With the financial support from the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the European Union European Commission - Directorate-General Home Affairs

INSTITUTE *for* STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

The Education and Training of Islamic Faith Leaders in Europe: A Comparative Evaluation of Approaches in France and Germany

DILWAR HUSSAIN AND HENRY TUCK

I. Introduction

With estimates of the Muslim population in Europe rising to between 9 and 15 million, Muslim communities are now prevalent across the majority of European societies.[1] Within these communities Imams remain a significant influence and have traditionally been sourced from outside Europe; the question of why faith leaders preaching in Europe cannot also receive their training in Europe has often been raised. Considering the challenges faced by Muslim communities and individuals in Europe, and the ongoing debate over the successes of integration and community cohesion policies, this is an important question. This issue has also been raised in discussions on radicalisation as it is feared that a lack of local and authentic 'home-grown' Imams could leave a vacuum of religious and community leadership that is open to abuse by extremist individuals, ideologies or interpretations.

Although the education and training of Imams has in some instances become an element of government strategy in dealing with the problems of integration and radicalisation, it is important to stress that Imams are merely one potential source of religious and community leadership and only represent a particular aspect of any future policy. Similarly, in an increasingly interconnected world it is also important to recognise that there are a multitude of other actors and influences both within and outside European Muslim communities.

This report aims to increase the understanding of initiatives by both governments and communities in this area and, through the identification of best practices, contribute to the formulation of effective programmes and policies. It is part of a larger project funded by the European Commission and is based on research and interviews conducted during visits to countries in question. It focuses on the education and training of Imams and Muslim faith leaders for a number of reasons;

- The major concern and focus in this area, in the context of counter-radicalisation, has been the development of Muslim religious leadership and the potential role it could play in enhancing the resilience of vulnerable individuals to radicalisation.

- The resources available for this report did not allow for the comparative evaluation of a range of faiths.
- This report focuses on those courses and institutions that aim to produce faith leaders, teachers and Imams, although conventional higher education in which Islamic themes may be studied are also mentioned where relevant. It is also important to note that not all available courses are included, the report instead provides an overview of some of the more established organisations and recent developments in this area.

II. Defining key terms

It is important to elaborate on what is meant by the terms 'Imam' and 'Imam training' as they can both potentially have rather broad definitions. The term 'Imam' can refer to a number of different roles with the Islamic faith and Muslim communities. The most prevalent interpretation of the term is **an individual that leads prayers in a mosque and fulfils the religious and pastoral requirements of that community**.[2] It can however also refer to a scholar, intellectual, the leader of an organisation or even a head of state. While this definition encapsulates the primary responsibilities of an Imam in most contexts, there are of course numerous other aspects of the role. It is also useful to note that there are a number of other related terms that somewhat overlap with the concept of an Imam that is used in this report:

- *Shaykh* – literally meaning someone elderly, but often refers to a scholar and widely used as term of respect
- *Mufti* – a high-ranking scholar who is qualified to make legal pronouncements and verdicts (*fatwas*)
- *Alim* – also a scholar

An Imam employed in a mosque would primarily be responsible for leading prayers, preaching and attending to their congregation, but they might also be expected to teach children or manage the practical or logistical aspects of the mosque. Imams are also employed as community development workers, social welfare practitioners or as chaplains within state institutions such as prisons, hospitals or the armed forces. All of these roles require a broad range of training beyond purely theological matters, and their diversity illustrates the potential difficulties in formulating effective Imam training and standardised, widely recognised qualifications.

As can be seen by the diverse range of roles and responsibilities carried out by Imams, there is no universal model for their training. Traditionally the training of Imams has been less formalised and more individualistic than in many other religions. This enabled trainee Imams to seek instruction from a variety

of different sources. In many circumstances trainees were encouraged to live with their mentor in order for non-academic skills or religious knowledge to develop organically. Although this paints a picture of a diverse, diffuse and multi-disciplinary education, it is possible to identify four broad themes of knowledge and skills that an Imam requires:

- Theological education (e.g. *fiqh* (law), *hadith* (teachings of Muhammad), *tafsir* (commentary of the Qur'an))
- Pastoral care experience and skills
- Other vocational skills such as language, communication or management
- Higher theological education and expertise [3]

To accommodate the broad range of forms of Imam training necessary there are a number of different providers of religious education within Islam. These could include, but are not limited to:

- Mosques or madrasas
- *Dar ul-ulum* (seminaries)
- Colleges (through certifications or degrees)
- Universities (degrees and above)
- Religious or voluntary organisations
- Private study with a scholar (*ijaza)*
- Ad hoc or remote learning courses [4]

There are also a variety of traditional curricula for training Imams that have been imported into Europe from elsewhere, notably the Diyanet (Ankara Religious Affairs Department) and the Milli Gorus from Turkey and the Darse Nizami from the Indian Subcontinent. The Darse Nizami syllabus, for example, covers topics ranging from language, literature, poetry and philosophy to Islamic history and law to theology and the interpretation, recitation and commentary on the Qur'an.

