

***Dresden Declaration of the 23rd German Congress on
Crime Prevention***

**German Congress on Crime Prevention and Congress
Partners**

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German Congress on Crime Prevention and Congress Partners

Dresden Declaration of the 23rd German Congress on Crime Prevention

Since the 12th German Congress on Crime Prevention in 2007 in Wiesbaden, the Congress on Crime Prevention and its event partners have published a Declaration on the occasion of each congress. It contains statements on the main consequences resulting from the annual focus topic as well as other advisory issues in relation to current developments and trends in prevention work. The declarations are primarily addressed to those who are politically responsible for (crime) prevention in local authorities, the federal states, the federal government and in Europe, as well as to academics and practitioners. The Dresden Declaration of the 23rd German Congress on Crime Prevention also follows this tradition.

“No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin or his background or his religion...” Former U.S. President Barack Obama addressed the American public via Twitter with this quote from former South African president and anti-apartheid campaigner Nelson Mandela to send a signal after the racist riots in Charlottesville (on 11-12 August 2017 in the U.S. state of Virginia). He thereby set a Twitter record with over three million “Likes”. For the German Congress on Crime Prevention, this leads to the following central question: How and why does someone become a racist, an extremist or a terrorist? And building on this, how can such developments be countered preventively?

The 23rd German Congress on Crime Prevention is dedicated to precisely these pressing questions under the theme “Violence and Radicalism: Current Challenges for Prevention”. Before the congress, Prof. Dr. Dirk Baier (Zurich University of Applied Sciences) prepared his expert report on “Violence and Radicalism – The State of Research and Perspectives on Prevention”. On the occasion of the 23rd German Congress on Crime Prevention and on the basis of this report, the following Dresden Declaration was drawn up. It is supported by

the German Congress on Crime Prevention and its close event partners, namely the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the DBH – Fachverband für Soziale Arbeit, Strafrecht und Kriminalpolitik, the Free State of Saxony, the State Capital Dresden, the State Prevention Council of Saxony, the Police Crime Prevention Programme of the Länder and the Federal Government (ProPK), the Foundation German Forum for Crime Prevention (DFK) and WEISSER RING e.V.

Physical violence and political extremism, which use violence to overcome the democratic order, are different phenomena. Both are of high relevance and topicality for (criminal) prevention and prevention policy. The various statistics on these issues provide good news: physical violence has decreased significantly over the past ten years, especially among young people. The causes of this positive trend have not yet been sufficiently investigated. However, the assessment that 25 years of targeted violence prevention have not failed to have an effect is supported by a wide range of experiences. The intensive continuation of prevention work is urgently needed, however, given that in Germany, for example, more than 140,000 people are still victims of serious bodily harm every year.

Extremism, which is characterised by the advocacy of violence or the use of violence for ideological reasons, must be differentiated from “classical forms” of youth violence. While these have been significantly reduced, in the field of political extremism the activities of right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism and Islamist extremism are on the increase – in some cases combined with drastic acts of violence and numerous victims. Survey studies cannot confirm an increasing prevalence of manifest extremist attitudes. However, they nevertheless make clear that generally negative or pre-judicial attitudes are fairly broadly accepted among the general population. Scientific studies should be carried out for further clarification.

An important guiding principle of prevention work is that effective prevention should address the causes of a phenomenon. However, at present, this guiding principle cannot be adequately implemented in view of political extremism. Although there are already numerous findings on the various causes of radicalisation, there is still a distinct lack of longitudinal studies tracing the causes. Too little is known about the processes and conditions of the long-term processes of rapprochement, entry, retention and exit into and from political and ideological extremism. Such studies will be of enormous importance in the future in order to further focus prevention work.

The various qualitative and quantitative studies that have been carried out so far allow at least a preliminary assessment of the background factors of radicalisation. These studies show that radicalisation is a complex process that can be influenced by different factors in various ways. Radicalism encompasses a wide range of attitudes and behaviours at an individual level. In addition to different biographical constellations, social conditions of radicalisation also play an important role, such as social marginalisation, membership of radical groups and networks, some of which operate internationally, as well as the influence of the media. The influencing factors range from the parental home, peer groups, schools and the media to regional/local contexts and social conditions. To some extent, violence and extremism have the same factors of origin, but there are also certain backgrounds that can be associated specifically with radicalism. Prevention approaches should therefore take into account various general as well as specific influencing factors. Due to the complexity of the causes and processes of radicalisation, a wide range of preventive measures is required.

