of reports undermining ISIS' messaging and credibility<sup>111</sup>. To assess if sermons released by DİTİB could or do already play a similar role, I examined the *khutbas* published on the website of the German umbrella organization between September 2015 and September 2019. I focused on sermons published after the major terrorist attacks in Turkey and abroad, an important turning point being the Paris bombing that led to establishing P/CVE cooperation mechanisms between Turkey and the EU<sup>112</sup>. The starting date of the chosen time frame corresponds with Diyanet's official "declaration of war" on ISIS. In this regard, in August 2015 Diyanet published a report aiming to tackle ISIS's misuse of religion, which was also translated to German and published by DİTİB<sup>113</sup>, and in 20 November 2015 it released a sermon for this purpose, entitled "Islam: the Religion Targeted by Global Terror", which was distributed and read in over 80,000 mosques in Turkey and 2,000 mosques abroad<sup>114</sup>, including in DİTİB mosques in Germany.

Drawing from the main religious causes of radicalization and the content analysis of the sermons I distinguish between five main recurring thematic areas which recommend the *khutbas* as antidotes or counter-narratives to Muslim radicalization: embracing mystical Islamic traditions and values; signaling the "misinterpretation" of Islamic beliefs and concepts through theological references; generating a new, more inclusive Muslim identification; emphasizing the role of religious education and regulating Muslim conduct and speech.

<sup>108</sup> See Hakan Övünç Ongur, *op. cit.*

<sup>109</sup> Moutselos notes that regular mosque attendance leads to increased exposure to political issues and higher voter turnout on election days. See Michalis Moutselos, „Praying on Friday, voting on Sunday? Mosque attendance and voter turnout in three West European democracies”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2019): 1-18.

<sup>110</sup> See Mohammed Errihan, "Managing Religious Discourse in the Mosque: The End of Extremist Rhetoric during the Friday Sermon", *Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2011): 381-394.

<sup>111</sup> Demir Murat Seyrek and Amanda Paul, „The Threat of Jihadist Radicalisation in Turkey”, *The Challenge of Jihadist Radicalisation In Europe and Beyond* (European Policy Centre: 2017), 64.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>113</sup> See DİTİB, *Bericht über die Grundüberzeugungen der Organisation Daisch (ISIS) und ihre religiösen Referenzen*, (Cologne: 2015) [https://www.DITIB.de/media/Image/duyuru/Bericht\\_Daisch.pdf](https://www.DITIB.de/media/Image/duyuru/Bericht_Daisch.pdf).

<sup>114</sup> Monica Marks, *ISIS and Nusra in Turkey Jihadist recruitment and Ankara's response*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue Report (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2016), 26.

## Mysticism and tolerance

Some of the *khutbas* expressly refer to Islamic mysticism, celebrating Rumi's<sup>115</sup> messages of love and tolerance<sup>116</sup> and making use of Alevi<sup>117</sup> traditions. A *khutba* from February 2016 adopts the well-known Alevi precept which summarizes the *Edep* philosophy: „Be master of your hands, tongue and loins!, referring to it as a teaching of „our elders”, in order to avoid to mention the Alevi as a separate Muslim group<sup>118</sup>. The Alevi precept is used in the sermon to stress the importance of the purity of one's heart as source of his/her good words and actions. Another sermon from December 2017<sup>119</sup> cites the poetry famously attributed to Rumi (but probably written by an earlier poet):

„Come, come again, whoever you are, come!  
Heathen, fire worshipper or idolatrous, come!  
Come even if you broke your penitence a hundred times,  
Ours is the portal of hope, come as you are.”<sup>120</sup>

It is noteworthy that the Turkish version, or rather, the DİTİB sermon, uses the word *kafir* [n. kuffar Arabic], or infidel (for “heathen” in the English text) a concept routinely employed in the discourse of radicals. By using this word or specific translation in the *khutba*, shows the endorsement of Sufi values of tolerance and openness towards the most despised “Other” of Islam, the infidel.

Tolerance is a frequent topic of the *khutbas*, being considered one of the main traits of Islam. In a sermon read at the end of September 2019 before the Open Mosque Day, DİTİB calls upon believers to invite their neighbours to the mosques and show how peaceful and tolerant Islam is<sup>121</sup>.

