

## Short Note: Right-wing Extremism

### What is the Short Note about?

This Short Note informs about Rightwing Extremism and its various forms and manifestations. Moreover it offers some recommendations for prevention/intervention as well some links leading to counselling and further readings.

- What is Right-wing Extremism? Radical groups and parties and major ideology
- Right-wing attitudes and behavior. Ideological facets and action including music/fashion and violence
- New Developments: the New Right and the Identitarian Movement, violent Accelerationism and right-wing Terrorism, the role of the Internet and Social Media
- How widespread is Right-wing Extremism? Far-right parties, radical organizations and right-wing ideology among the population in Europe
- What to do against Right-wing Extremism? Five-Steps of Civil Courage and the protection of victims.
- Links to Counselling, further readings and websites

### What is Right-wing Extremism?

*Right-wing extremism* comprises attitudes and behavior that are directed against central elements of a liberal democracy: human dignity, free and fair elections and respect for the rule of law. This makes right-wing extremism the antithesis of democracy. The phenomenon of right-wing extremism includes *extreme right-wing parties and organizations, groups* with or without formal membership connected in loose networks, often via the Internet. It also includes *right-wing extremist attitudes in the general population*, which are taken up by extreme right-wing parties and currents and from which parties of the extreme right are elected or right-wing extremism is tolerated or even subliminally advocated.

In right-wing ideology, the national community is defined as ethnic and exclusionary, i.e. "*völkisch*": Only those who belong to their supposedly own "race" belong to the people. Right-wing extremists believe that their people, their nation and their "race" are superior to others, and they are prepared to enforce this view also by using violence. The transitions

between right-wing extremism and *right-wing populism* are fluid. Both share a similar or even the same ideology, right-wing extremists use right-wing populist rhetoric, organizations and actors are often in close contact and exchange ideas. While right-wing extremists want to overthrow the democratic system and create a dictatorship, the relationship between right-wing populism and democracy is not so clear-cut.

### Right-wing attitudes and behavior

The extreme right-wing ideology is manifested at the *level of attitudes* in the advocacy of a right-wing dictatorship, the trivialization of National Socialism, nationalism, racist and anti-immigrant attitudes, anti-Semitism and Social Darwinism (i.e. the idea that some peoples are inherently superior to others). On the *level of behaviors*, right-wing extremism manifests itself in the choice of far-right parties, activity in far-right organizations and/or groups, right-wing extremist propaganda (e.g. the denial of the Holocaust and celebrating the national-socialist past in Germany) and violence or support for violence to enforce these ideas (e.g. against desecration of Jewish graveyards, hate crime against members of vulnerable societal groups e.g. against refugees or homeless persons). Functionaries and cadres of right-wing extremist parties/organizations are usually ideologically more moderate, and do not necessarily participate in violent acts themselves. Activists take on the task of building up the right-wing scene and publicity campaigns. For thugs and followers of right-wing extremist groups, the focus is often on group experiences and violent actions, underpinned by ideology; some are also involved in other crimes, e.g. drugs. Thus *young people* also join right-wing extremist groups because they are offered leisure activities, are looking for thrills, find social contacts and a feeling of belonging and can exercise power over others. They are almost always nationalistic, xenophobic, anti-Semitic in their attitudes, but do not necessarily share a closed extreme right-wing world view. *Right-wing extremist music/concert events and fashion* play an important role in entering the extreme right-wing scene. For leaving the right-wing scene, both work on right-wing extremist ideology, the offer and development of an alternative lifestyle beyond the scene and the solution of personal problems are important.

### The New Right



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The classic hard right-wing extremism was often easily recognizable by the appearance of its members; neo-Nazis wore bald heads, combat boots and swastika tattoos. In the meantime, right-wing extremism often appears in the form of the so-called "*New Right*". The New Right represents a similarly ethnic ideology, but in a modernized form transported via terms and concepts of "ethnopluralism" and ethnic "identity". In the USA the Alt-Right movement (Alternative Right) is one of them. The best known movement in Europe is the "*Identitarian Movement*" (ID), which uses the Greek Lambda ( $\lambda$ ) as a symbol for resistance. The ID explicitly follows the strategy of mimicry by hiding and trivializing its ideological message. They spread the *conspiracy myth* of a supposed "population exchange", run by a liberal, cosmopolitan elite; often anti-Semitism resonates with this. They call for "resistance" against these alleged developments.