The reputation, legitimacy and authority of Imam training should also be considered as it is crucial to the work that Imams undertake that they are trusted and respected by their respective congregations and communities.[5] One potential pitfall of the drive to train 'home-grown' European Imams is that different Muslim communities and denominations will have differing levels of respect for certain institutions or training providers. Some for example would place greater legitimacy in courses provided by seminaries or universities based in the Muslim world with established traditions of Imam training, or those that can claim to trace their lineage of their instruction to the Prophet Mohammad or his close companions. Clearly an Imam is unlikely to be judged on the provider of their training alone, there are multiple indicators that individuals and communities will take into account, however it is a factor that must be accounted for when developing such courses, especially in a European context.

THE STATE AND IMAM TRAINING PROVISION

European governments maintain an interest in the training of Imams for a number of reasons. If integration and social cohesion are to be improved then it is vital for there to be the necessary religious infrastructure in place in society, whether in the form of institutions or community leaders and representatives. Relationships between many European governments and their Muslim constituencies have at times been strained in recent years as a result of the increase in jihadist extremist violence, and debates have arisen surrounding the supposed incompatibility of Islam with European democratic society.[6] One factor that has contributed to persistence of this debate is the lack of recognisable and legitimate mainstream or moderate voices to represent Islam and Muslim communities in a positive manner. It is hoped that by increasing the number of 'home-grown' Imams that more moderate and representative figures will emerge that can help promote further integration, dialogue and understanding both within and between communities, and also reduce the levels of tension, misinformation and hysteria that often mire discussions surrounding Muslim communities across Europe.

The training of Imams is also considered an important tool in the ongoing fight against extremist radicalisation in Muslim communities. A small number of notorious, self-proclaimed Imams have been convicted or prosecuted for promoting violent extremism and contributing to the radicalisation process, such as Abu Hamza in the UK or Metin Kaplan in Germany.[7] More important however than these isolated cases is the role Imams have to play in responsible religious education and the protection of vulnerable young people from extremist narratives and recruitment. The danger is that poorly trained or imported Imams who are potentially unfamiliar with the society, culture and environment in which they find themselves, may be ill-equipped to communicate with the members of their communities that are most in need of their guidance and support. There is also a need for well-trained Imams to work in state institutions where radicalisation can occur (such as prisons) or where it can be encountered (such as healthcare or social services).

It is worth stressing that Imams do not represent a comprehensive solution to the challenges of integration and radicalisation in Muslim communities. There is however a clear link between these two challenges; any successful solutions to either are likely to reduce the problems associated with the other. The training of Imams therefore represents one of a myriad of potential areas which governments and civil society should consider when attempting to address either a lack of integration or the threat of radicalisation.

States within the EU have adopted very different approaches to their recognition of, and relationships with, religion, especially those that do not have such an established history on the continent. This has had profound implications for both the policies and relationships that have evolved between the state and religious communities over time. In Austria, for example, Islam has had state recognition in one form or another since the nineteenth century and therefore the state has been able to help develop policies and

support for the formation of effective domestic Islamic religious education. Spain on the other hand only formalised an agreement with the Protestant, Jewish and Islamic communities in 1992 to officially recognise their faiths.

On a pan-European level an understanding of the historical context of religious education and Imam training provides important insights into the contemporary environment. The migration of Muslims into Europe began in earnest in the second half of the twentieth century. This was initially considered a somewhat temporary phenomenon by both 'host nations' and the majority of migrants themselves. This meant that many in nascent Western European Muslim communities concentrated on retaining the traditions, norms, cultures and practices of their countries of origin rather than focusing on integrating into European societies. As time went on however many migrants remained in Europe and, particularly younger generations, began to assimilate into the communities around them. The legacy of this initial lack of integration and long-term thinking has been that Imams have traditionally been brought in from outside Europe. The necessary frameworks and institutions needed to train domestic Imams were slow to materialise, and in many cases remain inadequate considering the current size of the Muslim population in Europe.

The availability, content and quality of religious education and Imam training courses across the EU is therefore somewhat variable and uneven. The current landscape is a product of a combination of historical developments, migration patterns, the variety of state approaches to religion, and the ongoing debates around the position and role of Islam within individual national contexts. This report concentrates on the situations in Germany and France, two countries with large Muslim populations of contrasting origins and historically contrasting philosophies on the relationship between religions and the state.

III. France

France operates a policy of secularism, enshrined in the 1905 Law on the Separation of Church and State, or *laïcité***.** This law guarantees the complete religious neutrality of the French state and the freedom of individuals to practice their chosen faith. The state cannot interfere in the internal affairs of religions or provide them with funding. There are however a number of exceptions, most notably in the case of the protection of cultural heritage and religious buildings and the provision of chaplains in state institutions. There are also regions exempt from the law, such as Alsace-Moselle, as they were not under French jurisdiction at the time of adoption of the law.

