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Strategies of Extremist Organisations and their Influence in the Education Sector

Summary of the results of the Stratex project

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This article provides an overview of the results of a two-year research project. We investigated, firstly, how extremist organisations try to exert influence in the formal education system. Secondly, the project focused on educational actitivties and trainings that extremist organisations use to spread their ideology and recruit new members.[1] Five areas were examined in status quo analyses and in-depth case studies, namely: domestic right-wing extremism, ultranationalism in diaspora communities, Christian extremism, Salafism, and far-right esoteric anti-state movements. While we found little direct influence on the formal education system, it is mainly the organisations' own educational activities that are important. The investigated groups differ in their organisational structures, but also in their educational offers and target groups. While some form very loose networks that even refrain from using a common name or label, others are organised in a strict hierarchy. Not all of them are equally interested in recruiting new members on a broad basis; some organisations, such as the "Society of Saint Pius" (Piusbruderschaft) or the "Grey Wolves", direct their educational efforts inwards and towards their "own" youth; others – such as the Salafists or Identitarians – are missionary in nature. The goals of the investigated organisations are correspondingly diverse and range from the reproduction of their own community via the recruitment of new cadres and disseminators to the influencing of public discourse through low-level dissemination of their own ideology. Non-ideological educational measures can also serve the purpose of creating general legitimacy in the community.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Stratex project was carried out by an interdisciplinary team of researchers with different institutional affiliations – Department of Applied Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS), Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance (DÖW), Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip) – as well as the Counselling Centre on Extremism (BEX/bOJA) and three public partners: the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI), the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) and the Vienna Child and Youth Welfare Service. In this article, the project leader summarises the most important results of the research.

The project began by elaborating a definition of extremism suitable for the context of school and education system, in which the criterion of violence is not an indispensable part of the definition.[2] This is because few groups and organisations active in the education sector openly ad-

vocate violence. Specifically, the definition of right-wing extremism used by the DÖW (cf. Holzer 1993) was reworked into a cross-phenomena definition that also encompasses other forms of extremism (cf. Schmidinger/Peham 2022). As a definitive minimum, in order to be able to speak about extremism requires the transformation of social to "natural" or "god-willed" inequality, the arrogance of a nation or community ("Gemeinschaftsdünkel") that cannot get by without racism and (often antisemitic) conspiracy theories, as well as authoritarianism. This often goes together with rebellious impulses: if the submissiveness applies to the overall authoritarian context, the revolt is aimed at "false" authorities (e.g. "elites"). This resistance dispositive serves as a basis on which to legitimise political violence and forms an important narrative of extremism, which often contains traits of vigilantism.

On the one hand, the project aimed at identifying which measures and needs exist in extremism prevention in the Austrian education sector. The project therefore focused on the "Assessment of existing prevention measures, survey of needs and identification of good practices" (Danner et al. 2021a). The results of this research include a database, in which it is possible to search for suitable local offers of extremism prevention as well as for teaching materials on the subject.[3] In addition, good practices of extremism prevention in the education sector were identified and published in an IRKS working paper (cf. Danner et al. 2021b).

On the other hand, Stratex focused on the strategies of extremist organisations in the education sector. Both the targeted influencing of the formal education system and the educational offerings of far-right nationalist, religious fundamentalist and anti-state groups were investigated.

2. STATUS QUO REPORTS AND CASE STUDIES ON FIVE AREAS

A total of five reports were written, in which the researchers from oiip, IRKS and DÖW investigated the educational offerings in the following phenomenal areas and examined them in depth in the form of case studies:

1. Christian extremist organisations (case study: Society of St. Pius X)
2. Educational offerings of Salafist actors (case study: IMAN Da'wa trainings)
3. Ultranationalistic diaspora organisations (case study: Nizam-ı Alem)
4. Conspiracy ideology, far-right esoteric and anti-state groupings (case study: ethnic far-right esoteric associations and homeschooling)
5. Far-right organisations, fraternities (case study: "New Right")

Overall, we identified little direct influence on the formal education system. Apart from individual activities carried out by associations that attempt to spread their ideologies in schools – such as, for example, letters from Scientology offering to hold workshops at schools – it is mainly the organisations' own educational activities that are important. These activities and their underlying strategies are therefore described in more detail below.

