

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

[Spiegel Online](#)

Have Berlin Mosques Become a Target?

Arson and Integration

By Jill Petzinger in Berlin

12/29/2010

Several Muslim centers in Berlin have been the target of arson attacks in recent months. Police have made little progress in their investigation, but many suspect that the series of incidents has its roots in the raw rhetoric surrounding Germany's integration debate.

The list isn't long. In early December, a petrol bomb exploded with a loud bang against the façade of the Iranian cultural center in the Berlin district of Tempelhof, sending flames licking up the front of the building. Before that it was the Al-Nur Mosque in the Neukölln neighborhood, where the majority of Berlin's Muslim population lives. Berlin's Sehlik Mosque, also in Neukölln, has been attacked four times since late summer.

Yet even if there have been no injuries in the attacks to date, city officials are concerned. Berlin's State Criminal Police Office has established a special task force to look into a perplexing series of petrol bomb attacks that has targeted Muslim facilities in the German capital for months. Results, however, have so far been scant. Berlin police spokesman Klaus Schubert declined to comment on the specifics of the investigation, but told SPIEGEL ONLINE "there are no indications that the attacks were intended to cause actual harm to people."

Others, however, aren't as sanguine. The year 2010 in Germany was one which saw an intense debate about the difficulties of integrating the country's Muslim minority -- a discourse which many observers thought crossed the line into racial and religious profiling.

Indeed, the interior minister of the city-state of Berlin, Ehrhart Körting, said recently that there may in fact be a connection between the attacks and the immigration debate. The discussion, he told the German news agency DAPD, may have established a climate "which could have encouraged right-wing extremists or Islamophobes to perpetrate such crimes." That, he continued, "should be clear to all those responsible for creating this climate."

The Hallmarks of a 'Hate Crime'

Indeed, following the most recent attack on the Sehitlik Mosque on November 19, police said it bore the hallmarks of a "hate crime."

Berlin's Muslim population has sought to maintain its composure. A spokesman for the Iranian cultural center told SPIEGEL ONLINE that they had not increased security and that the attack "has not made a difference to those visiting the center. They do not feel nervous or unsafe."

This upbeat attitude was reiterated by Yavuz Selim Akgül, chairman of the Sehitlik mosque. "Considering one mosque after another is being set alight," he told SPIEGEL ONLINE, "one could imagine the general atmosphere here would be less than positive. But that's not the case: calm prevails and attendance has not decreased."

Security, though, is tight. Akgül's mosque is under 24-hour guard and additional surveillance cameras are being installed. While police have removed the police guard placed in front of the mosque in the wake of the attack, a spokesman said they are closely monitoring the situation.

And it is a situation that may have to be monitored for some time. In addition to the rancorous immigration debate, Berlin has been on a high terror alert since mid-November, when German Interior Minister, Thomas de Maizière, said that the German government had "concrete indications" that Islamists were planning an attack and Germany could be a target. Heavily armed police have been patrolling Berlin streets ever since.

'Erosion of Solidarity'

Some have criticized the terror warnings for being detrimental to the welfare of the German capital's Muslim population. In late November, Aiman Mazyek, chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, told the German press agency DPA that "not a week goes by without an attack on a mosque or a Muslim citizen. This terror hysteria exacerbates the situation and leads to an erosion of solidarity with Muslims."

Indeed, Ehrhart Körting himself has been blasted for using the kind of rhetoric he recently condemned. In the wake of late November's terror warnings, he told Berliners in a radio interview: " If you suddenly see three somewhat strange-looking men who are new to your neighborhood, who hide their faces and who only speak Arabic, you should report them to the authorities."

But it is Germany's ongoing integration debate which has particularly inflamed tempers on both sides. It is a discussion which the country has been wrestling with for years, but a book released in August by former Berlin politician Thilo Sarrazin poured fuel on the fire.

Sarrazin, who was fired from his position on the board of the German Central Bank as a result of the book, claimed that Muslim immigrants would soon outnumber the country's ethnic German population because of their higher birth rates. He also suggested that because immigrant children are less successful in school, immigration is making the country less intelligent. His theories found tacit agreement from many in Germany, but also ignited widespread disgust.

Stirring up Fear

Governor of Bavaria Horst Seehofer then one-upped Sarrazin in an October interview with the newsmagazine *Focus*. The powerful politician said: "It's clear that immigrants from other cultures such as Turkey and Arabic countries have more difficulties. From that I draw the conclusion that we don't need additional immigration from other cultures."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that efforts to establish a multi-cultural society in the country had "utterly failed."

While there is, as yet, no indication of a concrete connection between such comments and the attacks in Berlin, some have posited such a link. "I can only see these inhuman attacks as a consequence of the witch hunt by Sarrazin, Seehofer and co. against those Muslims they accuse of refusing to integrate," said Left Party parliamentarian Ulla Jelpke earlier this month.

Nurhan Soykan, general secretary of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, likewise blames the public debate: "Some media and politicians have stirred up targeted fear and rejection of Muslims and now we are seeing the results of this," she said. "The community is reacting and hostility towards Islam is growing."

Intolerant Germany

A recent survey would suggest that Soykan's comments might not be far off the mark. While Sarazzin's rhetoric was loudly rejected in the media, a recently released study by the University of Münster revealed startling levels of intolerance of Islam in Germany. The survey, which polled 1,000 people in five countries -- France, Denmark, Portugal, the Netherlands and Germany -- showed that just 34 percent of respondents in Germany had a positive view of Muslims. In each of the other four countries, the results were over 50 percent.

In addition, the study found that over 80 percent of Germans associate Islam with discrimination against women, over 70 percent with religious fanaticism and over 60 percent with a propensity to violence. Just 5 percent of Germans considered Islam to be a tolerant religion -- in contrast with a 30 percent result in the other four countries. According to Professor Detlef Pollack, who presented the study in Berlin on Dec. 2, two fifths of those polled in western Germany, and half of those polled in eastern Germany, feel that foreign cultures are a threat to the country.

The ongoing debate about Islam and integration would appear not to be helping the situation. Indeed, Soykan feels it is counterproductive. "The threshold of inhibition in politics and society has been lowered so dramatically that what would have passed for racism in the past is now an acceptable conversation topic at bourgeois parties," she said. "This is driving a wedge through society, and ultimately making integration more difficult."

Whether it is also fuelling attacks on Muslim centers in Berlin remains, for now, a matter of speculation.