A *khutba* published with the occasion of *Laylat al-Qadr*, the celebration of the night when the first verses of the Quran were revealed to Prophet Muhammad, decries Muslims' alienation from Islamic values. This alienation led to terrible mistakes committed by Muslims, admits the sermon, mistakes which came to be interpreted as representative to Islam and made people forget that Islam is the religion of peace and love. The *khutba*

<sup>115</sup> [Djalāl al-Dīn Rūmī](#) also known as Mawlānā (Mevlānā) was a Persian poet, theologian and Sufi mystic of the 13th Century, who lived most of his life in Konya (Turkey), where his followers founded the Mawlawiyya Sufi order known as Whirling Dervishes. Rumi's *Masnawi* (*Mathnawi*) is regarded as one of the greatest mystical poem collections of world literature. See A. Bausani, „[Djalāl al-Dīn Rūmī](#)” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 393-397

<sup>116</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Mevlana'nın Dilinden*, 7 December 2018, [https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=439&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=439&lang=en).

<sup>117</sup> Alevis (not to be confused with Arab Alawites) are usually referred to as a Muslim Shia sect, but different understandings of what Alevis share or what Alevism corresponds to have produced competing definitions. Thus, Alevism was described as a heterodox sect within Islam, as Turkish Anatolian Islam, as a philosophy, as Sufi or Shiite in nature or as a syncretic mixture of elements of Islam, Christianity and Shamanism. Alevis are the second largest religious community after Sunni Muslims in Turkey, representing 15 to 25 percent of the population. Turkish Alevis have not been recognized as a distinct group and are subjected to Sunnification by the state. See Gürcan Koçan and Ahmet Öncü, “Citizen Alevi in Turkey: Beyond Confirmation and Denial”, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, no. 4 (2004): 464- 489.

<sup>118</sup> See Hasan Ağırbaş, *Dilin Esiri Olmayalım!*, 5 February 2016, [https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=279&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=279&lang=en).

<sup>119</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Mevlânâ'ya Kulak Verelim*, 22 December 2017, [https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=385&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=385&lang=en).

<sup>120</sup> There are two wide-spread translations of this poetry, the main difference appears in the second verse, „Heathen, fire worshipper or idolatrous” being replaced by slightly gentler substitutes: „Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving”. The first version's words choice reflects better the meaning conveyed by the sermon, and it is also the version used by Anadolu Agency, one of the largest Turkish state-run news agency, and by Ahmet Davutoğlu - former Prime Minister of Turkey and AKP leader, founder of the Future Party (December 2019)- in his new book „Systemic Earthquake and the Struggle for World Order” (2020), thus showing its prevalence in the conservative circles.

<sup>121</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Camiler ve Din Görevlileri Haftası*, 27 September 2019, [https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=483&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=483&lang=en).

asserts that God's way is the way which ensures "peace, justice and tolerance to all humanity regardless of language, religion, race, gender."<sup>122</sup>

"Tolerance is the essence of Islamic morality" declares another *khutba* and defines it as "not blaming, offending or humiliating others, but showing forgiveness, and accepting different beliefs and opinions". Tolerance embraces all people, not only Muslims, because "freedom of belief and worship are indispensable fundamental rights. It is everyone's duty to respect these rights"<sup>123</sup> says the *khutba*. Discrimination and marginalization are regarded as psychologic disorders. "We can, of course, live together in respect and tolerance, by giving prominence not to differences, but similarities, without excluding people with whom we share the same world, the same sun, the same water, the same air."<sup>124</sup>

An earlier sermon from 2016, having discrimination and peaceful co-existence as central topics, focuses exclusively on Islamophobia in some Western countries, and ideological or sectarian discrimination against Muslims in Muslim countries, though, failing to account for the non-Muslim perspective. In this sermon, too, people are reminded to be tolerant, patient and forgiving<sup>125</sup>.

Sermons indicating tolerance and love as essential Islamic values, encouraging Muslim and non-Muslim dialogue, denouncing discrimination and calling for forgiveness, acquire counter-narrative potential in dismissing radical ideologies which build on hate and intolerance.