2.1 Christian extremist organisations

The Christian extremist groups were investigated by Schmidinger and Hofinger (cf. Schmidinger/Hofinger 2021). Schmidinger (cf. Schmidinger 2021) additionally investigated the Society of St. Pius X in an in-depth case study. Schmidinger and Hofinger distinguish between organisations that try to influence politics and others that tend to close themselves off from politics. The former tend to be ideologically more moderate in a transitional area from right-wing conservative to extremist, the latter are more extremist. With regard

to the more extremist groups, we found no organised efforts to influence the regular school system. Rather, their educational strategies aim at closing off the next generation in their own community from outside influences and raising it in their own religious and ideological worldview (cf. Schmidinger/Hofinger 2021, 55).

Many of these groups are about community building and about isolating themselves from an outside world perceived as hostile. To achieve this closing off from the outside world and the community building within, the world is divided into a good inside world and bad outside world in a strictly Manichaean worldview. The latter is perceived and conveyed as being satanic.

The community's own teachings are presented as the sole truth; questioning them is punished with the most massive of consequences, right through to breaking off contact (including with the person's family). An appeal is made to a "godly" and a "natural" order created by God, particularly in connection with gender relations. In this worldview, "natural" motherliness cannot be combined with a professional career. There is a clear division of roles between man and woman: children should be raised to become "real" women and "real" men. Homosexuality contradicts the "natural order" created by God (cf. ibid.).

To enable this closing off, public schools are frequently rejected. It is argued that they do not impart any "Christian values". Apart from sex education, the teaching of evolutionary theory is considered to be problematic. Children from Christian extremist families are taught in their own school projects in Austria or at home, or in boarding schools in German-speaking countries abroad. In some cases, the legal possibility of homeschooling in Austria even leads to extremist families or entire communities migrating to Austria from Germany – where this legal option does not exist. In fact, the children are then not always taught in their families, as envisaged in homeschooling, but taught in groups by declaring the lessons to be "private tutoring". In all of these groups, children and adolescents are taught to reject the secular modern and adopt a strict anti-liberal position. Other religions too, in particular Islam, are conveyed as being hostile (cf. ibid., 56).

Most of the groups accept physical violence as a method of child-raising or at the very least do not fully reject it or do not recommend it only because of potential legal consequences. Psychological violence is omnipresent. Ultimately, the permanent fear of the torment of hell is presented as punishment for all possible "sins" and of a hostile environment. In many groups, this is also associated with an explicit or implicit expectation of the apocalypse, i.e. the coming end of the world. The goal of all this is to ensure the reproduction, growth and cohesion of one's own community and to prevent any questioning of the religious and ideological persuasion from within the community's own ranks. This is thus less problematic for regular schooling than it is for the children and adolescents who grow up in these communities (cf. ibid., 57).

2.2 Education offerings of Salafist actors

Salafist influence on the education system and the education offerings of Salafist actors were researched by Gharib and Hacker (cf. Gharib/Hacker 2021). Hacker (cf. Hacker 2021) looked in depth at the associations Iman and Fitrah, which played a big role in the area of street missionary work and recently also increased their online presence. Above all, Iman offers online formats, in which external viewers can participate and have the possibility to join in the discussion. The of-

ferings of both associations are designed to be appealing to young people and encourage participation. Both associations avail themselves of very similar strategies: specifically, they speak to people on the street or online and try to involve them in a discussion about religion and God. One rhetorical strategy employed is to simply not take the arguments of the counterpart seriously, but instead show how convinced they are of their own, absolute truth. Moreover, the associations rely on disseminators who in turn proselytise other people and aim to convince them of the true belief (cf. Gharib/Hacker 2021, 32 f).

