



# Connect

Strengthening cooperation between  
police and civil society against right-wing extremism

## **New Alliances?**

## **Conspiracy Beliefs and Right-Wing Extremism**

Conference on 21 and 22 November 2022

Venue: Parkhotel Stuttgart Messe-Airport

## **Preliminary programme and practical information**

German Police University  
Chair of Criminology and Interdisciplinary Crime Prevention  
Prof. Thomas Görgen  
[connect@dhpol.de](mailto:connect@dhpol.de)

**Monday, 21 November 2022**

**From 10:00 am Arrival, Registration and Opening Survey**

**11:00 am Welcome and Opening**

**Introduction to the Connect Project**

Richard Reinfeld | *Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community*

Prof. Thomas Görgen | *German Police University*

Prof. Andreas Beelmann | *Friedrich Schiller University Jena*

Prof. Dominic Kudlacek | *Bremerhaven University of Applied Science*

**11:30 am Keynote: “Antidemocratic Certainties in Times of Uncertainty: Empirical Observations on the Link between New Right Sentiments and Conspiracy Beliefs in the Centre of Society”**

Prof. Andreas Zick | *Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence at Bielefeld University*

**12:30 pm Lunch (at Hotel Restaurant)**

**01:30 pm Workshop Session I: Conspiracy Beliefs and Their Links to Right-Wing Extremism**

Prof. Roland Imhoff | *Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz*

Psychology of Conspiracy Mentality (*in German*)

Prof. Dirk Baier | *Zurich University of Applied Sciences*

Conspiracy Beliefs as a Challenge to Democracy – What Can We Do? (*in German*)

Till Baaken & Christian Schwieter | *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*

The Role of Conspiracy Theories in Right-Wing Extremism:

Evidence from the Evolving Far-Right Online Ecosystem (*in English*)

**03:00 pm Summary and Discussion of Workshop Results**

**03:30 pm Coffee break**

**04:00 pm Addressing Conspiracy Beliefs - International Perspectives**

Karina Urbanavičiūtė | *DebunkEU.org (Lithuania)*

Disinformation as the Threat of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: How Can we Recognise and Counter it?

International Insights from a Lithuanian Think Tank

Prof. Iztok Prezelj | *University Ljubljana (Slovenia)*

Right-Wing Extremism in Slovenia – A Case Study of the Paramilitary Structure “Sisko’s Vard”

Verena Fabris | *Extremism Information Center*

**05:20 pm Workshop Session 2: Solutions - Civil Society and Police as Partners in Confronting Conspiracy Beliefs (Part I)**

Verena Fiebig | *Competence Centre against Extremism in Baden-Wuerttemberg (konex)*

Teamwork Required – The Difficult Handling of Conspiracy Beliefs (*in German*)

Miro Dittrich | *Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy (CeMAS)*

Cooperation Between Civil Society and Police in the Context of Conspiracy Beliefs (*in English*)

**06:25 pm Summary of the Day and Organisational Matters**

**06:40 pm Break**

**07:30 pm Dinner**

**Tuesday, 22 of November 2022**

**09:00 am Welcome and Organisational Matters**

**09:15 am Workshop Session 2 (continued): Civil Society and Police as Partners in Confronting Conspiracy Beliefs (Part 2)**

Dr. Sarah Pohl | *Counselling Centre for Ideological Issues (ZEBRA) &*

Stefan Kugler | *Competence Centre against Extremism in Baden-Wuerttemberg (konex)*

Conspiracy Beliefs: New Phenomenon or Old Hat? (continuing "Teamwork Required") (*in German*)

Miro Dittrich | *Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy (CeMAS)*

Cooperation Between Civil Society and Police in the Context of Conspiracy Beliefs (*in English*)

**10:30 am Summary and Discussion of Workshop Results**

**11:00 am Coffee break**

**11:30 am Workshop Session 3: Prevention and Intervention in Practice**

Felix Steinbrenner | *State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Wuerttemberg*

Prevention of Conspiracy Beliefs and Right-Wing Extremism in Educational Contexts (*in German*)

Sarah Shiferaw | *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*

Prevention and Counterstrategies in the Context of Conspiracy Beliefs (*in German*)

Alexander Ritzmann | *Counter Extremism Project*

Tales of Heroes and Dragons:

Why People Believe in (Extreme-Right) Conspiracy Narratives and How to Help Them Change Their Mind (*in English*)

**01:15 pm Lunch**

**02:30 pm Summary and Discussion of Workshop Results**

**03:00 pm Cooperation in Practice: Brief Presentations on Collaborative Projects**

**04:15 pm Summary of the Conference & Closing Survey**

Prof. Thomas G3rger | *German Police University*

**04:30 pm Coffee Catch-up & Networking**

**05:30 pm End of Conference**

## Overview of the Workshops

### Workshops on Conspiracy Beliefs and their Links to Right-Wing Extremism

Monday, 21 November (01:30 pm to 03:00 pm)

Group 1 (in German):

**Prof. Roland Imhoff**

*Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz  
Chair of Social and Legal Psychology*

#### **Psychology of Conspiracy Mentality**

After developing a shared understanding of what a conspiracy theory is and what is supposed to be problematic about it, central findings of psychological research on conspiracy beliefs will be conveyed in a lecture. Furthermore, questions about potential and limits of constructive dialogue with conspiracy believers will be addressed together with the participants.