## **"Misinterpretation" of Islam and Islamic concepts**

The sermon "Islam: the Religion Targeted by Global Terror" from November 2015 read in Turkey and many European mosques, including DİTİB mosques, is Diyanet's most wide-reaching attempt to denounce terrorists' use of Islamic teachings. The *khutba* announces that the message of Islam is "not killing but keeping alive, not persecuting but looking after one's rights (...), promotes knowledge and wisdom, not ignorance. This message teaches peace, not war, conscience and mercy, not terrorism and brutality." The sermon condemns terrorists for trying to discredit Islam and for creating anxiety and fear of Muslims. It also decries the misuse of Islamic concepts like *Takbir*<sup>126</sup> as a slogan of terror. The sermon describes terrorists as "criminal networks" that use religion to exploit "the anger accumulated from past to present, wounded pride, repressed emotions, and broken dreams". The *khutba* warns that "those who carry out such brutal acts against humans and humanity, have no respect for God nor belong to any religion." The solution to terror advanced by the *khutba* is "Let's protect our children and young people. Let's teach them our beliefs and values correctly." The sermon calls on believers to preserve and protect "true religious knowledge" and to thoroughly research and analyse religious information before accepting it<sup>127</sup>. While this was Diyanet's first attempts to launch a common

<sup>122</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Kadir Gecesi*, 31 May 2019,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=464&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=464&lang=en).

<sup>123</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *İslam'da Birlikte Yaşama ve Hoşgörü*, 24 February 2017,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=337&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=337&lang=en).

<sup>124</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Ayrımcılıkla Mücadele*, 15 March

2019, [https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=453&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=453&lang=en).

<sup>125</sup> See Hasan Akpınar, *Birlikte Yaşama Ahlakı*, 27 May 2016,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=295&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=295&lang=en).

<sup>126</sup> *Takbir*, or the Arabic phrase "Allahu akbar" means "God is Great" and is used during prayer or as an expression of joy, surprise or distress.

<sup>127</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Küresel Terörün Hedef Aldığı Din: İslam*, 20 November 2015,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=268&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=268&lang=en)

ideological battle against religiously-framed terrorism with its European umbrella organizations, it is not the first anti-terrorist *khutba* read by DİTİB. A month before, DİTİB published a *khutba* condemning the 10 October 2015 terrorist attacks in Ankara, and while it is different from the sermon released by Diyanet at the time<sup>128</sup>, the strong echo and emotional response to home country events in the diaspora is evident. The sermon denounces killing of innocent civilians, saying that the duty of Muslims is to keep people alive and to protect them. No worldly ambition, interest and ideology must precede this Islamic responsibility, according to the sermon, which also calls believers to stay united in the fight against terrorism<sup>129</sup>.

DİTİB also reacted after the Berlin Christmas market terrorist attack too through a sermon, stating „Terrorist attacks have been recently carried out against innocent people in Istanbul, Kayseri, Aleppo and Berlin. As the Turkish-Islamic Union of Religious Affairs (DİTİB), we stress that terrorism is a crime, regardless of the identity of the perpetrators or country targeted, we convey our condolences to the families of those who lost their lives as a result of the attacks, and we wish quick recovery to those who were injured in the attacks.“<sup>130</sup>

The rise of ISIS-linked suicide attacks in 2016 both in Turkey - March 19 Istiklal Street attack, June 28 Atatürk airport suicide bombing, and 20 August suicide bombing at a wedding in Gaziantep – and Germany – see the 24 July Ansbach suicide bombing-prompted DİTİB to publish a sermon entitled „Suicide- A Spiritual Depression“. The *khutba* begins with a Quranic verse “Whoever deliberately kills a believer, his punishment is eternal hell” and warns that the same fate awaits those who commit suicide. The *khutba* underlines that suicide is a great sin in Islam, because God gives life, and only God has the authority to take life away. The sermon goes on to account for the reasons behind suicide, identifying „spiritual emptiness” of nonbelievers, loneliness and addictions as main causes<sup>131</sup>.