Iman and Fitrah, both of which claim to represent the one true religion, officially distance themselves from violence and radicalisation. Iman even encourages its members to abide by a declaration of anti-extremism, which is available on the website. What remains unclear, however, is the extent to which this is just a strategy for external consumption. Because the language used by these groups does not permit any other opinion in terms of belief and interpretation of the religion, as they claim the absolute truth for themselves. Proselytising is presented as the most important task and the association's own interpretation of Islam is presented as the only correct one. Extremist tendencies are constantly portrayed, such as in a Manichaean thinking that the world is divided into "us" and "them", and in which the goal is to proselytise others and convince them of their Salafist-influenced ideology (cf. ibid.).

The actions of Iman and Fitrah are legal and covered by freedom of religion. The spread of political Salafism – together with the supposedly absolute superiority of its own ideology – through the training of disseminators, public missionary work and online content is, however, relevant in terms of social and security policy. For these low-level offerings, which have a great reach in the German-speaking countries (cf. BPB 2021), contribute to the creation of a Salafist subculture amongst adolescents, which in turn can be the breeding ground for further radicalisation (cf. ibid., 33).

With regard to the rising number of virtual educational programmes, it can be said that the scene has changed dramatically in the last ten years: the mutual relationship between mediatised online propaganda and the establishment of a subculture amongst adolescents has created a decentralised ecosytem that makes Salafism a widely available instruction manual for everyday life (cf. Abou-Taam 2012; Comerford et at. 2021). This international network, which is also available to Austrian youth, has such a broad base in the German-speaking countries that it now almost monopolises searches on religious topics online and thus dominates the ecosystem of religious videos on YouTube (cf. Comerford et al. 2021). The broad spectrum of Salafism is thus also reflected in the digital space: less extremist disseminators take on a bridging function to the mainstream and thus inconspicuously contribute to joining or drifting into more radical, even jihadist environments. This mediatisation is significantly responsible for Salafist content having become increasingly attractive to today's youth (cf. Gharib/Hacker 2021, 33).

In this way, however, not only the strategy, but also the content is adapted to the target group. As a consequence of the mediatisation and the restructuring of the scene, religion is losing relevance and increasingly being replaced by superficial ideological quotes, images and videos, most of which are created by anonymous actors and preachers of a loose network.

Salafism and religion are simplified and used in a banal form to provide coun-

selling for different youth-related problems (gender roles, relationships, family, finance, etc.; cf. Comerford et al. 2021). As a result of this transition, Salafist educational measures now mostly focus on finding one's identity and on giving orientation by means of short excerpts from primary sources or sermons. Salafist education thus no longer conveys nuanced religious knowledge and is no longer characterised by an ideological rigidity. Instead, it is about the dissemination of an elastic, superficial mindset that becomes the basis for any and all decisions. Much here points to the proving of Olivier Roy's thesis of the "Islamisation of radicalism". By shifting the educational offers to social media, preachers and associations no longer have to be local actors, but also reach their crowd from Germany, Switzerland or even from the Arab world and Turkey. At the same time, the decoupling from physical spaces also offers Salafist women the possibility to participate actively in educational programmes. Accordingly, there are more and more offerings that are deliberately aimed at young women and mothers (cf. Gharib/Hacker 2021, 33 f).

2.3 Ultranationalistic diaspora organisations

Sahin and Schmidinger (cf. Sahin/Schmidinger 2021) focus on ultranationalistic organisations in the diaspora, especially Turkish ultranationalism (cf. also the in-depth case study of Sahin 2021). The objectives of ultranationalistic associations active in the field of education can be assigned to three areas, which are sometimes interrelated: the creation of legitimacy, the reproduction of the associations and the formation of community. Course offerings are intended to bind members of the associations, especially youth, to the respective organisation and to reach out to new members. On the one hand, the focus is on politically ostensibly non-suspicious content, such as vocational and language courses or various forms of cultural cultivation. On the other, religious education is offered in some cases (Turkish and Croatian ultranationalism). The religious content conveyed is not necessarily extremist in nature, but primarily serves community building. The associations try to create legitimacy as institutions for education and integration as well as to meet the needs of young people and their parents for training aimed at improving their personal socio-economic situation. Thus, the educational activities are well received by the young people and their parents. Many parents also see the religious courses in mosque associations as a means to prevent their children from getting involved in criminal activities. Through language courses or vocational training, the respective associations present themselves as "benefactors" within the respective communities and thus try to acquire legitimacy beyond the narrower circle of members (cf. Sahin/Schmidinger 2021, 64 f).

