

Germany briefing: March - April 2024

Reporting period: 1st March – 30th April 2024

Germany's crackdown on pro-Palestinian activists expands to international activists

- The German government has remained steadfast in its unequivocally pro-Israel stance and has continued to take a tough stance against pro-Palestinian activists:
 - Berlin police disbanded the Palestine Congress, leading to individual arrests. The congress organisers criticised the harsh police action and the infringement of their fundamental rights.

However, the German Interior Minister and the Berlin police praised the operation, asserting zero tolerance for 'Islamist propaganda' and 'hatred against Jews' - a notable statement given that the organisers primarily consisted of leftist groups and the association "Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East" (Jüdische Stimme).

- Palestinian-British doctor and University of Glasgow rector Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah, and former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, among others, were denied entry into Germany. Both were scheduled to speak at the Palestine Congress.
- The association Jüdische Stimme publicly disclosed that the Berlin Sparkasse bank had abruptly closed its accounts. The association was given a deadline to submit various documents, including a comprehensive list of names and addresses of all members—a demand suggesting the involvement of state authorities in the account closures. The association had already faced account terminations in 2019 under pressure from an Israeli journalist and the Central Council of Jews in Germany.
- Authorities in Berlin's Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg district ordered the closure of two girls' facilities due to pro-Palestinian statements made by some employees on their private social media profiles.
- Moderator Helen Fares was dismissed by the state broadcaster SWR following a social media post about the app "No Thanks," which identifies products of Israeli origin. Fares faced accusations of anti-Semitism in numerous media outlets, also due to a 2019 resolution by the German Bundestag condemning the BDS movement as anti-Semitic.

- German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser announced plans to expand the questionnaire for the mandatory naturalisation test to include questions about Judaism, Israel, and the Holocaust, aiming to make it more difficult for supposed anti-Semites to obtain permanent residence or German citizenship.

This initiative primarily targets Muslims, who have long been accused of inherent anti-Semitism, a charge that has intensified over the past six months.

Muslim activists penalised for mobilisation and blamed for anti-semitism

- The narrative portraying Muslims in Germany as inherently antisemitic, as well as their alleged endorsement of Hamas and therefore terrorism is resulting in increasing pressure on Muslim activists.

In light of their pro-Palestinian sentiments, the spotlight is on groups such as "Muslim Interaktiv," "Generation Islam," and "Realität Islam," all of which were mentioned as extremist already in the 2023 report by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

- Their 'extremism' primarily lies in their engagement on social media, by targeting young Muslims, denouncing state-sponsored Islamophobia, and criticising German integration policies as "assimilationist terror."

A pro-Palestinian demonstration at the end of April, which also criticised the German government's handling of Gaza and called for dialogue instead of media vilification of Muslims and pro-Palestinian demonstrators, was misrepresented in the media due to a single sign stating "Caliphate is the Solution," portraying it as an anti-democratic demonstration demanding the establishment of a caliphate in Germany.

Human Rights Watch criticises Germany for failing to combat Islamophobia

- Human Rights Watch criticizes the German government for its inadequate protection of Muslims, and those perceived as such, against rising racism and discrimination. The absence of a clear definition of anti-Muslim racism and lack of official data hinder an effective response.
- Despite a rise in anti-Muslim incidents, the government's hate crime statistics are incomplete. Although there is acknowledgment from Germany's federal commissioner for anti-racism and civil society organisations, the government has yet to develop a comprehensive monitoring system.

Recommendations from experts to recognise the intersectionality of anti-Muslim hate and

racism have been largely ignored

Far-right AfD party continues its ascent despite repatriation scandal

- As per the "Youth in Germany" study, the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) emerges as the favored party among 14 to 29-year-olds with a staggering 22% support. The party appears to captivate young minds primarily through its robust social media presence, offering a starkly simplified worldview and conveniently assigning blame for complex issues—often targeting the incumbent government and/or (Muslim) migrants as scapegoats.

The fact that the AfD's repeated ties to the extreme, violent right are substantiated seems inconsequential in this narrative.

- Simultaneously, parties such as the conservative CDU/CSU, Germany's second-largest political force, increasingly adopt AfD-related themes in their bid to secure their voter base, particularly concerning Muslims and migration. This strategic maneuvering edges even these established parties closer to the right-wing fringe.