Islam is currently the second or third largest religion in France (depending on which estimates are used) with approximately **4,155,000 adherents, 1,555 mosques, 2,147 places of prayer, and 1,300 Imams**.[8] It is the largest Muslim community in Europe and makes up between 8-10 percent of the total French

population.[9] It must be noted however that these figures are unofficial. Due to the laws of *laïcité* there are restrictions on the state gathering of information relating to its citizens' religious or political affiliations and racial or ethnic origins. A large proportion of the French Muslim community can trace their roots in France back to the influx of migrants in the second half of the 20th Century. After the Second World War and the period of Western decolonisation that followed during the 1950s and 1960s many migrants arrived in France from across North, Western and Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia. More recently there has been a shift towards Turkish migrants arriving in France that had previously lived in Germany.

There is a long tradition of Arabic linguistic and oriental studies in France. Teaching of the Arabic language has existed at the Collège de France since 1539, and the National School for Oriental Languages was founded in 1793.[10] However, given the laws and culture of *laïcité*, it must be noted that public universities do not formally offer 'Islamic Studies', 'Religion', 'Theology' or 'Religious Studies' as named disciplines or departments. In terms of providing access to theological and religious knowledge, there has been a strong tradition of trained Imams coming to France from both Africa and Turkey. However, with the discussions surrounding the integration of Muslim communities into French society increasingly common since the 1980s and the emerging discourse of a 'French Islam' or an 'Islam of France', the idea of so-called 'home-grown' French Imams has gained traction in recent years.

PRIVATE OR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Historically initiatives in France aiming to train Imams and faith leaders domestically have been undertaken without state support or involvement. Predominantly these have been private arrangements funded from a combination of course fees, donations and overseas benefactors, although the success and longevity of these initiatives has been mixed.

- **L'Institut Français des Sciences Islamiques** (IFESI – The French Institute of Islamic Sciences) is a private college opened in 2001 aiming to provide students with extensive knowledge of Islam (including Qur'anic studies) and Arabic, as well as other practical skills. It positions itself in the higher education sphere and its programmes last for five years, although shorter evening and weekend courses are also available.
- Since 2005 **L'Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines** (IESH – The European Institute of Human Sciences), located in the central region of Saint-Léger-de-Fougeret, has offered full training courses aimed at Muslims hoping to become Imams or chaplains. The Institute is closely affiliated to the Union of Islamic Organisations of France (UOIF) and offers selective courses lasting a minimum of three years and focusing on Arabic language, Islamic theology and Qur'anic studies.[11] The institute relies on course fees and funding from the Gulf, they have however managed to expand their activities to Paris with a centre there now offering similar courses.[12]
- The **Shâtibî Centre** in Lyon offers 3 year courses in Arabic, Islamic theology and Qur'anic recital

and interpretation rooted in a European context for those hoping to become Imams or specialists in Islam.[13]

- The **Centre de Recherche sur L'Islam** (CERSI – Centre of Research into Islam) offers an Islamic studies programme that can be taken remotely, and also does Arabic language courses.[14]
- The **Grande Mosquée de Paris** (Grand Mosque of Paris) established a centre for education offering Islamic courses in 1994, however it ceased operating in 2000 due to a combination of high course costs and a lack of financial support.[15] The **Institut d'Études Islamiques de Paris** (Paris Institute of Islamic Studies) also suffered a similar fate. Despite the failure of their earlier attempts to provide Imam training, the Grand Mosque of Paris began partnering with the Catholic Institute of Paris in 2008 to provide 'top-up' courses for Imams. Established with the support of the French government, the one-year course is not theological but instead concentrates on French culture, history and law.[16]
- The **Free Faculty of Islamic Theology** in Strasbourg opened its doors in September 2012 and offers Imam training and theological courses.[17] The faculty is financed by the Turkish Diyanet and the University of Istanbul validates its courses. This represents a unique example in France of such a centre, made possible due to the exemption of laïcité laws in the region of Alsace-Moselle and the precedent set by the long-standing presence of similar Protestant and Catholic faculties in the area.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

Despite the limitations imposed by the concept of laïcité, the state has shown interest in the training of Imams and faith leaders and acknowledges the potential benefits of improving the quality of courses available in France. The Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (High Commission on Integration) identified the lack of existing institutions capable of providing sufficiently high quality training for Imams and faith leaders in 1992. Since then it has called for the introduction of such training as part of university courses as this would allow for stringent academic standards to be set. In 2000, the Commission published a report entitled "L'Islam dans la République" (Islam in the Republic) which reiterated its stance on the matter.18

There were also concerns over the lack of a single representative body to manage the relationship between Islam and the French state on behalf of the Muslim community. Whereas other religions in France have established hierarchical institutions to fulfil this role, Islamic organisations and institutions have been unable to unite the diffuse network of mosques and places of prayer that exists throughout French society. In an attempt to make up for this disadvantage a series of Interior Ministers sought to create a body that would act as a sole contact for the French state in matters relating to the Muslim community. These efforts culminated in 2003 with the creation of the **Conseil Français du Culte Musulman** (CFCM – French Council of the Muslim Faith).[19] Previously The Grand Mosque of Paris and The Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), along with the Federation of Muslims of France

(FNMF), were the key competitors vying for the position of leadership of the 'the community'. The three organisations eventually came together under the CFCM umbrella along with other smaller regional associations. Whilst its primary aim is not the training of faith leaders and Imams, the CFCM does seek to facilitate the pooling of resources (including training) between Muslim organisations and arrange various short courses and workshops for religious personnel.