The educational activities also serve the reproduction of the associations. By connecting the young people to the associations via educational programmes, the intention is clearly to incorporate the young people into the organisation for the long term. The operation of a student residence is also associated with this aim. Due to their ideological indoctrination and because they believe that the association has their wellbeing in mind and that they are part of an important "mission", the young people can be seen as the next generation of the associations' members and management (cf. ibid., 65).

Certain events serve explicitly to pass on the ultranationalistic ideology and a corresponding image, in which historic events or myths often play an important

role. These events also serve community building, but are more explicit in their content and in the symbols on show. In some cases, religion and ideology are interwoven (e.g. church festivals of Croatian ultranationalists in Bleiburg, Sohbet's Turkish ultranationalists). In this regard, the associations intend to exert a greater, ideological influence on the young people. Groups like the Ülkücü (Grey Wolves) movement also structure their environment according to a strict friend-enemy scheme. In this way, they create polarised inner and outer limits and – in a similar way to Christian extremist organisations – purport to want to protect young people from what they believe to be a morally degenerate society (cf. ibid.).

2.4 Conspiracy-based, right-wing esoteric, anti-state scene

Stratex also investigated the activities of conspiracy-based, right-wing esoteric and anti-state groups in the educational sector (cf. Reisinger/Hofinger 2021 as well as the case studies of Reisinger et al. 2021). The coronavirus pandemic and government actions to limit its impact offered the perfect breeding ground for recruitment efforts of the right-wing esoteric and anti-state scene. The scene profited in two ways from the shift into the virtual space caused by the pandemic: it is now not only possible to reach a much larger audience. Social networks and online platforms – with their functionality and flat hierarchies – also provide an excellent base for the recruitment and dissemination tactics of the scene and are in line with its preferred network structure (cf. Reisinger et al. 2021, 47).

As recruitment strategies, a multi-level system was first discerned: depending on which context the various actors operate in – on their own Telegram channels, on video platforms and websites, in interviews on internet radio or in online congresses – they present themselves in highly different ways. If a broad audience interested in esoteric content is addressed, certain problematic ideological contents are not mentioned at all or only marginally. Presented content and ideological underpinnings are therefore custom-tailored to the context and the audience. If interested parties come into contact with protagonists for the first time, they are referred to other ideological offers, some of which can be classified as problematic or even as clearly extremist. If the media labels content as problematic or extremist, it is removed from the organisations' websites.

Thus, for example, videos that made reference to the "völkisch"-antisemitic Anastasia movement or videos on "Germanic medicine" disappeared from the platform "WissenSchafft Freiheit", just after German media had reported on them (cf. ibid.).

Another central strategy is the offering of concrete assistance and instruction on homeschooling. Parents who responded highly critically to the measures put in place at schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and who went on to deregister their children from school were offered not only practical assistance (such as, for example, "maths support"), but also emotional support, regional networking and legal guidance for setting up learning groups – in connection with narratives that reject the school system as a whole. The results of our research clearly indicate that the right to homeschooling is sometimes exercised in problematic ideological settings and the lack of the authorities' rights of control may very well encourage the abuse of this right (cf. ibid., 48, 43 f; Hofinger et al. 2022).

As a third strategy, targeted network building or the normalisation of extremist content through a lack of demarcation has been identified. The central actors of the

conspiracy-right-wing esoteric scene form a tight-knit network amongst themselves. It is essential here that these networks depict the full bandwidth of the scene – a demarcation of right-wing extremism is not undertaken.

This practice makes it possible for extremist individuals to be represented as an accepted part of the scene: they are thus in no way on the margins or even in their own, separate "bubbles". This results on the one hand in an exchange of the respective audience and in a maximisation of reach and potentially interested parties; on the other, it leads to the normalisation of problematic and extremist ideological content in the broad, esoteric mainstream (ibid. 48 f).