Religious exploitation (*dini istismar*) is a subject discussed further in *khutbas* in the following years, in July 2017<sup>132</sup> and 2018<sup>133</sup>. Both *khutbas* advise believers to rely on Quran and hadith as guides and to use their minds, conscience and hearts aiming towards good deeds and not religious or worldly interests in order to avoid religious abuse. The 2018 sermon states that religion is not the monopoly of any group, Islam belongs to all humanity. While both *khutbas* could be used to prevent Salafi-linked or inspired religious radicalization, the fact that both were published around 15 July, the date of the failed coup attempt in Turkey, suggests that their primarily target is the Gülen community, even though none of the sermons includes direct references to the self-exiled preacher. However allusions to the “network of betrayal” in the 2018 sermon, and the heavily used concept of “religious exploitation”<sup>134</sup> in the *khutbas*, following Diyanet’s 140-page report

<sup>128</sup> On the same date, in Turkish Diyanet mosques, imams were reading a sermon on compassion. While the antiterrorist message is present in both DİTİB and Diyanet sermons, the encompassing narrative- unity and togetherness in the DİTİB *khutba*, and compassion in the Diyanet sermon- as well as the Quranic verses used are different. See Diyanet’s sermon at: Din Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Merhamet iksirini yudumlayabilmek, 16 October 2015,

<http://www2.diyaret.gov.tr/DinHizmetleriGenelMudurlugu/HutbelerListesi/Merhamet%20%C4%B0ksirini%20Yudumlayabilmek.pdf>

<sup>129</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Gün Birlik ve Beraberlik Günüdür!*, 16 October 2015,

[http://DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=262&lang=en](http://DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=262&lang=en).

<sup>130</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Kader, Kaza ve Tevekkül*, 23 December 2016,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=328&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=328&lang=en).

<sup>131</sup> See Orhan Bal, *Manevi Bunalım-İntihar*, 26 August 2016

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=309&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=309&lang=en).

<sup>132</sup> See Muhammed Baki Tuncel, *Dinî ve insanî değerleri istismar*, 14 July 2017,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=360&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=360&lang=en).

<sup>133</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Din İstismarına Karşı Uyanık Olmak*, 13 July 2018,

[https://www.DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=416&lang=en](https://www.DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=416&lang=en).

<sup>134</sup> The concept „dini istismar” was not used in any previous sermons.

published in July 2017 accusing followers of Fethullah Gülen of being “organized exploiters of religion”<sup>135</sup>, shows that these sermons were mainly targeting the Gülen community.

In the analysed timeframe, there was no sermon explaining the concept of *jihad* for example, even though it is a period heavily marked by Islamized terrorist attacks claimed by ISIS in Germany, Turkey and other countries. A possible reason why such a sermon was avoided might be the stigma and fear the word itself provokes, and the idea that such a concept has no place in European Islam. But *jihad* was not the only critical concept ignored, the clarification of other relevant terms appropriated by radicals such as *tekfir* (excommunication) and *kuffar*<sup>136</sup> (infidel) are missing. On the other hand the lack of these taboo concepts in the *khutbas* can be also attributed to the fact that they might be rendered obsolete in Turkish Islam, which is more permissible in terms of membership to Muslim community, thanks to its Maturidi tradition.

## Redefining the Muslim ummah

The *khutbas* mirror Diyanet’s formulation and reach of the Muslim *ummah*, in line, purposely or not, with Ankara’s efforts to claim leadership of the global Muslim community. The sermons are not exclusively targeting diaspora Turks anymore; however, their primary audience is (still) the Turkish community, as the language of the sermons is Turkish in most of the mosques with a few exceptions. A *khutba* from June 2019 affirms that regardless of race, colour, language and denomination, Muslims belong to the same *ummah*<sup>137</sup>. Muslim brotherhood is highlighted in many sermons, delegitimizing any attempt which renders acceptable fight against or persecution of other Muslims – largely practiced by violent radical groups-, as the 8 April 2017 shows “A Muslim is brother of another Muslim. Do not oppress him/her!”<sup>138</sup>

With the occasion of celebration of Prophet Muhammad’s birth, a sermon asks God to grant peace to “our country, the lands and peoples close to our heart and the entire humanity”<sup>139</sup> and make Muslims His true servants, a real *ummah*. The positioning of the Muslim community in “our country”, referring to Turkey, and expansion over the entire humanity, through “the lands and peoples close to our heart” (*gönül coğrafyamız*), indicating ex-Ottoman territories, diasporas, and communities that are perceived to have a shared history and culture with Turkey -especially Muslims in the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa-<sup>140</sup>, locates Turkish ambitions and understanding of the *ummah* geographically and ideologically.

