A comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating right-wing extremism

Our democracy must be able to defend itself against threats from within and without. It must clearly identify and fight the enemies of the open society. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community therefore uses every means allowed by the rule of law to oppose all forms of potentially violent elements opposed to our Constitution.

Right-wing extremism is the greatest extremist threat to our democracy. The murders committed by the right-wing extremist group National Socialist Underground (NSU); the assassination of Walter Lübcke, regional commissioner for the state of Hesse; and the attacks in Halle and Hanau revealed a new dimension of extremist threat. This violence did not come out of nowhere – it grew from the fertile soil of contempt for human life which incites violent extremists to take brutal action.

We want to send a clear signal that our democracy is not passive; it is vigilant and it defends itself.

We need a comprehensive strategy for preventing and combating right-wing extremism. The government must not wait until right-wing extremist views lead to violent crimes. It must make every effort to prevent violence before it occurs by addressing all segments of society, promoting democratic processes of negotiation, educating and raising awareness of threats, and supporting those who work on behalf of our democracy or face threats themselves. It also requires us to keep right-wing extremist organisations from spreading hate, incitement and anti-constitutional ideas on the internet and in our society. Whenever we discover that such activities are coordinated by a certain group, we will not hesitate to ban that group.

The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community has drawn up this action plan to set important priorities for the fight against right-wing extremism during the new legislative term, and it will implement a package of punitive and preventive measures that will take effect in the short term. This action plan is a first step in the fight against right-wing extremism. The Federal Government will take decisive action in this fight – by implementing and further refining the measures developed by the Cabinet Committee for the fight against racism and right-wing extremism, and
by developing an overall interministerial strategy for the Federal Government to combat extremism and strengthen our pluralist democracy. This is also intended to send a clear message: our democracy is able to defend itself.

1. **Dismantling right-wing extremist networks**

We want to dismantle right-wing extremist networks. To achieve this, we want to identify such networks more rapidly and reliably, understand their structures and fight them effectively. We will investigate and put a stop to the financial activities of right-wing extremist networks. Without financial resources, right-wing extremist networks cannot spread their propaganda or carry out activities to radicalise and recruit people. Cutting off their sources of funding can help to weaken right-wing extremism considerably and prevent acts of terrorism. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) will therefore significantly increase its efforts to detect and analyse the financial activities of right-wing extremists. The aim is to identify and crack down on key networks, actors and business areas. For example, concerts, festivals, music recordings, combat sport events and e-commerce/shops for clothing and merchandise generate significant revenues. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution will investigate the financing structures on a case-by-case basis, successively develop an overview of the business areas in which right-wing extremists are commonly active and analyse their importance so as to be able to take rigorous action against right-wing extremist financing networks.

2. **Resolutely disarming right-wing extremists**

Weapons in the hands of right-wing extremists are a threat. The figures show that we must act: around 1,500 individuals classified by intelligence services as suspected right-wing extremists have at least one weapons permit. This is something we want to change. We will therefore develop more effective procedures for revoking and denying weapons permits. For example, we will create a forum for sharing information among the domestic intelligence agencies, police and weapons authorities that will also involve the administrative courts as appropriate.

In addition, we aim to effectively prevent extremists and individuals with mental illness from owning weapons by ensuring that the weapons authorities can access relevant information of other authorities when checking the reliability and personal suitability of applicants or permit holders.
3. A comprehensive approach to combating incitement on the internet

Experience with the Telegram messaging service has shown that the government must not rely on the providers of such services alone to respond to punishable content as required by law. We must make it even clearer that our law is also consistently enforced on the internet and that the police are also active online. However, our authorities must be well-equipped to be able to do this. We will continue to expand the required structures to increase criminal prosecution of punishable content and to make it easier to ask social media providers to delete it. The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) will therefore take a comprehensive approach to responding to the developments in the field of punishable (right-wing) extremist content on the internet. Building on our Telegram task force, this includes targeted observation of social networks to recognise emerging developments at an early stage. In addition, the Federal Criminal Police Office will expand and restructure its central reporting office for various partners (e.g. non-governmental organisations) which was created under Germany’s Network Enforcement Act (Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz, NetzDG) and will actively assist the federal states. This will help us to increase and intensify criminal prosecution in cooperation with the federal states.

We are also committed to combating hate speech and incitement on the internet rigorously and comprehensively at European level. A suitable legal basis like our Network Enforcement Act is therefore needed at EU level as well. Going forward, service providers in the EU will be required to report illegal content to the law enforcement authorities based on the Digital Services Act (DSA). Germany supports specific and binding obligations for service providers in the EU. We would like to see a European reporting obligation based on our current national standards.

4. Removing enemies of the Constitution from the public service

There is no place for individuals with anti-constitutional views in the public service. Those who reject the state cannot serve it. Even if there have been very few such cases in relation to the total number of public service staff, every case is one too many.

Germany’s civil service and disciplinary law provides effective mechanisms to deal with extremist activities. We will expand these instruments to remove individuals with anti-constitutional views more quickly from the public service than before.
And we will amend the Federal Disciplinary Act (*Bundesdisziplinargesetz*, BDG) to speed up disciplinary proceedings. We will assist investigators with best-practice recommendations to ensure that breaches of official duty related to anti-constitutional views are prosecuted consistently and thoroughly.