Another important development in the state's relationship with Islam and Muslim communities in France came in 2005 with the publication of a report by the **Commission de Réflexion Juridique sur les Relations des Cultes avec les Pouvoirs Publics** (Commission for Legal Consideration of the Relations between Religions and Public Authorities).[20] The report was commissioned by then Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy to re-examine the state's relationship with religions and to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the original 1905 law. Headed by Jean-Pierre Machelon (a specialist in French public law), the Commission proposed in its report ways in which French society could evolve, while keeping true to the spirit of *laïcité*; "The commission therefore strongly recommends, for the Muslim religion, the creation in the first instance of a system of training of religious personnel, in the framework of a joint action with the public authorities."[21] In the same year an agreement was also reached with the Diyanet in Turkey to incorporate the teaching of French into their training of religious officials. To date however progress towards such a system has been limited, with the partnership between the Grand Mosque and the Catholic Institute of Paris one of few examples of programmes that has received government support.

IV. Germany

Religions in Germany are classed as public-law bodies through a series of private agreements at the Länder level with individual regional authorities. Those religions recognised by the state are able to impose a church tax on their adherents which is then collected and redistributed between eligible institutions from that religion. This arrangement is enshrined in the Federal Basic Law, Länder constitutions and agreements between religions and regional authorities. The German secular culture is therefore markedly different to the strict separation of church and state of the *laïcité* policy adopted by France. Instead it aims for 'positive neutrality' by encouraging religions to play a role in the public sphere, but for the state to remain equidistant from all faiths. This has meant that the state has not found it as problematic to support centres of religious studies as in France.

There are **approximately 4 million Muslims currently living in Germany** which represents 5 percent of the total population.[22] The majority of the Muslim community have Turkish roots and Germany has strong links with the Diyanet, although there are also large communities from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Pakistan among others. Again it is important to stress that these figures are unofficial as the German state does not record information on its citizens' faiths, they are instead based on estimates from religious

groups. There are between **2,500 and 2,900 places of prayer** and **2,500 Imams** (of which 1,500 are full time).[23]

Despite the considerable size of the Muslim community, Islam is not currently recognised officially by the German state as a public-law body. It is therefore unable to levy the church tax and benefit from other privileges that come with state recognition. Islamic institutions and organisations are still however able to access other forms of public and private funding but remain at a disadvantage in comparison with recognised religions. This situation is starting to change however as, since 2012, a number of Länder (including Hamburg, Hesse, Bremen and most recently Lower Saxony) have signed agreements with representatives from the Muslim community to officially recognise Islam.[24]

There are around 20 Catholic, and a similar number of Protestant, theological centres in Germany. According to a 2008 study, 24 German universities have provisions for courses related to Islam and Oriental Languages.[25] For example the **Munich Centre for Islamic Studies** covers Anthropology, the History of Islamic Art and Near & Middle Eastern Studies and the **Institute of Islamic Studies,** established in 1948 as a part of the Freie Universität Berlin, covers the religion, law, culture, and society of the Islamic Middle East. These courses are not however specifically tailored to the training of Imams or faith leaders.

Public debates around a perceived lack of integration of Muslim communities and the potential dangers of radicalisation have also arisen (as in other EU countries) and have been spurred on by controversial incidents such as the publication of *Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab* (*Germany is Losing Itself*) by Thilo Sarrazin in 2010. As in other countries, a concern around the establishment of a more domestic Islamic presence and identity, as opposed to one that has been imported or heavily influenced from abroad, has been a pre-occupation within this debate. Efforts have been made to remedy the situation from both the state and communities by promoting social cohesion and integration and tackling extremist radicalisation. One aspect of this has been to improve the provision and availability of training for Imams and faith leaders.

PRIVATE OR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

While the majority of Imams have traditionally been brought in from countries such as Turkey and Bosnia, limited Islamic theological education has also been provided at a number of private institutions;

- The **Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion** (DITIB - Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) has partnered with **Goethe University** to establish a programme of Islamic studies offered through a theological faculty partnership.
- The **University of Münster** offers a programme of Islamic studies and the **University of Osnabrück** runs a Masters course in Islamic religious education intended to remedy often poor levels of the teaching of Islam among both teachers and faith leaders.

