Summary

The social position of Turkish-Dutch citizens: developments and risks of criminality and radicalisation

Background

Over the past few years, the Dutch security services, Turkish self-organisations and the media have reported repeatedly on social problems among Turkish-Dutch citizens, varying from socio-economic disadvantages and withdrawal into their own community to overrepresentation in crime statistics and increased radicalisation. These reports – which prompted responses from the Turkish community – have led to the present study, which focuses on developments in the social position of Turkish-Dutch citizens in relation to possible risks of criminality and radicalisation among young adults of Turkish descent.

Research questions and methods

The present study is centred around the following question:

Which developments in the social position of persons (in particular young adults) with a Turkish background have taken place in the Netherlands over the last decade and what are the effects of these developments on possible risks of criminality and radicalisation?

The central question was operationalised into the following four research questions:

1. Which developments regarding social position have occurred in the Netherlands since 2000 among persons (in particular young adults) with a Turkish background?
2. How can these developments in the social positions occupied by young adult persons with a Turkish background in the Netherlands be explained?
3. What are the relationships between social position and risks of criminality and radicalism?
4. What are the identifiable risks of criminality and radicalism among persons (in particular young adults) with a Turkish background in the Netherlands?

Various research methods were used In order to answer these questions. We first conducted an extensive review of the literature on the social position of Turkish-Dutch citizens and, more specifically, on developments among first and second generation Turkish-Dutch citizens in comparison to indigenous, Surinamese, Antillean and Moroccan citizens. Attention was focused on the position of Turkish-Dutch citizens with respect to the socio-economic areas of education, labour and housing and various aspects of their socio-cultural position, namely their social relations, identification and orientation, religiosity, and political activity. Using Merton's *strain* theory and Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT) we examined how developments in the social position relate to criminality and radicalisation (and the risks thereof).

In addition, empirical research was carried out. We conducted interviews with 27 professionals used to dealing with Turkish-Dutch citizens in the course of their work. Fifteen professionals were interviewed individually and twelve of them within the context of two expert meetings. We also interviewed 73 Turkish-Dutch young adults. The research sample consisted of more women than men, more highly educated than less educated respondents,

and more ethnically Turkish than Kurdish respondents. Our sample included young adults who sympathized with or were involved in movements mentioned by the security service (AIVD) in relation to radicalisation, but did not include any strongly radicalised or extremist respondents. This was taken into account when interpreting our findings.

Increased integration and persistent disadvantages

A review of the literature reveals a level of ambiguity regarding the social position of Turkish-Dutch citizens in both socio-economic and socio-cultural areas. On the one hand, there have been positive developments, given that Turkish-Dutch citizens are catching up in many areas, especially in comparison to the indigenous population. On the other hand, they are (still) disadvantaged in all areas when compared to the indigenous population and also, in a number of areas, in comparison to Surinamese, Antillean and Moroccan citizens. This gradual process of catching up makes it impossible to confirm or disprove the idea of an alarming state of affairs or a further falling behind, as reported by the media.

Education

Turkish-Dutch young adults are performing increasingly better in primary, secondary and higher education. In primary education improved performances have led to a growing number of Turkish-Dutch children going on to higher general secondary education and pre-university education. Secondary school dropout rates are relatively low. Young Turkish-Dutch adults are also following courses at Higher Professional (HBO) or University level more often, partly due to the fact that they have a tendency to 'stack' courses and opt for the highest possible next level of education. The same applies to many of our – predominantly highly educated – respondents.

Compared to other groups – particularly indigenous Dutch people – the Turkish-Dutch group is still lagging behind. In primary education it is lagging behind in the areas of language, maths and Cito-scores, in secondary and higher education they do not perform as well as their indigenous peers with regard to the level at which they study and academic success. Ten respondents in our research sample did not have any basic qualifications.

Our review of the literature reveals that persistent disadvantages can be partially explained by individual factors (such as abilities and motivation), factors at the family or group level (such as a low level of education and poor language skills of the parents), school characteristics (such as support by the institution) and experiences of discrimination (which can make young adults feel less 'at home' in school). The emphasis placed by Turkish-Dutch parents on social mobility is mentioned as a major explanation for young adults who manage to catch up. The aforementioned factors do not provide a full explanation, but they make it clear that there is no specific ethnic problem. Our respondents confirmed the importance of a number of these factors. Although they were pressured at the family level to achieve upward social mobility, their less educated parents with their poor command of the Dutch language lacked the ability to support their children in their studies. Several respondents also pointed to discrimination and a lack of social acceptance. They indicated that they felt 'different', that they were being treated 'differently' and 'with less respect' than other students, and/or that they felt they were being discriminated against by their teachers.