There is also a strategic "perpetrator-victim reversal" and immunisation against external criticism. In accordance with a Manichaean worldview we observed a division into good, knowing ("awakened") people on the one hand and the unknowing "others" presented as negative to hostile on the other, that leads to an immunisation against any external scepticism or criticism. Their own actions are always presented as an act of liberation against alleged suppression by the "system" and against "censorship"; as an awakened actor, one is thus always in danger of falling victim to a state power presented as being repressive (cf. ibid., 49).

Ultimately, existing deficits in the education system are instrumentalised: these deficits are exaggerated and parents' fears and mistrust towards the public education system are reinforced, when they talk of "widespread child abuse in schools" and when public schools cannot even stand up to the comparison with prisons, "where you can at least move". Parents whose children have problems in the current education system are addressed. Mostly, the messaging focuses on the mothers, who "naturally" always know best what is best for their child. The role and function of the mother is ideally enhanced, while it is the mothers who mostly experience considerable professional and financial disadvantages due to homeschooling. The homeschooling protagonists cleverly use existing deficits in the education system, such as outdated didactic concepts, too few opportunities for disadvantaged children, too few opportunities to move, etc., to propagate a complete exit from this "broken system". Promises are made that what is learned in school could also be learned in a much shorter time at home. These assertions, as usual in the conspiracy theory scene, are underpinned by allegedly authentic testimonials from "those in the know" and substantiated with false facts (such as, for example, the incorrect assertion that the Russian Schetinin school received the title "best school in the world" from UNESCO in 1994) (cf. ibid., 49 f).

2.5 Far-right activities in education: "New Right" and fraternities

The activities of far-right actors in the education sector were investigated by Hacker and Hager (cf. Hacker/Hager 2021) and by Peham (cf. Peham 2021). With regard to the "New Right", Hacker and Hager establish that the education sector has great strategic importance for recruitment efforts due to the high proportion of young members. The most frequent and most relevant "New Right" strategies are the ideological "information" via social media or via videos on streaming platforms; the distribution of flyers; regular "information stands"; the use of targeted conversational strategies; the development of video games; as well as in-house cadre training in educational centres and on web portals intended to be reminiscent of university structures. With this diverse range of offers these associ-

ations address various target groups: on the one hand a broader group with somewhat superficial strategies such as handing out flyers, and on the other the core of the scene with measures such as online "seminars" or events in their own facilities (cf. Hacker/Hager 2021, 38, 97).

Flyers of extremist organisations, which are distributed in educational institutions and elsewhere, are professionally made and strategically well thought out. The strategy of the "Identitarian Movement Austria" ("Identitäre Bewegung Österreich" [IBÖ]) is often based on, for example, elements of pop culture and makes reference to film content, contemporary internet memes or music. An example of this is the use of the film "Avatar" for the purpose of identifying with the main figure, who as the representative "of a nature-loving culture [resists] greedy conquerors" (Bruns et al. 2017, 97). Moreover, in the past, the IBÖ adopted motifs from the Lord of the Rings trilogy as well as from the American TV series South Park, by supplementing characteristic images with its own texts and slogans of the Identitarians and thus further using them as "memes" (cf. Hacker/Hager 2021, 38).

With the structural change of the "New Right" scene in recent years – such as the founding of the "DO5" "movement" – the flyer strategy also changed. On the one hand, flyers were handed out at demonstrations and the movement's own information stands, in order to reach out to politically like-minded people. On the other, flyer campaigns were extended to society as a whole and handed out strategically in areas that were sociodemographically diverse and, according to the media, arenas of local conflicts. There were regular campaigns in which activist dropped flyers into the letterboxes of the population living in such areas. The consideration behind this was that the resident population would be susceptible to conspiracy narratives due to the everyday conflicts with various groups. In terms of content, these flyers exhibit a clear pattern and are based on a pseudo-scientific strategy: first, a supposed problem is outlined and placed in context with the "Great Replacement" and/or the "Great Reset". An attempt is made to convince the public of an alleged danger, which is presented as threatening and potentially existentially destructive, in order to stir up fears and anger. To this end, the group uses selective statistics of state institutions, which are interpreted and ideologically framed through the spectacles of conspiracy narratives (cf. ibid., 38 f).