- The **Institut für Human- und Islamwissenschaften** (IHIW - Institute of Humanities and Islamic Studies) in Hamburg currently offers shorter courses on topics such as the place of Islam in Germany and dialogue between religions. They cover the following disciplines via bachelors, masters and doctoral courses:
    - Arabic and Persian Language and Literature
    - Islamic Belief
    - Qur'anic Sciences
    - Islamic Education
    - History of Islam
    - Religion and Religiosity
    - *Hadith* (Teachings of Muhammad)
    - Ethics
    - Law
    - Logic and Philosophy [26]
- The **Moslemische Akademie für Religiöse und Soziale Bildung** (Muslim Academy for Religious and Social Education) in Bremen supports the work of the work of the various Islamic associations by offering training to their staff and members on topics such as the history of Islam in Germany, the integration of migrants and their families, and interfaith dialogue. The training is intended to be accessible for a variety of individuals including Imams, chaplains, theologians, educators, lawyers, social workers and government employees.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

As a response to the intensification of the debate around Islam in Germany the Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble announced the creation of the **Deutsche Islam Konferenz** (DIK – German Islam Conference) from 2006.[27] Intended as an ongoing platform for dialogue between the Federal Government and the Muslim community on issues related to Islam it brought representatives from federal, Länder and local government together with a number of representative organisations and prominent individuals from the Muslim community at various events. The aims of the Conference were to improve social cohesion, further the integration of Muslim communities into German society and prevent extremism and radicalisation. One area in which the Conference has sought to achieve these aims is through further institutional cooperation between the state and the Muslim community, prioritising support for establishing Islamic theology courses at universities and training for Imams and religious officials.[28]

Historically the decentralised and non-hierarchical structure of Islamic institutions in Germany has prevented a singular, recognisable body from emerging into a position of leadership from which it could

advocate for state recognition of Islam and improvements in religious education and domestic Imam training. A number of organisations have laid claim to such a position over the years;

- The **Zentralrat der Muslime in Deutschland** (ZMD - Council of Muslims in Germany)[29] was established in 1994 as an umbrella organisation and now represents 24 Muslim community groups from across Germany. The ZMD represents approximately 300 mosque communities and advocates for the introduction of German-Islamic religious education and the establishment of chairs of academic training for teachers of Islamic religion and Imams. It has also lobbied for the introduction of Muslim chaplains in military, medical and social institutions.[30]
- The **Islamrat für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland** (IRD - Islamic Council for the Federal Republic of Germany) was set up in 1986 again as a national umbrella organisation with around 30 member associations representing around 400 mosques. Among other activities the IRD campaigns for the introduction of Islamic religious studies (in German) as a standard subject in schools and as an academic discipline at German universities for the training of Islamic scholars and faith leaders. The Council also promotes the religious seminars and courses available from its members.[31]
- The **Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion** (DITIB - Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) was founded in 1984 to represent a version of Islam similar to the official Turkish interpretation of Islam and maintains close ties to the Turkish Diyanet. With more than 870 Muslim community groups as members the DITIB is the largest umbrella organisation in Germany. It brings Imams and religious scholars to Germany who, although they have been trained in Turkey, speak German and have been educated on the issues surrounding the integration of Turkish Muslim communities into German society. The DITIB also brought 13 female Imams to Germany in 2006, an initiative that proved successful although their role was limited to working with women from their congregations.
- The **Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren** (VIKZ - Association of Islamic Cultural Centres) was established in 1973 and has links with Turkish groups that are located outside of the Diyanet state religious administration. The VIKZ represents a mystic form of Sunni Islam and represents more than 300 community groups. It is the only umbrella organisation to directly offer Imam (and female *Hoxha* or theologian) training in Germany and offers a three-year full-time course of Islamic theology, including a vocational placement, and also a graduate programme. The syllabus includes Qur'anic recitation, Islamic theology and history, *hadith* (teachings of Muhammad) and *tafsir* (commentary of the Qur'an). Echoing Islamic tradition students spend time in the community working with and learning from a qualified Imam or theologian. The courses aim to equip participants with the necessary knowledge and skills to preach in a mosque and meet the religious, social and cultural needs of their community.[32] The course is however taught predominantly in Turkish and Arabic so does not necessarily further the development of a German Islamic identity.

This situation was remedied in 2007 as a result of discussions at the DIK with the formation of the **Koordinationsrat der Muslime in Deutschland** (KRM - Co-ordinating Council for Muslims in Germany) which is an amalgamation of the four primary umbrella organisations (VIKZ, DITIB, ZMD and IRD). Through its affiliated organisations it represents approximately 2000 mosques of various denominations and acts as a unified representative of the majority of both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in Germany. Its primary role is to represent the German Muslim community in dealings with the state and the media and it has campaigned for improved Islamic religious education at the primary, secondary and higher education levels.

Perhaps the most interesting and significant of the recent developments in Germany has been the inauguration of **Chairs of Islamic Studies** established in a number of German universities. The Ministry of Education (BMBF) envisages that, considering the Muslim community is expected to continue to grow past the current 4 million figure, "over the next few years, up to 2,000 school teachers will be required to provide religious instruction for around 700,000 young Muslims".[33] This drive to train teachers has been key to the establishment of the new centres, even if the public debate around the centres has often focused on 'Imam training'.