Labour market

Turkish-Dutch citizens have also shown gradual improvements in the labour market, even though they are still lagging behind. These improvements concern a better starting position (the result of a higher level of education), greater diversity in career level and an increase in standardised income (disposable income corrected for household size and composition). However, the standardised income of Turkish-Dutch citizens is still lagging behind that of indigenous citizens. Turkish-Dutch citizens occupy an insecure position in the labour market relatively often due to flexible employment contracts, and they are exposed to a higher risk of poverty. This relatively unfavourable position may be contributing to the fact that this group opts for self-employment more often than other groups. It is not easy to relate these findings to the experiences of our research sample, because most of our respondents are still in training and only have limited experience in the labour market.

The literature suggests a number of factors to explain why Turkish-Dutch citizens are lagging behind in the labour market. They include demographic factors such as gender and age; more traditional role perceptions; social and cultural capital; structural and contextual factors such as the current economic crisis; government policies and experiences of discrimination. Despite their limited work experience, our respondents pointed to a number of factors also mentioned in the literature to explain why Turkish-Dutch citizens are lagging behind in the labour market. A significant number of respondents indicated that they felt discriminated against in their efforts to find work or internships, and that they were treated impolitely, disrespectfully and differently – compared to their indigenous peers – by potential or actual employers and colleagues. In addition to the factors mentioned in the literature, both the young adults and the professionals we interviewed also pointed to psycho-social and medical problems; the Turkish style of upbringing resulting in young adults being insufficiently assertive during job application procedures; the lack of suitable Turkish-Dutch role models, and the strong inward orientation of the Turkish community. In spite of the rejection they encounter, most of the young adults we interviewed are still seeking access to the labour market and, once they are employed, strive to do their jobs as well as possible. Negative experiences have led other respondents to look for work within the Turkish community. Some of our respondents were considering self-employment. This often results in a move towards the Turkish community, because the required social capital is mainly raised within the Turkish-Dutch social network. In the longer term, this could pose an obstacle to the social mobility of Turkish-Dutch young adults within Dutch society.

Housing and segregation

The position of Turkish-Dutch citizens in the housing market is also improving, even though they are still at a disadvantage. A positive trend can be observed regarding the number of Turkish-Dutch citizens who own their own home or live in single-family homes, and the available square footage of dwelling space. Their disadvantaged position compared to the indigenous population is particularly evident from the number of times they move house, relatively poor quality housing and the number of Turkish-Dutch citizens living in 'black' neighbourhoods. Compared to their Antillean, Moroccan and Surinamese counterparts, Turkish-Dutch citizens are more often concentrated in certain areas. Their relatively poor housing has been explained by a number of factors: the migration history of Turkish-Dutch citizens who – at the time of family reunification – mainly settled in affordable houses in the

city; various demographic and socio-economic factors such as age, income, flexible employment contracts and level of education; and neighbourhood characteristics such as available housing and building density. About a quarter of all Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese citizens live in neighbourhoods where more than half of the residents are of non-western origin. So-called 'ethnic enclaves', mainly populated by one particular ethnic group, are rare in the Netherlands. The relatively large number of Turkish-Dutch citizens living in 'black' neighbourhoods has been linked to socio-economic factors (income, level of education), socio-cultural factors (chain migration, the presence of ethnic facilities), discrimination, and exclusion mechanisms in the housing market. There is no consensus in the literature on the consequences of ethnic segregation. Some authors find no negative effect, while others posit that ethnic segregation has a negative impact on not just the socio-economic and socio-cultural position of migrants, but also on the social cohesion and feelings of safety in a neighbourhood.