Another means for recruiting at universities are "information stands", which students do not recognise as being extremist at first glance, as these are often marketed as leisure activities, although they de facto serve the purpose of recruitment and spreading the ideology. In this way, students get chatting with activities for a free drink and take flyers home with them. Distribution campaigns are also frequently held at these events, e.g. sunglasses, suncream with the logo "Real patriots don't turn red", pens and lighters with "New Right" sayings and symbols are given away. Such events on university campuses are mostly offered by student organisations, such as the Ring Freiheitlicher Studenten (RFS – Ring of Liberal Students), which is why the dual functionaries of RFS and DO5 are so important for influencing the education system. The recruiting strategy of the New Right is that they promise to tell everything that is not told at the universities. The promise that one will be given "secret knowledge" is thus a central component of recruitment activities. In terms of content, these discussions frequently focus on racist narratives and anti-Muslim racism, at least implicitly. Another strategic topic of discussion is an-

tifeminism as well as topics such as family, traditions, kindergarten and school, which are especially important for this ideology (cf. ibid., 39 f).

However, the New Right also works with entirely different strategies: video games have recently been gaining in importance overall as strategies of extremist groups, not only among the New Right, but also in religiously motivated extremist organisations (cf. Al Amir 2020; RAN 2020; Fisher-Birch 2020). Strategic innovations and gamification are used to try to advance "digital patriotism" and to establish a "patriotic" game developer scene. For example, New Right activists developed a video game in cooperation with Kvltgames in autumn 2020. The goal is to use gamification to create a low-threshold tool whose content is extremist, but is camouflaged as an exciting game. Strategically, the reach of the propaganda should thus be significantly expanded and at the same time the target audience comes into contact with New Right ideology without recognising it as such at first glance. The game from Kvltgames not only conveys the most important ideological elements in a playful way, but also informs the players about how they can "develop" themselves ideologically, if interested. Also, within the scope of so-called "Gamejams", new members are recruited and like-minded people networked (cf. Hacker/Hager 2021, 40 f).

In addition, the cadres of the movement also participate in reading groups, workshops and presentations, which are held in "education centres" or online. The Identitarian Movement Styria holds a kind of pioneering role as one of the most active provincial groups, not least through its educational centre in Graz. In 2021, there were still two active New Right education centres: the "Kulturfestung" ("Culture Fortress") in Styria and "Castell Aurora" in Steyregg, both of which run their own library and offer regular workshops and lectures. There is also a close exchange between New Right Austrian activists and educational institutions in Germany, such as with the "Institut für Staatspolitik" (Institute for State Policy) – however, for the cadres of the movements, this is not about "public education", but about elite building (cf. ibid., 14, 42).

Peham (cf. Peham 2021) reports on the educational offerings of the "völkischen" corporations for pupils and students – "fraternities" ("Burschenschaften"). Most of these focus inwardly and on their own members. Accordingly, their most relevant place is the non-public "Fuchsenkränzchen" or "Fuchsenconvent": here, the new (not yet fully fledged) members are primarily given knowledge about the association and its history, with great importance being placed on the association's rules and regulations. Outside one's own group, the teaching extends at best to student history and a few key dates (mostly heroising) of German national history.[4] Walther Hiebl (Bajuvaria Linz) also includes the "subjects of civics and European law", which would also be taught at least in his association (cf. Neuwal 2015). According to Gerald Zauner (Bajuvaria Linz), students learn "Things that might have less value placed on them at school, such as learning about free speech". In addition, "good behaviour" plays a "big role" and is therefore instilled in "the youngsters". The "active students" are subsequently encouraged to attend seminars of umbrella associations, above all to better take on the leadership roles in the associations and their representation to the outside world (cf. Peham 2021, 63).