Group 3 (in English):

**Till Baaken & Christian Schwieter**

*Institute for Strategic Dialogue*

#### **The Role of Conspiracy Theories in Right-Wing Extremism: Evidence from the Evolving Far-Right Online Ecosystem**

What is the role of conspiracy theories in far-right mobilisation strategies and related radicalisation processes? This workshop will review evidence from far-right activity across a variety of online platforms. The goal is to identify key narratives, to share insights into the role of emerging online spaces, and to understand the change in discursive opportunities for right-wing extremists over the past years.

Group 2 (in German):

**Prof. Dirk Baier**

*Zurich University of Applied Sciences  
Institute of Delinquency and Crime Prevention*

#### **Conspiracy Theories as a Challenge to Democracy – What can we do?**

Since the Corona pandemic, conspiracy theories have been discussed more intensively than ever before. This attention is well-founded, as it has been shown that an affinity for these theories is associated with, among other things, anti-democratic attitudes. The workshop will present the empirical state of research on the topic. Implications for dealing with conspiracy beliefs will be developed with the participants.

## **Workshops on Solutions:**

### **Civil Society and Police as Partners in Confronting Conspiracy Beliefs**

Monday, 21 November (05:20 pm to 06:20 pm): Part 1

Tuesday, 22 November (09:15 am to 10:30 am): Part 2

Group 1 (in German) – Part 1:

#### **Verena Fiebig**

*Competence Centre against Extremism in Baden-Wuerttemberg (konex)*

#### **Teamwork Required - The Difficult Handling of Conspiracy Beliefs**

Conspiracy beliefs have dramatic consequences on a personal and societal level. Belief in conspiracy ideologies has been shown to have negative effects on personal well-being by increasing feelings of insecurity and fear. In addition, the belief in conspiracy ideologies increases the support for illegitimate forms of protest and violence. The workshop will present and discuss current methods for dealing with conspiracy theories on the levels of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

Group 2 (in English):

#### **Miro Dittrich**

*Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy (CeMAS)*

#### **Cooperation Between Civil Society and Police in the Context of Conspiracy Beliefs**

Civil society organisations have been warning for years about the dangers of conspiracy beliefs for our society and their connection to right-wing extremism. The Corona pandemic has brought conspiracy beliefs into the focus of police work on various levels. Civil society is increasingly reaching the limits of its effectiveness due to a radicalisation of the conspiracy ideology scene, and police institutions often lack background knowledge on this phenomenon. In this workshop, we will clarify how a productive cooperation can be established and how mutual reservations can be reduced.

Group 1 (in German) – Part 2:

#### **Dr. Sarah Pohl & Stefan Kluger**

*Counselling Centre for Ideological Issues (ZEBRA) & Competence Centre against Extremism in Baden-Wuerttemberg (konex)*

#### **Conspiracy Beliefs – New Phenomenon or Old Hat?**

Conspiracy beliefs have been part of right-wing extremist ideologies for a long time and have accompanied exit programmes in Baden-Wuerttemberg for about 20 years. Since 2020, a large number of people seeking advice have turned to the ZEBRA Counselling Centre for Ideological Issues, including many affected by conspiracy beliefs. What connects the Counselling Centre (ZEBRA) and the Competence Centre (konex), how do counselling and networks differ?

## **Workshops on Prevention and Intervention in Practice**

Tuesday, 22 November (11:30 am to 01:15 pm)

Group 1 (in German):

### **Felix Steinbrenner**

*State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Wuerttemberg*

#### **Prevention of Conspiracy Beliefs and Right-Wing Extremism in Educational Contexts**

This workshop focuses on concepts of political education against right-wing extremism and conspiracy beliefs using the example of the State Agency for Civic Education Baden-Wuerttemberg. Based on concrete examples, the workshop provides insights into the goals, contents and methods of educational prevention of extremism.

Group 3 (in English):

### **Alexander Ritzmann**

*Counter Extremism Project*

#### **Tales of Heroes and Dragons – Why People Believe in (Extreme-Right) Conspiracy Narratives and How to Help Them Change Their Mind**

This workshop will address the functionality of conspiracy beliefs and introduce practical recommendations on how to plan and implement an intervention.

Group 2 (in German):

### **Sarah Shiferaw**

*Institute for Strategic Dialogue*

#### **Prevention and Counterstrategies in the Context of Conspiracy Beliefs**

This workshop deals with approaches to action and methods for promoting social, media and historical skills and competencies as a preventive measure and counter-strategy in dealing with conspiracy beliefs.