

**Vortrag von Dr. Thomas Pfeiffer, Innenministerium Nordrhein-Westfalen,**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues of the International Network Against Cyber Hate,

I would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to give my view on the question “Why is discriminatory content on the internet problematic?” I will introduce myself briefly since my professional background has impacts on my perspective that hate pages are problematic indeed. I am a researcher in the department for protection of the constitution within the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Northrhine-Westfalia. As you may know Northrhine-Westfalia is one of Germany’s federal states, located in the very west of Germany. The Ministry of Internal Affairs is based in Düsseldorf.

The departments for protection of the constitution are closely linked to the general design of the German constitution. The constitutional design is often referred to as a “militant democracy”. The term was coined in 1937 by Karl Loewenstein, a German sociologist who emigrated to the USA during national socialism. What is a militant democracy? To cut a very long story quite short a militant democracy is characterized by the fact that the state is aware of the enemies of democracy and that it is willing and able to protect its democratic character. The experience behind it is the decline of the

Weimar Republic. In fact the destruction of democracy followed lawful procedures, national socialists used all means democracy provides to overcome democracy. Karl Loewenstein argued a democracy should have effective means to defend itself at an early stage when it could get under pressure from antidemocratic powers. Just to avoid any misunderstanding: I am not saying that other types of democracy – particularly a typically liberal democracy in the Anglo-American tradition – are defenceless. I am pointing out the legal framework in Germany and the reasons for its existence.

Some means of a militant democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany are:

- legal measures to ban an organization or even a political party
- the fact that certain symbols and certain types of hate speech are prohibited by German law.
- offices that observe antidemocratic groups and organizations and report to the governments, the parliaments and to the public. These offices are so-called offices or departments for protection of the constitution [Verfassungsschutz]. Not only are they responsible to observe illegal action of antidemocratic – we say: extremist – groups but also lawful action and propaganda if it is hostile to democracy. The departments for protection of the constitution are intelligence services – in order to gain information on hidden plans and developments they are in contact with informants within extremist groups and organizations.

So to answer the question in the headline I may say in one line:

A website is problematic if it's antidemocratic.

I should make my point a bit more precisely: It is problematic if it is hostile to the core values of the German constitution, which are part of the so-called "liberal democratic basic order". These are the core values of any democracy in the western sense: for example individual human rights, independence of the courts, the right to form an opposition. In this regard any propaganda that promotes a "Fourth Reich" in the tradition of the national-socialist "Third Reich" is considered extremist. The most basic of the core values in the constitution is "human dignity" in article one of the constitution: "Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority" – of any human being regardless of ethnic background, religion, colour of skin and so on. Content on the internet that promotes xenophobia or racism in a way that the equal dignity of any human being is questioned is to be considered extremist.

The departments for protection of the constitution are obliged to observe an organisation if there is indication for suspicion that it follows objectives that are hostile to the liberal democratic basic order. As I mentioned this does not necessarily mean that their action and propaganda is against the law. Thus we are so to speak the early warning system of militant democracy.

Our main focus is not on the internet. Our focus is on the antidemocratic organization or party behind the websites that use the internet as a tool – a platform for propaganda, to gain support or to build an extremist right-wing communicative network. In this regard, however, extremist websites are a very relevant factor of our work: They fulfil a number of functions that effect the ability of the extremist right-wing scene to get active, stay active and mobilize support. The internet has become one of the – if not *the* – most important means for right-wing extremists to network inside their own movement and to address potential sympathizers. Right-wing extremist groups and organizations are highly aware of this and have started to use the web more and more professionally right from the beginning of the internet era. I would like to name some of the functions that the internet fulfils for such groups:

- Mobilization: Websites are an important tool to organize extremist right-wing demonstrations. They spread the message and continuously give up-to-date information. Very often there are special websites to promote the objective and give detailed information on the demonstration. However, websites are just one type of media for mobilization. It would not work without other media such as extremist right-wing newspapers and magazines, flyers, posters and so on.
- Networking: Networking was the main function of the very first neo-Nazi-page on the web. When the “stormfront-page”

went online in 1995 its welcome-screen said that this is a “resource for those courageous men and women fighting to preserve their White Western culture, ideals and freedom of speech and association. A forum for planning strategies and forming political and social groups to ensure victory”. Today the stormfront page is a collection of forums for discussion. Among these are German language forums. Contact and communication between right-wing groups on a national and international level has been one of the key functions of their websites. This is particularly true for German neo-Nazi-groups that call themselves comradeships. Just as important or even more important than contacts on the internet is the face-to-face contact in a group and between the leaders of groups.

