



Press Release

New research network puts conspiracy theories under the microscope

Tübingen professor coordinates European initiative “Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theory”

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The Ukraine crisis, the first moon landing, the terrorist attack on the French satire magazine Charlie Hebdo - all have one thing in common: they are surrounded by all manner of speculation and rumors. The University of Tübingen's Professor Michael Butter is now coordinating a new research network, Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theory, which aims to discover the origins and mechanisms of conspiracy theories in the European sphere.

Some of this kind of speculation is harmless, even amusing; but some of it can be dangerous. “Conspiracy theories can lead to the radicalization of extremists, inflame tensions between nations, and undermine trust in democratic institutions,” says Butter. And in the internet age, such theories can spread within minutes.

Some 60 researchers from the humanities, political science, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and psychology in more than 30 countries are to take part in the Comparative Analysis of Conspiracy Theory network over the next four years. It is sponsored by the EU platform Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), which promotes international research.

Research on conspiracy theories has largely been conducted on single theories in individual countries; the network aims to analyze it systematically. The researchers hope to answer a number of unanswered questions: Do certain aspects of conspiracy theories come up regardless of the time or cultural context? Who produces and proliferates conspiracy theories? What psychological and cultural factors provide a breeding ground for such theories? What are the consequences for policymakers? And not least - What is the best way to deal with them? To this end, the researchers will work with those who are the target of conspiracy

theories, or who have to deal with them - such as politicians, journalists, as well as climate researchers and other scientists.

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