A significant number of our respondents live in 'black' neighbourhoods. They claim to have many valued social contacts in these neighbourhoods, which are not available to respondents living in 'white' or 'mixed' neighbourhoods. The explanations for spatial concentration mentioned in the literature also emerged during our interviews. Young adults who stated a preference for living in the same neighbourhood as their parents and friends confirm the importance of socio-cultural factors. The young adults who would rather move to a better neighbourhood confirm the socio-economic explanation, while respondents who preferred to remain living in a 'black' or 'mixed' neighbourhood in order to avoid discrimination, offer support for the explanation focused on exclusion and discrimination.

Social relationships

There is a trend towards increasing ethnic heterogeneity in the social relationships of Turkish-Dutch citizens, particularly among second generation and higher educated Turks, but the inward focus remains strong, as evidenced by the preference for marriage partners from within their own community. The choice of social contacts and partners is explained in the literature by various factors, such as similarity (attitudes and demographic characteristics), language skills, level of education, meeting opportunities, policy effects, and the role of parents. In addition to this, social control within the Turkish community also stands in the way of a more heterogeneous social circle.

The effects of social control, heterogeneity in social contacts and a pronounced inward-looking focus were also observed among the respondents. Higher educated respondents in particular have a mixed circle of friends and a minority of them even moves in exclusively non-Turkish social circles, but a significant section of the respondents still mix with a predominantly Turkish group of friends. The respondents explained this by pointing to the fact that they share the same norms and values and understand each other better (similarity), and have opportunities to meet through parents and school. The respondents also expressed a preference for a partner from the same ethnic and religious background. They insist on choosing their partners themselves, which puts the parental influence on the choice of marriage partners that is presumed in the literature somewhat into perspective. The young people interviewed – young women in particular – experience strict social control from their environment. Whereas some of our respondents value the protective aspect of

social control and conform to it, others try to circumvent this control by strategies such as seeking out contacts outside the Turkish community.

Identification and orientation

In terms of identification and orientation, Turkish-Dutch citizens are generally strongly focused on their Turkish identity and on Turkey, certainly in comparison to Antillean, Surinamese and Moroccan citizens. They also have stronger transnational ties than these other migrant groups, although in the case of highly educated second generation youngsters, identification with and orientation towards Turkey is often less strong. As we found in our interviews, higher educated young adults increasingly identify with the Netherlands. Fewer experiences of discrimination and a higher level of education should also make them feel more at home in the Netherlands, but this is where we come across an 'integration paradox': although the higher educated group feels more at home, they simultaneously feel less respected. The relatively strong orientation towards their own ethnic group is linked to the ties between Turkish-Dutch residents and/or their transnational ties with Turkey.

Most of the young adults we interviewed indicated that they felt more Turkish than Dutch, but at the same time they acknowledged that they had adopted many Dutch customs. A number of young adults identified more with Islam or the Kurdish cause than with their Turkish background. Questions about their identity usually first arose during puberty, when they became more aware of the social climate and the cultural differences separating them from their peers with a different background, realisations that made them feel more like 'foreigners'. The picture emerging from the interviews is therefore more differentiated than that suggested by the literature. What is striking is that the respondents experience feelings of being 'different' both in the Netherlands and in Turkey. Their sense of identity is shaped by a combination of religion, Turkish culture and language, and spatial concentration. To a number of respondents, religion is more important than Turkish ethnicity when it comes to their sense of identity. Kurdish young adults prefer to describe themselves as 'Kurdish-Dutch citizens', rather than 'Turkish Kurds'. Despite their strong ties to Turkey, most of the young adults we interviewed preferred not to live there.

Religion

Turkish-Dutch citizens constitute the largest group of Muslims in the Netherlands. Most of them are Sunnis (75 per cent) or Alevites (20 per cent). The Sunnis belong to different factions and movements, such as *Diyanet, Milli Görüş*, *Süleymanci* and the *Fethullah Gülen* movement. A review of the literature shows that the past decade has seen a religious revival, especially among second generation Turkish-Dutch citizens, as demonstrated by, for instance, an increase in mosque attendance. Both the literature and our interviews indicate that Turkish-Dutch citizens rate the importance of religion, and more specifically Islam, very highly. Only a limited number of respondents described themselves as atheists.