- Recruiting and influencing potential sympathizers: Young people have become the most important target group of extremist right-wing groups and organizations in Germany. This fact is mirrored by the way some websites are tailored to address young people. What we find on these pages is close to what happens in real world extremist groups: Not obvious political content is the bait to fish in young people’s waters, but fun, entertainment and action. Some websites provide a full range of options for entertainment in an extremist right-wing environment: Online-radios, Online-TV, music as background sound, music for download, interactive forums such as guest books or chat rooms. Such pages are an example of what we call “Erlebniswelt Rechtsextremismus” – my suggestion to

translate the expression: “the adventurous world of right-wing extremism”. This is also the title of a book jugendschutz.net and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Northrhine-Westfalia have published recently. We picked the term to raise a significant point: Right-wing groups and their websites provide highly attractive offers to young people – at least at first sight: They provide entertainment, group feelings that they call comradeship, a set of myths and symbols that turn their action into a legendary fight, a clear set of enemies, which are also scapegoats for developments that negatively affect one’s personal life. Since you can find all this on extremist right-wing websites they can be an effective means to address potential sympathizers.

- Factor number four is closely connected to the last one: broad effect: In 1997 David Hipschman wrote on the Media Awareness Website: “If anything makes the Internet different from other types of speech it is the relative ease with which the few can reach the many“. In order to increase the broad effect many extremist right-wing pages would not express their ideology frankly – more and more pages offer “hate in disguise” – or to use the term that one of the protagonists of the intellectual New Right invented: “political mimicry”. Implicitly he gave the message: We must learn to use language that sounds harmless – just as some animals that adopt the colour of their environment in order not to be detected. Some groups would even take left-wing symbols and terms on board and link

them to their own ideology. This picture gives you an example. It says “Revolution – no more, no less” and “autonomous nationalists”. The picture is taken from a neo-Nazi-platform based in the north of Germany called “störtebeker.net”. There has been a significant tendency in German right-wing extremism over the last years to avoid any symbols or language liable to prosecution. They would prefer allusions to unlawful statements and codes to replace illegal national socialist symbols. This is equally true for websites or any other media such as CDs or magazines. Thus the outward appearance of many extremist right-wing materials has become less aggressive, on the other hand propaganda has become more accessible to a broader audience. There is no doubt about the fact that the potential broad effect of extremist right-wing propaganda has increased – the actual broad effect is hard to measure. We don’t really know how many people use hate pages. Who are they? Sympathizers?

- Factor number 5: Trading with extremist right-wing products. I show you three examples for products that you can easily order in extremist right-wing mail orders. In 2006 there were 91 extremist right-wing mail orders based in Germany – they would not offer illegal products such as the Swastika flag whereas you will find a collection of such products in right-wing mail orders based abroad, for example in the United States. You will also find extremist right-wing products in special extremist shops – again the German ones would not

sell illegal products – at least they would not do so openly. I remember talking to a former extremist right-wing skinhead who said: If you know people that know people there is access to everything including fire arms. This was before the internet played a major role in the scene. There is no doubt about the fact that access to any kind of extremist right-wing products – illegal or not – has become significantly easier.

- Prevention of sanctions. The internet is international and the legal conditions outside of Germany can be quite different. German right-wing extremists who distribute illegal materials anonymously often use internet service providers abroad for example in the USA – some of which are actively involved in the movement so they provide a safe haven for materials liable to prosecution in Germany. There is low risk of being made responsible. However, as I said early, most German groups and organizations would rather avoid illegal materials on the web since the people behind their sites are well known to the security agencies.

