

Radical views of Imams in the Netherlands less public

Imams and mosque administrators who follow the puritanical form of Islam known as salafism are adopting a less radical and anti-Western stance in public than in the past. The change is mainly a response to external pressure, and it is too early to say whether their new attitude will last. This is stated in a report by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) on Saudi influences in the Netherlands and links between the salafistic mission, processes of radicalisation and Islamic terrorism (*'Saoedische invloeden in Nederland, verbanden tussen salafitische missie, radicaliseringsprocessen en islamistisch terrorisme'*), which has been sent to the Lower House today by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Johan Remkes, also acting on behalf of the Minister of Justice, Piet Hein Donner, and the Minister for Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk.

The AIVD also concludes that radical Imams and recruiters today increasingly meet and operate behind closed doors. The radicalisation process that takes place during these closed meetings is regarded as very serious by the AIVD. The policy of the government is aimed at ensuring that radical Imams and mosque administrators cease their calls for Muslims to turn their backs on Dutch society. The Dutch government will lend its full cooperation to the request by the United States to place the Al-Haramain foundation on the UN list of groups that have ties with Al Qaeda.

Salafism is the official state doctrine in Saudi Arabia. For many years that country has supported the spread of salafism abroad via embassies and charity organisations. According to the report, salafism can easily lead to intolerant views and anti-Western sentiments. A number of mosques and foundations in the Netherlands have also received support from Saudi Arabia. The radical views promulgated by those mosques and foundations have made some young people vulnerable to recruitment practices.

The Saudi government, which has now also been confronted by terrorist attacks, has changed course as a result. Not only has a rigorous campaign been launched against terrorist groups, but the supply of money to salafist mosques and foundations has been halted. In taking these steps the Saudi government is seeking to prevent radicalisation. Imams and administrators of salafist mosques in the Netherlands had already begun adopting a more moderate stance towards Western society than in the past. However, this change is primarily the result of external pressure, such as publicity and the actions of local administrators and moderate Muslim organisations. It is therefore not certain that this trend will continue if that pressure disappears.

The Dutch government has already informed the Saudi Ambassador of its great concerns regarding the harmful effects of the salafist missionary activities on Muslims in the Netherlands. The Ambassador shares these concerns and has promised full cooperation in efforts to prevent money from Saudi Arabia being misused for setting Muslims against the West or for terrorist purposes. In addition, the government feels that a political/administrative approach is needed to the risks presented by salafist missionary work. The mayors of towns in which salafist mosques are established will where necessary have to (continually) confront radical mosque administrators. The government also wants to involve moderate mosques and Muslim organisations in the attempts to curtail the risks. Efforts will be made to prevent individuals with demonstrable links to intolerant salafist groups from living in the Netherlands, among other things by refusing to issue residence permits. The government wants foundations to be subjected to a greater degree of transparency. According to the government, the increased efforts of the AIVD and the police already announced, involving keeping a close watch on the fluctuating group of 150 individuals with terrorist backgrounds, are also explicitly intended to discover and disrupt recruitment activities.