



Press Release

University of Tübingen establishes research center examining extremism on the right

Researchers to analyze the attitudes, lives and communication of extremists - Close cooperation with Documentation Center for Right-Wing Extremism and other partners

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The University of Tübingen is to set up a research center to investigate right-wing extremism. The project is sponsored by the state of Baden-Württemberg. "Our goal is to use research to help strengthen social and governmental structures against right-wing extremist ideologies and practices," said the Dean of Economics and Social Sciences, Professor Ansgar Thiel, in Tübingen on Tuesday. "With this we seek to explore both the emergence and spread of far-right attitudes and practices, and in each case to identify the current potential threats to an open society," he said.

The research center will comprise three professorships funded by the state of Baden-Württemberg, including Germany's first professorship in the field of political science for research into right-wing extremism. In addition, the University is funding an assistant professorship for research into anti-Semitism and group-based hostility. There are also further academic and support-staff positions. The state is sponsoring the research center with a total of 1.2 million euros annually. In addition, the new institution will raise third-party funds for individual research projects.

The research center will work closely with the Karlsruhe Documentation Center on Right-Wing Extremism, which the Baden-Württemberg state government decided to establish in 2020. Other cooperation partners include Esslingen University of Applied Sciences, the universities of administration in Kehl and Ludwigsburg, the Baden-Württemberg police academy, the Gäu-Neckar-Alb memorial association, and the state working group for open youth education. Establishment of the research center is to begin this year.

One focus of the research will be the analysis of right-wing extremist communication on a wide variety of digital platforms and in social media. Among other things, the research will examine how right-wing extremist

discourses, media and strategies damage the culture of democratic debate. "Social media play a central role in the spread of right-wing extremist ideas and communication between right-wing extremist actors," says Tanja Thomas, Professor of Transformations of Media Culture at the University of Tübingen.

The professors to be appointed to the research unit will deal with right-wing extremism from the perspectives of political science, media studies and education, as Thiel explains, "The idea is to take into account all aspects of research into right-wing extremism, from ideology and the everyday life of right-wing extremist milieus to the concrete activities of individual actors." In doing so, the researchers will use a wide range of methods to obtain as comprehensive a picture as possible, he says. The research center will examine the right-wing scene in Baden-Württemberg as well as nationwide and, in some cases, its international interconnections, Thiel adds.

Thiel's predecessor as Dean, the political scientist Professor Josef Schmid, said the research center could build on several academic projects at the University of Tübingen, including the Democracy Monitor Baden-Württemberg, the collaborative research center "Threatened Orders" and a doctoral program on right-wing extremism. Tübingen's informatics department, with its focus on artificial intelligence, will support research activities, as will the Methods Center. The University's Centers for Knowledge Communication and Media Competence are further partners in research and the transfer of research results to civil society.

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