<sup>135</sup> See Ceren Lord, *Religious Politics in Turkey. From the Birth of the Republic to the AKP* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 113.

<sup>136</sup> While I could not find evidence of DİTİB’s use of *Kuffar* in the sermons examined- except from the sermon which cites Rumi’s poetry-, and the term was rejected by the religious officials I interviewed, the Turkish President did not shy away from using the concept in his speech, referring, however, to Turkey’s opponents in the context of the Turkish military intervention in Syria in October 2019. See „Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Çamlıca Camisi’nde cemaate seslendi”, *Sözcü*, 25 October 2019, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2019/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-camlica-camisinde-cemaate-seslendi-5411136/>.

<sup>137</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Ramazan Bayramı*, 4 June 2019, [https://www.ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=465&lang=en](https://www.ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=465&lang=en).

<sup>138</sup> See Sani Gedik, *Bir Vasiyetname Olarak Veda Hutbesi*, 7 April 2017, [http://ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=344&lang=en](http://ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=344&lang=en).

<sup>139</sup> See Ramazan Taşdelen, *Mevlid Kandili*, 18 December 2015, [http://DITIB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=272&lang=en](http://DITIB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=272&lang=en).

<sup>140</sup> Mete Hatay and Zenonas Tziarras, *Kinship and Diasporas in Turkish Foreign Policy: Examples from Europe, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean*, PRIO Cyprus Centre Report 10 (Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre, 2019), 4.

A *khutba* from 2017 highlights how important mosques are in the creation of the Muslim *ummah* in DİTİB's understanding. The sermon claims that the first endeavour of the first Turkish Muslims migrants in Germany was to build mosques, just like the Prophet and his companions did in the places they settled<sup>141</sup>. In reality, Turkish migrants started to build mosques only in the 1980s<sup>142</sup> when they decided to settle in Germany. For almost three decades they prayed in makeshift mosques, including railroad cars, former garages, church basements or canteens<sup>143</sup>. The above-mentioned *khutba* states that mosques are not only places of worship, but also as places where educational, cultural and social activities are carried out, with the aim to strengthen unity and solidarity between believers. The *khutba* asserts that "the Islamic *Ummah*, which can come together in our mosques all over the world, is closely connected and enjoys together the peacefulness of Fridays, holidays and holy nights with the understanding of community and wholeness"<sup>144</sup>, suggesting that Turkish mosques are *the* legitimate worship places of the Islamic *ummah*. Thus, Turkey's state-sponsored program to build mosques abroad is used as an instrument of uniting and/or creating *ummah*(s), unravelling ambitions to lead Sunni Muslims. Another sermon from February 2019 clearly states that "we [n. DİTİB mosque attendees] are the representatives of Islam in Europe"<sup>145</sup>, projecting Turkish-Islam as a model for Euro-Islam.

A *khutba* from November 2015 points towards what they consider the most important quality of the Muslim community, respectively moderation. A "moderate *ummah*" (*vasat ümmet*) is balanced and restrained, and shows moderation in faith and worship. The sermon advises believers to "avoid extremism in behavior and communication"; to act thoughtfully and talk only when needed. The *khutba* concludes with the Prophet's words: "Avoid going to extremes in religion, because your predecessors were destroyed by their excesses in religion."<sup>146</sup>

## Importance of education

DİTİB releases every year special sermons at the beginning of the academic year, highlighting the value of education in Islam and encouraging Muslim youth to study. This initiative goes beyond a banal yearly ceremony to mark the end of summer holidays and start of new school term, being rooted in the problems the community faces in the field of education. According to a study carried out by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees in 2009, Turks register the lowest levels of education in Germany: 17% of Turks had no school-leaving qualification compared with only 28% people who held a high school-leaving qualification at the time. Only migrants from the Near East and African countries registered similarly low scores, 17%, respectively 15% having no school-leaving

<sup>141</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Mescit ve Camiler: Rahmân'ın Evleri*, 29 September 2017, [https://www.ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=372&lang=en](https://www.ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=372&lang=en).

<sup>142</sup> Ossama Hegazy, "Towards a German Mosque: Rethinking the Mosque's Meaning in Germany by Applying Socio-Semiotics", in *Everyday Life Practices of Muslims in Europe*, ed. Erkan Toğuşlu (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015), 204.

