

300 officers raid mosque and suspected 'hotspot for radical Islamists'

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Police in Lower Saxony launched a major raid on Tuesday morning on the organization "German-speaking Islamic Circle", which officials believe to be a "hotspot for the radical Salafist scene". Around 370 officers took part in the raids beginning at 6am on the nationally active "German-speaking Islamic Circle" (DIK) in Hildesheim. The state interior ministry also placed a ban on the group on Tuesday.

Berlin Christmas market attacker Anis Amri, who killed 12 people in an Isis-claimed terror act in December, had also stayed with the group in February 2016. According to German intelligence, more than 22 young men from the DIK circle have left Germany to join IS – either as fighters or as alleged aid convoys. Minors have also been radicalized by the banned association, authorities say.

According to officials, 'hate preachers' who were part of the group radicalized Muslims and encouraged them to become jihadist fighters in war-torn areas.

"Banning the association has crushed a hotspot for the radical Salafist scene in Germany," said Lower Saxony interior minister Boris Pistorius. Among DIK's 300 members was nationally-active Salafist preacher "Abu Walaa." Considered among intelligence services as "IS' number one" in Germany he was arrested in November near Hildesheim and remains under investigation on suspicion of supporting a terrorist organization.

The raids were conducted at the association's mosque, as well

as at the homes of eight members.



Police would not initially say whether any arrests were made. Officials also would not say to what extent evidence was seized during the operation.