The importance of religion does not always translate into the observance of religious prescriptions such as, for instance, praying five times a day. This is consistent with reports in the literature that Turkish-Dutch citizens are less observant of Islamic prescriptions than Moroccan-Dutch Muslims. The majority of religious respondents strive to follow the tenets of their faith, but there is also a smaller group of believers who admit to being unable to observe the precepts of Islam in actual practice. Only a very small number of respondents claimed to follow Islamic precepts to the letter. These results correspond to the findings

outlined in the literature. The majority of respondents interpret Islam as being related to their inner life and, more specifically, to finding consolation and the meaning of life. Only some respondents translated their religious convictions into political beliefs, without however feeling the need to put their political ideas into practice in an activist fashion.

Efforts to explain the religiosity of Turkish-Dutch migrants focus on socio-economic circumstances, social context and the space afforded to Islam in Dutch society. There is no clear picture of the factors influencing the religiosity of second generation Turkish-Dutch young adults in particular. The young people we interviewed indicated that their religiosity developed within the context of their upbringing, personal development, stressful situations and/or intense personal experiences, and their own interest. The perception of social exclusion and discrimination can also play a role: feelings of exclusion among Turkish-Dutch young adults may be contributing to an increase in their religiosity. Although the interviews did not exactly reveal that experiences of discrimination have led to more religiosity, the strictly religious young adults in our sample feel that they are discriminated against on the basis of their faith. Less religious respondents tend to ascribe experiences of discrimination to their ethnicity.

Political participation

Turkish-Dutch citizens present an ambiguous picture with respect to political participation. On the one hand, they demonstrate political involvement by a relatively high level of participation in political self-organisations and local politics. On the other hand, they show little interest in Dutch national politics and have little faith in Dutch political institutions. The respondents' distrust and lack of interest not only apply to Dutch politics: they showed even less interest in Turkish politics, although various Turkish political parties are represented in the Netherlands. Young adults who were not otherwise politically active did, however, voice opinions – often critical – on Turkey's conflict with the Kurds. Kurdish-Dutch respondents are more politically active than Turkish-Dutch respondents: a number of them have participated in youth camps organised by the PKK and/or donated money, either directly or indirectly, to the PKK in Turkey.

Political engagement and participation are explained in the literature by references to socio-economic factors, social capital, and a number of individual factors such as age and gender. The respondents explained their distrust of the police by referring to negative experiences with and stories about police discrimination. The interviews also pointed to a possible relation between upbringing and political activity: parents who are politically active appear to stimulate political activity in their children.

The developments in the social position of Turkish-Dutch citizens described above show that they are gradually catching up in all socio-economic and socio-cultural areas, but are still lagging behind in comparison to the indigenous population and, to a lesser extent, when compared to Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean citizens. A range of factors have been discussed as possible explanations for persistent disadvantages. A recurring theme in the literature, which was also emphasised during our interviews, concerns social exclusion and discrimination, or perceptions thereof. Such experiences could have a negative impact on the socio-economic position of Turkish-Dutch young people and may also pose an obstacle to the socio-cultural integration of Turkish-Dutch citizens.

Risks of criminality and radicalisation: limited signs

The next question is how Turkish-Dutch citizens compare to indigenous, Surinamese, Antillean and Moroccan citizens in the areas of criminality and radicalisation. The literature review shows that Turkish-Dutch citizens are overrepresented in Dutch crime statistics. In this respect, the position of the second generation is worse than that of the first generation. Still, Turkish-Dutch citizens are registered as suspects less often than Antillean, Moroccan and Surinamese citizens. Moreover, a downward trend can be observed in the number of crimes committed by Turkish-Dutch citizens across the board, including the second generation.

Only tentative estimates can be made with respect to the size and extent of radicalisation among Turkish-Dutch citizens. First of all, it is not at all clear whether the organisations that have caught the attention of the AIVD are actually radical movements. In particular, there are doubts about the radical nature of the *Fethullah Gülen* movement and *Milli Görüş*. Various organisations with roots in Turkish politics and the Turkish diaspora, such as the religiously oriented Kaplan movement, the nationalist Grey Wolves and the left-wing separatist PKK, have all been characterised by the AIVD as radical. There are also a number of multi-ethnic Islamic movements with only some Turkish followers, such as *Hizb ut Tahrir* and jihadist Salafism, which is currently very much in the public eye. A range of organisations are being monitored by the AIVD, but estimates of the number of Turkish and Turkish-Dutch members rarely exceed more than a few dozen people, according to the AIVD's annual reports. There is no other research available to provide us with a reliable assessment of the appeal of radical movements to (Turkish) Dutch citizens.