An analysis of the websites of associations of the "Österreichischer Pennäler Ring" (ÖPR) strengthens the thesis of the relative insignificance of education

in everyday corporatised life and for recruitment. In the "Events" section, Peham found hardly any references to educational offerings in the narrower sense, but instead above all "bars" and "foundation festivals", which serve as the measure of education and community building. The "educational tool"[5] "Mensur" is highlighted as a unique selling proposition in the self-portrayals online – in accordance with the precedence of upbringing over education. For example, the Carinthian Middle School associations recruit members by advertising with the "Mensur" as an "educational resource": "The young person learns to stand up for himself and others, to embrace the risk of painful blows and to surrender himself to a truly exceptional situation." Only after that is the educational offering mentioned in the presentation, with the focus here also being on the community aspect: "Training and discussion evenings, sporting activities and seminars as well as social events. Cheerful sociability alternates with intense debate on the questions of our time. Recreational activities away from the mainstream promote community."[6] (cf. Peham 2021, 64).

The pennal upbringing and educational offerings primarily serve the recruitment of new members and the solidification of the group and its ideological structure. They are mostly low-threshold in nature and address various needs, above all those for belonging, orientation and recognition. The new members ("foxes") are mentally sworn in to the group and the "German national community" ("Volksgemeinschaft") in numerous units. As a result, they often come into conflict with school and the values that school teaches or should teach. As a general rule, they respond to this by withdrawing into the group, which increasingly becomes a kind of "safe space". The few public events mainly serve to position the corporations in current political debates. They rarely have the character of open-ended discussions, rather they exhaust themselves in the mutual confirmation of their "völkisch"-German worldview (ibid., 64 f).

3. CONCLUSION

In the summary of the results, the groups vary widely, especially in their organisational structure. While some form loose networks that even refrain from using a common name or label, others are organised within a strict hierarchy. Not all of them are equally interested in recruiting new members on a broad basis; some organisations, such as the "Society of Saint Pius" or the "Grey Wolves", direct their efforts in the area of education heavily inwards and towards their "own" youth; others – such as the Salafist or Identitarians – are purposefully missionary in nature. The goals of the described organisations are correspondingly diverse and range from the reproduction of their own community via the recruitment of new cadres and disseminators to the influencing of public discourse through low-level dissemination of their ideology. Non-ideological educational measures can also serve to create a certain legitimacy for an association in the respective community. In doing so, some groups systematically obfuscate their problematic attitudes and regularly remove content from their websites or from social media.

Overall, online formats are playing an increasingly important role. They enable not only the expansion of the target group to the entire German-speaking region. They also allow for loose network structures and spaces where women can be active even in conservative environments. What all groups have in common is the dissemination of a strongly Manichaean, black-and-white view of the world, a demonisation of the "others" and a tendency towards

(often antisemitic) conspiracy narratives, whether these concern the "Great Replacement" or the total subjugation of children in the "regular school system". Closing oneself off from an outside world depicted as hostile is also enabled by the right to homeschooling, which is subject to hardly any checks in Austria and can therefore also be used by ideologically problematic groups.

[1] *The research project Stratex – Strategies of extremist organisations in the education sector – has been funded by the Austrian Security Research Programme KIRAS of the Federal Ministry of Finance.*

[2] *The definition of extremism on which the project is based also differs from possible definitions under criminal law such as "religiously motivated extremist associations", which were recently criminalised in Section 247b Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB).*

[3] *Beratungsstelle Extremismus 2022.*

[4] *Weidinger (Weidinger 2014, 174 f) supplements the taught contents with "'Issues of folklore' and 'borderlands'" and the debate on hostile (left-wing and liberal) theory and practice.*

[5] *Cf. LDC Kärnten 2021. As "central upbringing contents", according to Weidinger (Weidinger 2014, 173), "self-discipline and the willingness to subordinate one's own self (including one's physical integrity) to a greater whole; under the covenant 'in whose colours' the academic fencing is fought, and the (German) people, for which the participant in the academic fencing shows willingness to shed blood and, if necessary, to die." (ibid.)*

[6] *LDC Kärnten 2021.*

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