Radicalisation is a complex process that is highly individual. Social deprivation is a significant factor that can favour radicalisation tendencies. It is accompanied by lower levels of education and participation and experiences of exclusion. In particular, groups of people who can hardly make themselves heard politically tend to be more susceptible to extremist ideologies. In the prevention of violence and radicalisation, greater efforts must therefore be made to reach and support members of socially disadvantaged groups.

In addition, social integration and participation on the one hand and raising democratic awareness on the other must be the central objectives of violence and crime prevention. Modern societies are characterised by pluralism in values, interests and attitudes, and by globalisation. This is associated with feelings of alienation and isolation, but also with global networking and communication. The resulting dynamics create social tensions. Among other things, these tensions manifest themselves in the emphasis on differences between people and groups and on mutual revaluations and devaluations or exclusions. Social debates that emphasise differences and demarcations should find a counterweight in a perspective that strengthens a reflective approach to cultural and social differences and is not dependent on the devaluation of others.

Discourses of exclusion and devaluation promote extremism – this should be taken into account in everyday life, in public, media and political discussions and in political action. Confidence in the basic democratic order and thus also distance from extremisms can only be conveyed if participation is made possible and exclusion and discrimination are credibly minimised. Previous German Congresses on Crime Prevention have repeatedly pointed out the limits of repressive measures in particular and warned against measures that are planned and adopted urgently and in isolation due to the fear of violence and extremism.

Like any form of prevention, the prevention of extremism must also be anchored at all levels, at international and national level as well as at the level of the federal states and local authorities. The municipal focus of preventive work was already clearly emphasised in the Munich Declaration (2012). Prevention activities are geared to local conditions. Prevention eliminates fears and anxieties, thrives on communication and presents alternatives and other perspectives. Local prevention councils, partnerships for democracy and corresponding structures must be supported professionally and integrated into municipal and social strategies. Sustainable prevention services need a functioning community. For prevention practice, these include the regulatory structures of child and youth work and the education system. In particular, the importance of schools should be emphasised, i.e. in their function as places which can foster experiences of belonging, recognition and democracy and where children and young people with problems can be reached comparatively directly. In child and youth work, youth social work, political youth education and first and foremost in schools, social diversity and democratic values should be taught and promoted through constructive encounters.

In addition, prevention work relies on appropriately qualified personnel. The supraregional networking of local prevention actors and the further development of supraregional infrastructures to develop and implement tried and tested standards and qualification programmes will make it easier to assess the impact of prevention.

Sustainable prevention work must continue to ensure that violence and radicalisation tendencies are comprehensively taken into account. This includes in particular the consideration of interactions between different extremist groups. The previous emphasis on the prevention of right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism could be reduced by paying sufficient attention to left-wing extremism as well as new

forms of extremism and movements grounded in conspiracy theories which often combine elements of both right- and left-wing extremism. In addition, emphasis should be placed on expanding deradicalisation and activities and distancing approaches, for which experience has so far been gained mainly with right-wing extremism and increasingly also with Islamism.

In order to further develop prevention work and to react to new social developments, a joint effort by all relevant actors in prevention work is necessary. This includes cooperation between the federal and state governments, the work of local authorities, but also those engaged in scientific research, civil society and prevention practice. In the future, increased efforts will also be needed to generate knowledge and experience about proven prevention approaches and measures. In Germany, as in some other European countries, a large number of people and organisations are already active in the field of violence and extremism prevention. This high level of commitment, which is often carried out on a voluntary basis, must be appreciated, supported politically and, if possible, scientifically. The same applies to the approaches included in the ongoing development process with the aim of preventing young people in particular from radicalising themselves. Prevention needs this innovative dynamic. In the future, therefore, the scientific evaluation of prevention measures and programmes must continue to be a priority. They are not about “controlling” prevention actors, but rather about enabling all participants to learn together.

It is also necessary to continue the strategic framing of all activities in the field of extremism prevention through national action plans. The interdepartmental “Strategy of the Federal Government for the Prevention of Extremism and the Promotion of Democracy“ adopted in July 2016 laid the foundation for the sustainable expansion of prevention measures in Germany. This must be further developed and expanded taking into account current developments and challenges.

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