This study then proceeds to examine the question of the risks of criminality and radicalisation among Turkish-Dutch citizens in the light of the changes in their social position. With respect to criminality, it is reasonable to assume that crime rates are likely to fall, on the basis of a continuing improvement in the socio-economic position of Turkish-Dutch citizens, especially in comparison to the indigenous population. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, increasing heterogeneity in social contacts and decreasing social control could lead to a situation where, as far as crime statistics are concerned, Turkish-Dutch citizens become increasingly more comparable to the indigenous population. It is also possible that the rise in religiosity among Turkish-Dutch young adults will contribute to lower crime rates, given the idea that religion can act as a deterrent for young people to engage in criminality (as indicated by a number of respondents). Developments that could be conducive to criminality among Turkish-Dutch citizens concern experiences of relative deprivation and obstacles faced within the educational system or on the Dutch labour market.

Considering the factors that have been linked to radicalisation, various predictions can be made regarding future risks of radicalisation among Turkish-Dutch young adults. On the one hand, an improvement in their socio-economic position may lead to a reduced risk of radicalisation. On the other hand, relative disadvantages still exist and relative deprivation may lead to radicalisation. From a socio-cultural viewpoint, a decreasing orientation towards Turkey could result in lower participation in specifically Turkish radical movements, but this tells us little about possible participation in multi-ethnic radical movements, which – according to the AIVD – have also made converts among Turkish-Dutch citizens. Simultaneously, experiences of discrimination and the perception of living in (or between) two cultures could also increase the risk of radicalisation.

Given that there is a wide range of factors possibly contributing to the level of criminality and radicalisation among Turkish-Dutch young adults, questions regarding the actual risk of radicalisation are difficult to answer. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, although a range of factors related to radicalisation can be identified from both the literature and the interviews, the nature of the correlations is unclear: it is not possible to establish causal relations on the basis of previous research or the findings of this study. Secondly, previous research has pointed to many factors that could have an effect on radicalisation, but no statements can be made regarding the relative weight of each of these factors or how they affect, reinforce or counteract each other. Thirdly, explanatory studies of criminality point to similar if not the same factors as explanatory studies on radicalisation. Whereas one study may point to a disadvantageous socio-economic position to explain criminality, another study will link this position to explain radicalisation. All in all, it would seem that – judging by previous research – a variety of factors are at play in the emergence of radicalism and that developments in social position are in themselves insufficient to explain why young people in certain situations resort to radicalism.

Conversely, this study has shown that when all the factors linked to criminality and radicalisation are taken into account, Turkish-Dutch young adults should be particularly vulnerable to the 'ingredients' conducive to criminality and radicalisation. This then raises the obvious question as to why relatively few Turkish-Dutch young adults are engaged in criminality in comparison to other traditional migrant groups, and why so very few of them appear to be drawn to extreme forms of radicalism.

Developments and factors inhibiting criminality and radicalisation

In order to answer the question as to why Turkish-Dutch young adults are less often involved in criminality than the other three traditional migrant groups and rarely end up as extreme radicals, we examined a number of factors that emerged from the literature review and the interviews. These concern religious and political movements, the close-knit nature of Turkish communities, the internal emphasis on upward social mobility, democratic convictions and a tendency towards conformism. Some of these factors have been linked to a rise in criminality and radicalisation but, given the social position of Dutch-Turkish citizens, it is also possible to ask whether there is a reverse causal relationship in this case.

Whereas ideology and religion – Islam in particular – are often seen as important motivating factors for radicalisation and are sometimes even used as a justification for criminality, it could also be argued on the basis of the present study that the specific interpretations of ideology and religion in the Turkish communities act as a deterrent against criminality and radicalisation. The development of a secular Islam in modern Turkey in the twentieth century, which was brought to the Netherlands by Turkish guest workers and their descendants, as well as the institutionalisation of Islam through mosque organisations such as the *Diyanet*, enable Turkish-Dutch young adults to be 'good Muslims' without the need for radicalisation. Turkish-Dutch young adults appear to take an increasingly pragmatic and individualistic approach to their faith, and secular Islam enables them to do so. Political organisations play a comparable role to religious organisations. Not only is the Dutch political system designed in such as way that it enables immigrants and their descendants to participate fully in Dutch politics, but Dutch citizens from a Kurdish or Turkish background can also realise their political ideals within the context of self-organisations.