### Right-wing Terrorism and "Acceletarism"

Organizations of old and new right-wing extremism are increasingly coming together, united under the slogan "*White Supremacy*". Described under the slogan "*Acceletarism*" (acceleration), a new form of action is currently spreading, whose followers of the previous right-wing extremism/populism appear too lax and slow. They hope on assassinations and chaos to overthrow democracy and establish a fascist system. Some of the assassins of the recent right-wing terrorist attacks feel connected to this ideology and imagine themselves as part of an elite community. Some appear as "lone wolves" (such as Anders Breivik, who killed young people participating in a summer camp organized by the social democratic party on the Island Utøya, in Norway in 2011), others in small cells dedicated to "leaderless resistance". However, right-wing terrorism is not a new phenomenon (among others, there was a right-wing terrorist attack on the Munich Oktoberfest in 1980 in Germany which resulted in many dead and injured people and the assassination in Oklahoma City in 1995).

### The Role of the Internet and Social Media

The spread of right-wing extremism is facilitated and accelerated by the *internet and social media*. Thus, the net is full of conspiracy myths, partly spread deliberately by right-wing extremist trolls, partly passed on naively and willingly carried on by users, partly flushed upwards by algorithms that advance emotionally exciting and stereotypical contents. In this

way they may even reach inexperienced users. The right-wing extremist scene is in close exchange via the net, locally, nationally and internationally. In this way, participants can be quickly recruited for demonstrations. Assassins spread their message on the internet in a targeted manner to gain fame.

### Far-right parties and radical organizations

Parties of the far right may be found in almost all European countries. Although often they are more or less clearly extreme right-wing or right-wing populist sometimes they even change their image. For example, the French Rassemblement National (the former Front National) of Marine Le Pen and the Italian Lega presents itself more moderate recently, while the German AfD has radicalized itself. Parties of the far right differ in their character by being either national conservative, Eurosceptic or right-wing extremist. In the last elections to the *European Parliament*, parties of the extreme right were more successful, receiving a quarter of the votes. Success of far right parties range from e.g. 34 percent for the Lega in Italy, 12 percent for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) to 6 percent for Jobbik in Hungary plus another 52 percent for the right-wing populist party Fidesz. The AfD is partly classified as extreme right-wing and is monitored by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), on the other hand, has lost votes. Across Europe, far-right parties are more successful in rural than in urban areas.

There are also openly violent extreme right-wing organizations in almost all EU countries. One of the best known is "Blood and Honour" with its respective offshoots, including Combat 18 (in right-wing extremism, 18 stands for the initial letters of Adolf Hitler in the alphabet). Right-wing extremist organizations are very well networked across Europe and meet, for example, at concerts of right-wing extremist groups.

### Hate Crime

There are also right-wing extremist demonstrations and acts of hatred against marked minorities in all EU countries. *Hate crimes* are xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-gypsy, homophobic, or violent acts directed against homeless people. In every EU country, there have already been deaths due to their assigned group membership. In Germany, these include the ten murders of the self-styled National Socialist



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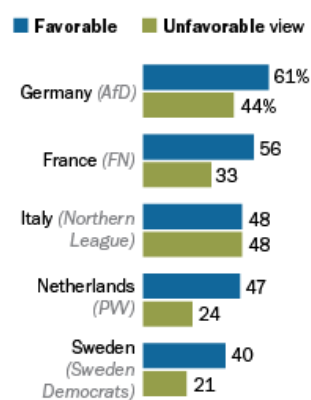
Underground (NSU) known to date and the murder of Walter Lübcke, the district president in the city of Kassel, Germany, in the summer of 2019.