<sup>143</sup> Elisabeth Becker, "Good Mosque, Bad Mosque: Boundaries to Belonging in Contemporary Germany", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 4 (December 2017): 1050–1088, 1055.

<sup>144</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Mescit ve Camiler: Rahmân'ın Evleri*, 29 September 2017, [https://www.ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=372&lang=en](https://www.ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=372&lang=en).

<sup>145</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Kültürümüzün Parçası Düşünlerimiz*, 1 February 2019, [https://www.ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=447&lang=en](https://www.ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=447&lang=en).

<sup>146</sup> See İbrahim Durmaz, *Vasat Ümmet Ve Özellikleri*, 30 October 2015, [http://ditib.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=264&lang=en](http://ditib.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=264&lang=en).

qualification.<sup>147</sup> While the participation of youth from migrant background has increased since 2009, they still lag behind natives in educational achievement, leave school early and choose vocational and non-academic school types more often according to the European Commission<sup>148</sup>.

The 2019/2020 academic year opening sermon refers to ignorance as the biggest enemy of Islam, and distinguishes between human beings and other beings based on the ability of the former to acquire, produce and apply knowledge, with the purpose of enriching, adding value to life. In this regard, the sermon recalls the Prophet's efforts to educate believers, paying special attention to young people, and reminds that Masjid Al-Nabawi, the Prophet's mosque, was also a center of knowledge/science where, without discrimination, woman and men were welcomed<sup>149</sup>. Many *khutbas* emphasize the relationship between knowledge and faith. In this regard a 2017 sermon asserts that "Knowledge is not just for the sake of knowledge, but is also an effort to spiritually and intellectually develop oneself in close relation to faith". Knowledge and faith go hand in hand, according to the sermon, the more people are informed (in religious matters) the stronger their faith will be. The same *khutba* brings forth a rhetorical question: "Are those who do not know ever equal to those who know?"<sup>150</sup> recurring in several other sermons, as for example in the one from April 2019, which declares that science and knowledge hold a special place in Islam and reminds that learning is an obligation of good Muslims, since it will help them to differentiate between good and bad deeds<sup>151</sup>.

## Regulating Muslim conduct and speech

"Being an ideal *ummah* is only possible if every Muslim is an exemplary believer." To be an exemplary Muslim, one must surrender to God's will, give *zakat* voluntarily, stick to good morality, be truthful and patient, do good deeds and avoids harming others. The sermon reminds that "exemplary human beings are the way to become an exemplary *ummah*, in which brothers and sisters are bound by sincerity and loyalty, their hearts and aims are one"<sup>152</sup>.

Another *khutba* from July 2019 deals with the worrying spread of violence, hate and anger in society, asserting that religiously educated Muslims, inspired by Islamic morality must control their anger, be patient and act thoughtfully, drawing from the Prophet's words "A strong man knows how to overcome his anger" the *khutba* warns the community that it is wrong to portray violence and expressions of rage as bravery or achievement. „It is a known fact that people with strong character and high self-esteem tend to be calm in the face of negative events, while people with weak character and low self-esteem often tend

<sup>147</sup> See Nilden Vardar and Anne Kuhl „Education of Muslim migrants”, Deutsche Islam Konferenz, 2 October 2019, [http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DIK/EN/Magazin/IslamSchule/BildungMLD/bildung-mld-node.html;jsessionid=44CD83B09798DA47628E748281EA489D.1\\_cid294](http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DIK/EN/Magazin/IslamSchule/BildungMLD/bildung-mld-node.html;jsessionid=44CD83B09798DA47628E748281EA489D.1_cid294).

<sup>148</sup> The report, however, does not distinguish between migrants in terms of country of origin or religion, See European Commission, *Germany: Education and Training Monitor 2019* (Brussels, 29 August 2019), [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-germany\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-germany_en.pdf).

<sup>149</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Yeni Eğitim Yılına Girerken*, 23 August 2019, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=478&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=478&lang=en).

<sup>150</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *İslam'da Eğitim ve Önemi*, 8 September 2017, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=369&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=369&lang=en).

<sup>151</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *İmtihanımız bilgi değil Ameldir*”, 14 June 2019, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=467&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=467&lang=en).