The locations were chosen on the basis of track record in theology, religious studies and Islamic and Arabic studies. The Federal Ministry of Education has pledged 20 million Euros over a period 5 years to the Länder (responsible for education) and the universities in order to establish the centres. Four centres were opened from 2011 – 2012 in **Tübingen, Münster/Osnabrück, Frankfurt/Gießen** and **Erlangen/Nürnberg**[34]

The centres were established in response to a report in 2010 by the **German Council of Science and Humanities** (the Wissenschaftsrat, Germany's chief advisory body on higher education and research) which recognised the need for teachers, as well as the role of Imams and faith leaders in the task of promotion of integration. In addition to school teachers the centres will aim to produce academic staff and theologians that can help to raise the level of public debate on Islam, leaders, social actors and chaplains that can help in the public sector and Imams that can support Muslim civil society. As mentioned above, most of the public debate has been around the latter, but the most significant need appears to be for teachers.[35] Thus far, Osnabrück is the only one of the universities with a specific programme for Imams, which is "*Imamweiterbildung*" (further training) for Imams already at work in mosques.

V. Challenges, lessons learned and suggestions

By drawing on the existing literature on Imam training in Europe and examining the achievements and failings of existing programmes and policies it is possible to identify a number of challenges that will likely

be faced, the lessons that have been learned, as well as elements of good practice that could be adopted by current or future programmes in this area.

CHALLENGES

Perhaps the most important challenge with respect to the training of Imams in Europe remains balancing the theological and practical needs of such training. Difficulties remain in defining the roles that we want Imams to fulfil. It was suggested during the course of the interviews conducted for this report that this was not a debate that widely engaged people within Muslim communities at the grassroots. This presents a problem as it is the communities that newly trained Imams will serve and it is imperative therefore that we have a clearer idea of what is, and will be, required from them.

Conservative Islamic educational traditions cannot simply be transplanted into a contemporary European cultural and societal context and still remain relevant to the younger generations within the Muslim community that have been raised and educated in a European environment. Hussain cites a survey that showed "the most prevalent questions among young Muslims - areas in which they sought religious guidance - were firstly around relationships, then mental health and religion itself".[36] One potential danger of this disconnect between the support currently offered by many Imams and the needs of some members of their communities is that a vacuum may be left that can be exploited by extremist radicalisation and recruitment.

There has been a proliferation of sources of religious information and advice online, whether via social networks or charismatic individuals. This simultaneously offers both the potential benefits of diversity and choice and the dangers of extreme or fundamentalist narratives going unchallenged. These alternative sources both undermine and reinforce the importance of the role played by local Imams. Although they no longer retain a monopoly on religious guidance in modern society, Imams remain a vital local, trusted source of advice, personal interaction and support for many.

Another issue that is likely to become increasingly prevalent in this debate is the role of women in positions of leadership within the Islamic faith and Muslim communities. In the majority of Muslim communities women are not considered 'Imams' despite working in similar roles and providing largely the same religious leadership and pastoral support to female members of their congregations.

LESSONS LEARNED & SUGGESTIONS

Although applying best practice across borders can be problematic due to differences in cultures, the origins and traditions of Muslim communities and the variation in state arrangements with religion there are still valuable lessons that can be learnt. Current systems do not require a complete overhaul, and in many cases appears to be moving in the right direction, it is still important however if this momentum is

to continue to ensure that past mistakes are not repeated and we attain a better understanding of the factors responsible for successful outcomes.

The sharing of information and resources is one area where current arrangements could certainly be improved or formalised and such moves would mirror existing traditions of Islamic religious training. Historically Imams would often be well travelled and try to develop their theological knowledge and pastoral or practical skills in different contexts. This tradition should be continued on a national and European basis where possible as in many countries the domestic training of Imams is a relatively recent practice and our understanding of what works and why is still developing. The formulation of national guidelines and best practices and a repository for such resources would be possible outcomes of such exchanges that could prove particularly beneficial moving forward. This could be done through community organisations and academic institutions, possibly with the assistance of governments or EU funding.

Community groups and umbrella organisations are also important stakeholders in the domestic provision of Imam training. Attempts should be made to strengthen cooperation between these organisations in order to develop the fabric and leadership of Muslim communities. If unified representative organisations are present, as is often the case with other mainstream religions, the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation with the state (if desirable and permissible in the national legal context) should increase. The previous lack of centralised, hierarchical Islamic organisations has only started to be addressed relatively recently with the creation of the CFCM in 2003 and the KRM in 2007 in France and Germany respectively. Without such organisations it can be difficult to cooperate effectively with the state as there is the danger of governments being seen to favour certain groups or individuals over others.

Another observation that emerged during the research interviews conducted was that many people have been contributing to the public debate on Islam's place in Europe without sufficient knowledge or expertise. It is hoped that the formation of these umbrella groups will help to raise the level of the debate by providing trusted representatives and positive role models (including Imams) to speak on behalf of Muslim communities and advocate for change, whether for improvements in the domestic provision of Imam training and career opportunities or on other issues of concern. Both organisations have also contributed to broader attempts at improving community cohesion and social integration by tackling Islamophobia, providing a platform for the Muslim community to air its views in the public sphere, and reducing levels of societal tension during various controversies that have arisen in recent years where possible. Both organisations have also contributed to tackling radicalisation by denouncing extremist violence and countering misinterpretations of scripture. Despite infighting and criticisms from some quarters that they are unrepresentative, too close to the state or institutionally biased towards larger, more financially secure groups, the CFCM and the KRM do represent an important step forward in many respects.

