

## Germany Briefing: July and August 2024

*Reporting period: 1<sup>st</sup> July – 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024*

### Germany National Developments

#### **New Security Package Following Knife Attack with Three Fatalities**

Following the knife attack at a city festival in Solingen by a rejected asylum seeker from Syria, which resulted in three deaths, the German Federal Government has decided on a new security package. This includes, among other measures, the increased deportation of rejected and/or criminal asylum seekers, a ban on carrying knives in certain public places, and an intensified fight against Islamism, including expanded possibilities for data analysis using artificial intelligence (AI). Although the reliability of AI in this context is questionable, it is to be used for online facial recognition comparisons and assessing the dangerousness of individuals based on publicly accessible information on social media. The 26-year-old Syrian, who was supposed to leave for Bulgaria in 2023, killed three people in mid-August and severely injured others. Shortly after the crime, the so-called Islamic State released a claim-of-responsibility video allegedly showing the now-detained suspect. The suspect has not been known for any radicalization or affiliation with groups like the so-called Islamic State.

This incident once again fuels the already widespread prejudices against Muslims within German society and leads to renewed media debates in which mosque communities are partially blamed for this and similar acts. This is despite the fact that both the Solingen perpetrator and others were typically not involved in local mosque communities but rather accessed radicalizing content online and had often already been conspicuous for drug and/or violent offenses, as well as psychological issues.

During a press conference on another knife attack in the city of Siegen by a German woman, North Rhine-Westphalia's Minister of the Interior, Herbert Reul, responded to a question about the relatively subdued reaction from politics and the media to the latter incident by stating: "What happened here in Siegen has nothing to do with what happened in Solingen. The only commonality is that both involved knives. But there is a huge difference between a terrorist on the loose and a German woman with mental health issues randomly stabbing people."

#### **Bavarian Ministry of the Interior publishes Nazi-style video on Salafism**

A few days after the knife attack in Solingen, likely in response to calls for stricter measures against Islamism, the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior released a short video on Twitter, specifically targeting (Muslim) women and warning them about the influence of "Salafists." The video opens with the question, "Is makeup haram?" It follows a young woman who—according to the narrative—gradually becomes involved in the "Salafist scene" online. In quick succession, she begins wearing the niqab, meets a man online, marries him, and is ultimately shown crying while cleaning an apartment. Her husband, dressed in a taqiyah and qamis, is depicted flirting with another Muslim woman behind her back.

The video's title: \*The Salafist Trap.\* Its message: "It happens faster than you think."

Aside from perpetuating numerous clichés about Islam and marriage in Islam, some elements of the video—such as the predatory online preacher engulfing the woman—bear striking resemblance to antisemitic propaganda from the 1930s. Due to public criticism, the Ministry of the Interior halted the campaign just a few days after its launch.

On September 1st, in state elections in Saxony and Thuringia, the Islamophobic, right-wing populist, and far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) achieved the expected electoral successes. In Saxony, the AfD garnered 30.6% of the vote, becoming the second strongest party behind the conservative CDU, while in Thuringia, it secured a victory with 32.8% of the vote—nearly 9 percentage points ahead of the CDU in second place.

For the first time since 1938—excluding the war years when no elections were held—a far-right party has won an election in Germany. The AfD, which in recent years has increasingly used social media and partnered with influencers, was particularly popular among younger voters.

## **Federal Government Reaffirms Uncritical Support for Israel**

In a press conference on August 14th, Wolfgang Büchner, the deputy spokesperson for the German Federal Government, and Kathrin Deschauer, the spokesperson for the Federal Foreign Office, responded to Israel's attack on a school in Gaza City during the Fajr prayer, which resulted in over 100 deaths. They stated that the government refrains from labelling the event as a massacre, as it is not yet clear what exactly transpired there. They emphasized that it is a reality of the conflict that Hamas uses schools, hospitals, and kindergartens as command centres. Since Israel is a functioning democratic state governed by the rule of law, independent investigations of incidents involving civilian casualties are deemed unnecessary; such investigations are solely the responsibility of Israel. It is now up to Hamas to release the hostages and agree to a ceasefire.

This press conference once again underscored the unwavering, blind support of the German Federal Government for Israel's actions in Gaza and the uncritical



acceptance of all explanations provided by Israel regarding its actions in Gaza and the West Bank.

## **German Publishing Group Profits from Illegal Settlements**

The German conglomerate Axel Springer, Europe's largest publishing group, financially benefits from its acquisition of the Israeli portal yad2.com for 165 million euros in 2014, through the unlawful construction of settlements in the West Bank, in violation of international law. Yad2.com is Israel's leading platform for automotive, real estate, and classified ads. According to an investigation by "The Intercept," the platform hosts thousands of listings, some of which are paid advertisements, for the rental and sale of houses and apartments in Israeli settlements that are considered illegal under international law. Paid advertisements for properties in so-called outposts, which are illegal even under Israeli law, were also found.

The Axel Springer Group includes German newspapers such as "Bild," which has the largest digital circulation in Europe, and "Die Welt," as well as the television channel "Welt," which have repeatedly drawn attention with their uncritically pro-Israel and Islamophobic reporting. Recently, "Die Welt" ran the headline: "God bless the IDF," while "Bild" consistently omits Palestinian casualties from its coverage and portrays a free Palestine as a Taliban state.

## **Closure of Hamburg Islamic Centre Following Long-Standing Debate**

After a protracted debate, Federal Minister of the Interior Nancy Faeser has ordered the closure and search of the Islamic Centre Hamburg, along with its well-known Blue Mosque, which is considered loyal to Iran and a "significant centre of Iranian propaganda in Europe". It has been substantiated that the centre promotes Islamist-totalitarian ideologies, anti-Semitism, and hostility toward Israel, and supports Hezbollah, which is connected to the Iranian regime and banned as a terrorist organization in Germany. The mosque's Imam, Mohammad Kadi Mofatteh, will also be deported from Germany and subject to an entry ban. He is regarded as the official representative of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Germany.