The German domestic intelligence services will further intensify the fight against right-wing extremism in the public service. The coordination office of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution will provide comprehensive advice and information to affected federal authorities. The second situation report on right-wing extremists and the “Reichsbürger” and “Selbstverwalter” movements in the security authorities is scheduled for publication in March 2022 (update: the second situation report on right-wing extremists, “Reichsbürger” and “Selbstverwalter” was presented on 13 May 2022). We will gradually expand the situation report to encompass the entire public service.

5. **Challenging conspiracy theories to prevent radicalisation**

Conspiracy theories based on anti-democratic populism can sow the seeds of right-wing extremism. We want to counter this risk by offering targeted information and advice, paying special attention to conspiracy theories which are explicitly opposed to our free and democratic constitutional system.

The Federal Government will work with civil-society organisations to create a central advisory service for people who witness or suspect radicalisation among people they know based on their growing acceptance of conspiracy theories. The service is intended to be a central point of contact for people in the social environment of the persons affected (relatives, teachers, sport clubs, friends, etc.) and to offer advice for dealing with the persons affected, so that, ideally, they will turn away from radical ideologies.

The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution will also expand its exit programme to address conspiracy theories. The aim of the programme is to help individuals who wish to distance themselves from conspiracists such as those who deny that the coronavirus exists. The programme offers advice and information from an initial contact person and counselling from qualified staff, in particular to help them to make the move away from extremist views and become reintegrated into society.
In addition, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community will commission a research project investigating radicalisation processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. This will serve as the basis for creating a strategy for additional prevention measures.

6. Preventing extremism to promote a democratic culture of debate

Preventing extremism starts with an open, fair and respectful culture of debate. However, public debates are increasingly marred by polarisation, division and targeted disinformation. In order to effectively counter this trend, we must strengthen local discussion formats for civic education that enhance citizens’ openness to dialogue and ability to deal with conflict.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (BpB) will therefore expand its successful programme "Miteinander Reden" (Talk to each other). This is intended to open up new spaces for discussion, bring together controversial opinions and address radicalisation and extremist tendencies in the expression of political views. The lessons learned will be evaluated and made available nationwide. They will enable a conscious analysis of personal positions and values, thus preventing polarisation, conspiracy narratives, extremist movements and incitement.

7. Strengthening civic education to combat right-wing extremism

Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic provide a breeding ground for conspiracy narratives offering simple explanations and scapegoats. Social media users often share conspiracy narratives without questioning whether they are true; right-wing extremist movements include them in their inhumane agenda. Action is needed to counter these trends.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education already funds more than 100 recognised civic education providers all over Germany. Civic education projects are also increasingly needed to tackle the social crises of our time. That is why we want to provide more support to civil-society actors, so that we can work together to identify and combat conspiracy narratives both on- and offline. In addition, with a new funding priority on civic education to address right-wing extremism and conspiracy theories, we are funding targeted support and training for civic education providers. Their educational and advisory services make an essential contribution to informing, sensitising and training multipliers in schools across Germany as well as in institutions providing youth or adult education.
8. **Improving media literacy in dealing with disinformation, conspiracy theories and radicalisation**

The digital transformation has profoundly changed public communication. Social media stimulate social interaction and networking, but they also help to spread disinformation and conspiracy narratives. The influence of social media depends on the sense of responsibility and media literacy of their users. It is not only the protests against anti-COVID restrictions that have revealed the enormous potential for radicalisation and mobilisation that even smaller social media platforms have. Civic education must develop new ways to respond to this shift of (spaces for) debate from public to semi-public and private digital communication formats. The funding programme “Demokratie im Netz” (Democracy online) launched by the Federal Agency for Civic Education is creating new and more targeted civic education offerings to address the ways in which these platforms present themselves and stimulate communication. The aim is to explicitly address users and help them, as informed internet citizens, critically analyse social media content and actively oppose hate speech, incitement and disinformation.

9. **Protecting government officials**

Elected representatives and government officials increasingly face hostility and attacks. This has become particularly visible throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In recent years, the number of recorded politically motivated crimes against local politicians has more than tripled. The growing hate, threats and crimes directed at mayors has shown that these are no longer isolated incidents but rather a problem affecting government authorities across all regions, towns and cities in Germany. These attacks have the potential to permanently disrupt social cohesion and are a threat to our democracy.

The current situation has shown that we must act now to improve the protection of elected representatives and government officials. This requires measures tailored to the needs of local policy-makers. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community will therefore launch an alliance to protect local officials, which will include not only the federal states, but also national associations of local authorities, those active in local politics, the responsible authorities and civil-society organisations.
This alliance will develop concrete proposals within one year to improve the protection of local government officials. We will work with the federal states and local authorities to implement these proposals.

10. Helping the victims of right-wing extremism

The number of right-wing extremist crimes is still at a high level. Behind each of these crimes are individuals and their families who have become victims. The aim of this action plan is to increase the protection of citizens against right-wing extremism. Whenever citizens are affected by right-wing extremism, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community will work to ensure that the government addresses their concerns with sensitivity and good will.

Specifically, we are helping the federal states to pay even more attention to the needs of those affected and their families during police operations. The Federal Criminal Police Office and the federal states are working together to enhance their strategic cooperation and to establish a network for supporting the victims of right-wing extremism. At the same time, together with the federal states, we are strengthening police training, improving the teaching of intercultural skills and providing training to ensure that the families of those affected by right-wing extremism are treated with greater sensitivity and transparency in their initial contacts with the police.