Questions also still remain around the extent to which, if at all, the state should play a role in the provision of training for Imams. Relationships between religions and the state vary enormously across Europe and therefore so do the potential options that governments have. Politicians and policy makers will need to account for the impact that their interventions (either in terms of their own initiatives or the funding of others) in this area could have on the legitimacy of the 'home-grown' Imams that they hope to produce within Muslim communities. They must also be careful that any initiatives they introduce compliment rather than compete with existing community efforts. Additionally, there is a danger in governments framing their interest in this area as primarily a security concern. While this interest is reasonable given the role Imams potentially can play in the prevention of radicalisation, it could also contribute to the Islamophobic discourse and prove counterproductive in tackling issues that are primarily societal and cultural in nature.

Despite the difficulties associated with this highly sensitive area of policy, there are a number of ways in which governments can seek to improve the provision of training and the number of 'home-grown' Imams in their countries if they are mindful of the potential problems that may be encountered. There must be **consultation and cooperation between the state and Muslim communities** in order to clearly define their respective responsibilities and expectations, as well as commitments on both sides that any initiatives are sustainable. The general consensus among those interviewed as part of the research for this report was that the state can play a role in supplementing the pastoral and practical skills associated with the role of Imams, but that theological matters should be the responsibility of communities and representative Islamic organisations.

One area where governments can potentially have a positive impact is through the employment of chaplains in state institutions. Many mosques remain unable to afford a fully qualified, full-time Imam so an increase in the number of jobs available in state institutions, combined with salaries that are commensurate with the levels of training required, may encourage more domestic Muslims to consider it as potential career. An increase in the number of chaplaincy roles available could also pave the way for more women to work in the field as de-facto Imams.[37] It also allows for standards to be set that guarantee training courses and providers meet certain criteria. There is also the issue of legitimacy to consider, especially in the context of radicalisation. As chaplains in state institutions, Imams would be working in environments such as prisons where individuals may have a particular dislike or distrust of officials on the public payroll.

The higher education sector can also potentially be an important avenue for the provision of Imam training. Islamic theological training could be **incorporated into existing university institutions** in a similar way to Imam training offered in many Islamic countries and the training of personnel by other religions at various universities in Europe. This may be a good option in the short-term as it presents fewer difficulties than creating stand-alone Islamic institutions from scratch. The programmes offered by the Universities of Münster and Osnabrück in Germany are examples of such an approach.

Another option would be **creating faculties of Islamic theology**, such as the four centres recently established in Germany. This would however represent a more medium to long-term ambition elsewhere as it would require finding a suitable number of qualified lecturers and staff and coordinating with religious organisations, potential employers (mosques or state institutions) and community groups to establish what the curriculum should include and ensure that qualifications would be relevant to the current and future aspects of the role of an Imam. Other possible options would be to **encourage cooperation between Islamic organisations and European universities** or to **modify existing Islamic courses** to meet the specific demands of those hoping to become Imams. Attempts have been made at both these approaches; the collaboration between the Free Faculty of Islamic Theology in Strasbourg and the University of Istanbul, and the partnership between DITIB and Goethe University in Germany for example.

One final suggestion that has been put forward is the creation of an **independent pan-European institute for post-graduate study** that would pool the resources and expertise of existing training providers and allow for exchanges between personnel and students across the continent. This could supplement domestic training provision and also contribute to developing a more contextualised 'European Islam'. This is potentially one area where governments or the EU could get involved by providing financial support and networking opportunities to existing academic institutions working in the field, although safeguards would need to be put in place to ensure the independence and legitimacy of such an institute were it to be established.[38]

The Chairs of Islamic Studies established in four German universities have highlighted a number of potential problems that could arise with other attempts to provide training for Imams. All the centres opened within a two year period and this has resulted in competition in the recruitment of staff as well as students. Naturally, this has created some tensions between the centres as they try to attract funding, resources, expertise, raise their profiles in the media and demonstrate their legitimacy in academic circles and the wider Muslim community. One of the experts interviewed felt that perhaps this could have been done more slowly, phasing in the centres and having visiting professors that could be shared to establish a more collegiate approach.

Despite these concerns the centres have been greeted as a positive development as the relatively quick process of setting them up showed that there was strong will and backing from the Federal Government to get them off the ground as soon as possible. Other faith groups have also positively welcomed the centres as their establishment should not only help to produce public Muslim figures that can improve the quality of the debate on Islam's position in Germany, but also raise the standard and relevance of religious discourse as a whole. It remains to be seen however whether the centres will be sustainable in the long-term beyond the current five year funding cycle.