<sup>152</sup> See Hasan Gündüz, *Örnek İnsan, Örnek Ümmet*, 21 July 2017, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=361&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=361&lang=en).

to show anger”<sup>153</sup>. One *khutba* advises to follow the Prophet’s example and “Speak a good word or remain silent” describing the Prophet’s communication style as kind, soft, compassionate and respectful in his communication<sup>154</sup>. The importance of thoughtful communication and behaviour is emphasized in a sermon from February 2018 „In our human relationships we should adopt empathy, respect, kindness and understanding as principles. It is important to remember on the Day of Judgement we will be held accountable for each of our words and each of our actions”<sup>155</sup>. A sermon published two year before advises believers to consider the possible effects of their words before pronouncing them, because “before they come out of your mouth, words are your prisoners, when you pronounce them, you become their prisoner”<sup>156</sup>. The same goes for gossiping or judging others. The *khutba* from 26 July 2019 announces that it is a sin to interfere in one’s private life and judge his/her individual mistakes. Thinking badly of others is another behaviour good Muslims should avoid<sup>157</sup>. Patience, forgiveness, compassion and fairness are regarded as the most important features of Islam<sup>158</sup>. A significant characteristic of a good Muslim living in Europe, is respecting his/her neighbours. A sermon from July 2019 advises Muslims to be fair, tolerant and helpful with neighbours regardless of their ethnic, religious or social background. Muslims are reminded that “in Germany, which has a multicultural structure, we are responsible for respecting the rights of our neighbours and conducting our relations with them within the framework of moral values. We shall not forget that our behaviour, right and wrong, will be the source not only of positive or negative judgements regarding our personalities but also of the religion and nation we represent.” The sermon gives practical advices: Muslims should refrain from sensitive traditional or cultural practices that might disturb neighbours, avoid indecent, irresponsible and insensitive behaviour at work, school, on the streets or in traffic. The “approved” behaviour includes: to greet neighbours, help them in need, visit them, be friendly and cheerful, accept their invitations and participate in their funerals. Thus, being a good neighbour in diaspora is more than an individual choice, Muslims willingly or unwillingly represent Islam through their actions and words, thus, they should be twice as careful as locals<sup>159</sup>.

<sup>153</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Öfkeyle Kalkan Zararla Oturur*, 19 July 2019, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=472&lang=en#](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=472&lang=en#).

<sup>154</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Ya Hayır Konuş Ya Da Sus!*, 16 August 2019 [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=477&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=477&lang=en).

<sup>155</sup> See Yaşar Akgül, *İyi ve Güzel Söz*, 9 February 2018, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=392&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=392&lang=en).

<sup>156</sup> See Hasan Ağırbaş, *Dilin Esiri Olmayalım!*, 5 February 2016, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=279&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=279&lang=en).

<sup>157</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Mahremiyet ve Özel Hayata Saygı*, 26 July 2019, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=473&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=473&lang=en).

<sup>158</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Öfkeyle Kalkan Zararla Oturur*, 19 July 2019, [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=472&lang=en#](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=472&lang=en#).

<sup>159</sup> See DİTİB Hutbe Komisyonu, *Doğal Habitatımız: Komşularımız*, 5 July 2019,; [https://www.DİTİB.de/detail\\_predigt2.php?id=470&lang=en](https://www.DİTİB.de/detail_predigt2.php?id=470&lang=en).

# Conclusions and Recommendations

While ISIS and other radical groups can be defeated on the ground, their ideologies are still alive and attracting young Muslims. Regardless of the reasons behind religiously-framed radicalization, religious beliefs manipulated by radical groups and individuals, play undeniably an important role in the process. Religious risks factors, like the attractiveness of Salafi/Wahhabi currents, popularity of radical Muslim figures, adoption of rigid and dogmatic beliefs, justification of terrorism and “misinterpretation” of Islamic concepts, should be taken seriously.