### Right-wing ideology among the EU population

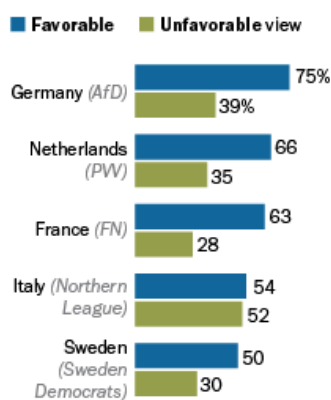
Fragments of right-wing extremist ideologies can also be found in the general population. Supporters of right-wing parties are not only less satisfied with politics in their country, but also more nationalistic and ethnocentric compared to voters who do not favor these parties (see graph).

#### Supporters of populist parties are more likely to believe that their culture is superior and that Islam is incompatible with their values

*% saying they agree that their people are not perfect but their culture is superior to others*



*% saying Islam is fundamentally incompatible with their culture and values*



Source: Survey conducted April-August 2017 in 15 countries.

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Right-wing extremist attitudes in the population have not increased overall in recent years. However, in some countries such as Germany a clear polarization is becoming apparent: the majority positions itself democratically, while a not very small, loud and violence-prone minority clearly shares extreme right-wing ideologies and is prepared to vote for parties of the far right.

Right-wing extremism is not only a youth problem. However, young people more easily adopt attitudes and behavior from the society in which they grow up. Voters and members of far-right parties and groups are predominantly male, far-right attitudes are shared less by women. With the exception of a few front-line women, women in far-right organizations mainly take on work in the background (e.g. organizing events, registering demonstrations). Women thus help right-

wing extremist organizations to achieve a more harmless image and camouflage.

### What to do against Right-wing Extremism?

Based on a common Five-Step-Model of Civil Courage Prevention and Intervention against right-wing Extremism need to include the following; most important is the protection of victims.

1. *Recognize right-wing extremism:* Knowledge and attention to extreme right-wing codes and music; sensitivity to new right-wing ideology.
2. *Taking right-wing extremism seriously:* Right-wing extremist positions are beyond the democratic playing field and are therefore not a case for an "exchange of opinions" in social discourse; not offering new right-wing actors a forum and clearly explaining this with democratic values of their own institution; "neutrality" in educational institutions does not mean freedom from values; not trivializing or suppressing ideological statements and crimes.
3. *Taking responsibility:* Offer or mediate protection for direct victims of right-wing extremism; make right-wing extremism a topic of discussion in (possibly one's own institutions, communities); plan and implement public actions to take a stand for the silent bystanders; involve other responsible persons; do not take part in spreading Regulars' table slogan or rumors about "the strangers" or similar, make distance clear, address the person directly who spreads rumors (in this case facts can help as an exception).
4. *Know strategies for action:* Acting smart about the phenomenon and about intervention/prevention (e.g. on the CHAMPIONS online platform); contacting NGOs in the field of democracy education for advice; looking at tips for arguing against right-wing extremism.
5. *Action:* Networking with local actors (police, municipal actors, social work, schools, NGOs in the field of democracy education); "Talking to the right" is useless, but for the people around you it is important to counter hate comments and take a stand, make right-wing extremist activities transparent and explain them (e.g. for other students); conducting training courses (e.g. on hate on the net); informing local media about right-wing extremism



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without making its actors into "heroes" by paying too much attention to them; applying domestic, regulatory and criminal law (e.g. do not allow demonstrations to take place in central places; prevent the renting of rooms for right-wing extremist events by means of informative talks with landlords; report right-wing extremist graffiti to the municipality or the police, submit complaints about hate comments on the Internet (e.g. on Facebook) or against advertisements of right-wing extremist parties in advertising leaflets at the ad acceptance office; taking part in public democracy festivals to show presence and not to leave public space to Nazis (e.g. also with posters against xenophobia in football stadiums); supporting NGOs/counselling centres for democracy with donations.

6. *Protect victims, do not endanger yourself:* Neither look away nor play the hero - if you witness right-wing extremist attacks you will not act alone, but seek support and become active together, call the police, take attacked victims out of focus; also in case of complaints and actions in the local area/neighborhood, act together with others in order not to be recognizable as an individual; do not use your own full name in case of objections on the internet.

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