VI. Summary

This report has outlined the debates surrounding the lack of domestically produced, 'home-grown' Imams in Europe and examined the current provision of training for Imams and faith leaders in France and Germany. It has raised a number of potential future challenges that are likely to be faced in this area and suggested ways in which the various stakeholders within governments and communities could seek to address current concerns. This issue is undoubtedly important in the context of improving social cohesion and the integration of Muslim communities, as well as the realm of security and radicalisation, and improvements certainly could and should be made in the provision and quality of training available in Europe. It is however also important to stress that Imam training does not represent a panacea for these problems, but instead needs to be part of a broader strategy (on behalf of both governments and communities) to address both the social issues of integration and community cohesion and the security concerns surrounding extremism and radicalisation. This area of policy is a relatively recent concern that has only received more substantial attention in the past decade or so. As a result both governments and communities are still discovering what works and why, and effective programmes will therefore take time to implement, develop and establish legitimacy in the eyes of Muslim communities. If policy is to be successful it must consider the current and likely future needs of those that 'home-grown' Imams will be expected to work with. Desired outcomes are unlikely to materialise in the short-term, therefore both governments and community actors will need to cooperate effectively and make long-term commitments in order for these outcomes to be achieved.

Endnotes and References

[1] Hussain, D. (2010) "PPN Working Paper – Development of Religious Instruction and Institutions: 'Imam Training' in Europe", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, p.5.

2 Ibid, p.8.

3 Ibid, p.6.

4 Ibid, p.18.

5 For more information, see: Johansen, B. (2006), Islam at the European Universities Report II, University of Copenhagen.

6 For more information, see:

- BBC News, "Viewpoints: Anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe", [21.01.2011], http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12240433, accessed 11.04.14.
- BBC News, "Islam debate in France sparks controversy", [06.04.2011] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12969641, accessed 11/4/14.
- BBC News, "Germans wrestle with multicultural identity", [30.12.2010], http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-12090328, accessed 11/4/14.

7 For more information, see:

- BBC News, "Profile: Abu Hamza", [14.04.2014] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11701269, accessed 14.04.14.
- BBC News, "Profile: The Caliph of Cologne", [27.05.2004], http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1705886.stm, accessed 14.4.14.

8 Husson, JF. (2007), "Training imams in Europe: the current status", King Baudouin Foundation, p.8.

9 U.S. Department of State: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2012), "International Religious Freedom Report – France", http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208314#wrapper, accessed 12.04.14.

10 Higher Education Academy (2008), "International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education: A Report to HEFCE", https://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/indirreports/2008/re0708/rd07_08.pdf, accessed 07.04.14.

11 For more information, see: http://www.iesh.org/

12 For more information, see: http://www.ieshdeparis.fr/

13 For more information, see: http://www.shatibi.fr/

14 For more information, see: http://www.cersi.net/

15 For more information, see: http://www.mosqueedeparis.net/

16 Ibid.

17 Le Monde, "A Strasbourg, la Turquie ouvre une "faculté" de théologie pour former des imams", [31.08.2012], http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2012/08/31/a-strasbourg-la-turquie-ouvre-une-faculte-de-theologie-pour-former-des-imams_1754033_3224.html, accessed 11.04.14.

18 Haut Conseil A L'integration (2000), "L'islam Dans La Republique", http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/014000017/0000.pdf, accessed 09.04.14.

19 For more information, see: http://www.lecfcm.fr/

20 Commission de réflexion juridique sur les relations des cultes avec les pouvoir publics (2006), "Rapport Machelon", http://www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/var/storage/rapports-publics/064000727/0000.pdf, accessed 09.04.14.

21 Ibid.

22 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (2012), "International Religious Freedom Report – Germany", http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=208318#wrapper, accessed 11.04.14.

23 Husson, JF. (2007), "Training imams in Europe: the current status", King Baudouin Foundation, p.8

24 Islam Today, "Islam to be Recognized as an Official Religion in Germany", [10/01/2013], http://en.islamtoday.net/artshow-229-4681.htm, accessed 11.04.14.

25 Higher Education Academy (2008), "International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education: A Report to HEFCE", https://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/indirreports/2008/re0708/rd07_08.pdf, accessed 07.04.14.

26 For more information, see: http://www.islamic-sciences.de/?page_id=1916

27 For more information, see: http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DIK/EN/DIK/UeberDIK/Hintergrund/hintergrund-node.html

28 For more information, see:

http://www.deutsche-islam-konferenz.de/DIK/EN/Startseite/startseite-node.html

29 For more information, see: http://zentralrat.de/2597_main.php

30 For more information, see: http://zentralrat.de/3035.php

31 For more information, see: http://www.islamrat.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=45&Itemid=54

32 For more information, see: http://www.vikz.de/

33 Federal Ministry of Education and Research, "Contemporary Integration Policy: Islamic Theology at German Universities", http://www.bmbf.de/en/15619.php, accessed 10.04.14.

34 Ibid.

35 New York Times, "Germany Adds Lessons in Islam to Better Blend Its Melting Pot", [06.01.14] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/07/world/europe/germany-adds-lessons-in-islam-to-better-blend-its-melting-pot.html?_r=2&, accessed 10.04.14.

36 Hussain, D. (2010) "PPN Working Paper – Development of Religious Instruction and Institutions: 'Imam Training' in Europe", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, p.4.

37 Hussain, D. (2010) "PPN Working Paper – Development of Religious Instruction and Institutions: 'Imam Training' in Europe", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, p.28.

38 Hussain, D. (2010) "PPN Working Paper – Development of Religious Instruction and Institutions: 'Imam Training' in Europe", Institute for Strategic Dialogue, p.6.