Since it is impossible to completely silence extremist narratives through military and legislative measures, policy-makers should put greater emphasis on developing effective preventive measures, switching from a reactive mode to a more proactive mode in dealing with radicalization. Developing efficient counter-narratives to radical narratives can dismantle the radicalization process. While there are many state-funded projects operating in the field of prevention, a closer look at existing and arguably successful Muslim models can inspire solutions. Social workers or security forces lack religious legitimacy in the eyes of radicalizing youth, thus, their efforts alone are prone to fail. Local Muslim community leaders should not be disregarded but approached as potential partners in prevention. Some organizations are already applying these strategies by employing former mosque staffs or volunteers. The German state’s collaboration with mosques, including with DİTİB before the spying imams crisis, is also an example in this regard.

Turkey’s control over religion through Diyanet and secularization were and are still considered by some observers the key to Turkey’s success story of containing religiously-framed radicalization and, in the first years of AKP government, of Muslim democracy. Diyanet was used by the Kemalists to produce a version of Islam compatible with modernity and to silence reactionary Islamist voices. While in the past, state control over religion was lauded for its capacity to prevent radicalization, including in the diaspora, today the same state control is amply criticized and feared for the reason that it might actually cause radicalization or politicization of communities, especially after the failed putsch in Turkey, when the Turkish and German states’ interests regarding the purpose and reasons of control began to diverge.

Despite the recent criticism, and DİTİB’s changing understanding of radicalization, as the rapprochement to IGMG shows, DİTİB still remains a relevant actor and possible partner in the field of prevention, considering the almost inexistent number of radicalizing youth within its mosque communities, and if nothing else, the large number of its members.

Besides the theological particularities of Turkish Islam and the diversity of the mosque attendees; its religious educational programs, Friday sermons and *sobhets* contribute to keeping Islamic and Islamized violent radicalization away from its mosques.

However, community members were not exempted from Turkish political propaganda and engagement. Friday sermons targeting the Gülen community, *khutbas* with nationalist undertone celebrating Turkish holidays, praising of the (Turkish) Muslim *ummah*, and

indirectly, supporting Ankara's ambitions to lead Sunni Muslims also beyond Turkey's borders, prayers for Turkey's military operations in Syria and the spying imams controversy, are some examples in this regard. It is noteworthy though, that lately there are less cases of political propaganda in mosques (at least in terms of official discourse), sermons released in the last year are less nationalistic in tone and seem to be more adapted to life conditions in Germany, there was a significant decrease in the number of mosques praying for Turkey's victory in Syria in October 2019 compared to January 2018, negotiation channels with the state were open and there seems to be a willingness to improve relations on both sides.

While DİTİB's dependence on Diyanet is unlikely to end soon, the mosque association has taken steps to answer criticism over the "import-imams" issue, by launching an imam training program for German Turks. This program, even if taken together with other existing imam training courses will not solve the shortage of religious personnel on their own in the near future, import-imams will still be needed until these programs manage to "produce" enough home-grown imams to fill positions in Germany's 2,600 mosques. But these efforts will likely have an impact in prevention, especially in preventing the radicalization of German converts, who, due to lacking of religious services in their native languages, fell prey to German Salafi groups.

A close examination of DİTİB's sermons' texts points towards their instrumental and educational role in countering terrorism. There are five thematic areas in which the *khutbas* could act as counter-narratives to Muslim radicalization: references to mystical Islamic legacy with special focus on tolerance and love; delegitimizing terrorism and clarifying the Islamic concepts used by radicals; redefining the *ummah* as less nationalist and more inclusive; stressing the importance of religious education and promoting scepticism and analysis of new religious information; and regulating Muslim conduct and speech in the diaspora. However, only a small number of *khutbas* deal with "misused" Islamic terms and only with some of them. In order to increase their counter-narrative potential, *khutbas* should also clarify other concepts used by terrorists to justify violence – i.e. explaining the concept of *jihad*.

# Abbreviations

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ATIB	Avrupa Türk İslâm Birliği (Union of Turkish-Islamic Cultural Associations)
BDMJ	Bund der Muslimischen Jugend (Union of Muslim Youth)
CATS	Centre for Applied Turkey Studies
DIK	Deutsche Islam Konferenz (German Islam Conference)
DITIB	Diyanet İşleri Türk-İslam Birliği (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs)
IGMG	Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş (Islamic Community Millî Görüş)
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
TÜSİAD	Türk Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği (Turkish Industry and Business Association)
UIP	Uluslararası İlahiyat Programı (International Islamic Theology Program)
VIKZ	Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (Federation of Islamic Cultural Centers)

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