The close-knit nature of the Turkish communities in the Netherlands and the related forms of social control have been put forward to explain their relatively low level of involvement in crime when compared to Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean citizens. However, it could also be true that Turkish-Dutch young adults, as a result of decreasing social control, are starting to resemble indigenous Dutch young adults and are moving towards a similar social position, which would further reduce the number of Turkish-Dutch young adults involved in criminality. With respect to radicalisation, it might be the case that a strong inward-looking focus offers Turkish-Dutch young adults a sense of security within their own group, resulting in less sensitivity to the judgements of the *outgroup*. In the terminology of the Social Identity Theory, this may contribute to a positive self-image and a sense of *belonging* that can mitigate feelings of social exclusion, being treated disrespectfully, and the perception of discrimination. This sense of security could also make Turkish-Dutch young adults less susceptible to radicalisation, partly because they can find ample answers to questions of an existential nature in their own community and its institutions.

Thirdly, criminality and radicalisation may be counteracted by the largely positive perception that Turkish-Dutch young adults have of their own social position and the opportunities they see for the upward social mobility that they attach so much importance to, partly because of their upbringing. This emphasis on social mobility combined with experiences of relative success are likely to dissuade young people who have been trying – sometimes for years – to succeed in Dutch society, from behaviour and attitudes that are incompatible with their ambitions, i.e. criminality and radicalisation. After all, criminal behaviour and radicalism will not only lead to negative responses from the immediate social environment, but could also pose an obstacle to future upward mobility. This situation is likely to be different, however, if their parents are engaged in criminal behaviour or subscribe to a radical ideology.

Even the respondents who expressed an affinity with organisations that have been characterised in the past as radical are not necessarily on a path to radicalisation, extreme or otherwise. This is particularly evident in the case of the politically active Kurdish young adults who had all considered joining the PKK's struggle in Turkey at one time or another. Although a number of them confessed a lack of courage, a more compelling reason to refrain from participating in the conflict was inspired by their preference for democratic solutions and a determination to contribute from a distance (the Netherlands) by participating in demonstrations, getting a decent education, donating money and/or attending Kurdish festivals to draw attention to the importance of an independent Kurdistan. For some of our respondents, their involvement in organisations branded as radical or terrorist, such as the PKK, had more of a social function: it was a mark of identity rather than a deed that could be interpreted as an act of radicalism or extremism. Furthermore, given their experiences, these young people were never activist enough to engage in radicalism. Another, more nuanced way of looking at possible radicalisation is that opinions on political issues such as Palestine are not necessarily religious in nature, but may also stem from human rights ideals. Finally, it would appear that the Turkish communities themselves are not set apart by conflicts of a radical nature. There are obvious differences of opinion between the various Turkish religious groups, but these differences are not likely to develop into serious tensions.

A concluding observation, which puts an overemphasis on developments in social position in relation to the risk of criminality and radicalisation into perspective, concerns the aims and ambitions of Turkish-Dutch citizens and the means they use. The young adults can be characterised in the terminology of Merton's *strain theory* as conformists, who identify above all with broadly shared objectives and institutionalised means. They are conformists rather than innovators (through criminality) or rebels (through radicalisation), who reject the goals set by society and/or its institutionalised means and replace them by other goals and/or means. In our conversations with Turkish-Dutch youngsters about their ambitions and where they saw themselves in ten years, we did not encounter many high-flown – let alone extreme – ideas or ideals but, rather, broadly shared and generally laudable goals such as a decent level of education, a responsible and well-paid job, a partner and/or children. The ambitions of Turkish-Dutch young adults appear to be quite similar to those of their indigenous counterparts, with the proviso that a sizable number of Turkish-Dutch young adults also want to be good Muslims. They combine these different efforts in a pragmatic fashion by aligning their religious ideals with more mundane goals such as success in society. Viewed from this perspective, Turkish-Dutch young adults probably resemble their Dutch counterparts more than they or, for that matter, Dutch society seem to realise.