I would like to give you a number of examples – some contain lawful materials, others illegal materials. I will just highlight some elements of the websites and won't go into to many details.

- This is the website of the NPD, the German National Democratic Party, the most active, the most aggressive and the most successful extremist right-wing party in Germany at the mo-

ment. The outward appearance of the website mirrors its strategies: The message is: We are young, we are modern, we are professional. We are not extremist, but we put social justice first – social justice for ethnic Germans. That is what they mean when they say “‘social’ only works on a national basis”. In fact this is a party that closely cooperates with neo-Nazi comradeships. Just to quote one line from Udo Voigt, the chairman of the NPD, who said in an interview: “There is no doubt about the fact that Hitler was a great German statesman” [“Zweifellos handelt es sich bei Hitler um einen großen deutschen Staatsmann”]. Part of the website is the media server where you can download the so-called “school yard CDs”, similar to the “Project Schoolyard” in Germany and the USA. These are give-away-CDs used in electoral campaigns. Music is used as a tool to attract young people, particularly young voters or future voters. I would like you to listen to one of the songs.

[Annett: „It is time for rebellion, time to stand up  
I am not going to watch the grievance in my country any longer  
It is time to speak up, that’s why I am here today  
I won’t be calm any longer and drown my sorrows in beer  
Stand up, my German people [Volk]  
You went through a lot of suffering  
It is your homeland, your country, your death  
Germany needs you in its misery  
It is time to make a noise, time to stand up  
If Germany were ours once again  
A gleam of hope – it would be wonderful. “]

The variety of styles on the CDs is remarkable. This one reminds me of left-wing songwriter festivals or the peace movement. The lyrics are rather subtle compared to other extremist right-wing songs. However, there is a xenophobic allusion in this part of the song and it gets more explicit in the rest of it. In general the website is an example of what I called “hate in disguise”.

- Music is an important part of the “adventurous world of right-wing extremism”, the mix of propaganda and free time activity. On the web a modern, appealing look is important particularly to attract young people. Interactive elements create an entertaining environment. A group that combines both is based in the centre of the German federal state of Hessen and calls itself “Nazis in Mittelhessen”, as they say a “youth project” of the action office Mittelhessen, which is a regional neo-Nazi-network. The fact that they explicitly call themselves “Nazis” is rare and in this context it is used to gain attention, German neo-Nazis prefer the word “national socialists” and more and more often they stress the word “socialists”. On the “Nazis in Mittelhessen”-website you can listen to music, watch videos, flyers and posters and contact the authors if you “feel like going to a concert, a party or a demonstration on the weekend”.
- This is NS-Media.info – the “nationalist YouTube”, as someone called it in a Neo-nazi-forum. One of the films you can download is called “Our beloved Führer Adolf Hitler”. The

ideas and the pictures are obviously old – the technology of the website is state of the art.

- The next website was created by an anonymous person. It is quite obviously illegal according to German law. The usage of the Hitler-Portrait is and so is the usage of the “Horst Wessel Song” even without the lyrics. In one of the texts the message becomes even more explicit: “Germans out to total war against the wog republic [Kanake is a slang insult mainly for Turkish people]. Do you want total war? As Mr. Goebbels asked in former times: Do you want total war?? So we have to ask you today, if it is still possible to be German in such a Germany!!!” The content of this page is beyond discriminatory, it promotes violence, it is primitive in many ways. However, the page is not quite relevant to our work. The person responsible is probably German, but the author seems to be a single person. There is no indication that an organization is involved. Moreover the provider is not based in Germany, so even for the law enforcement agencies prosecution is practically impossible.
- The last example: The website of an organization called “Citizens’ Movement Pro Cologne”. The organization appealed to the administrative court recently to stop their observation by the department for protection of the constitution. The court rejected their appeal, because of an ongoing xenophobic agitation of the organization and contacts to groups that follow extremist objectives more openly. “Pro Cologne”

has got four seats in the local parliament. The flyer that you can download on the website represents one of their main issues: the planned building of a mosque in Cologne. There has been much debate in the city about the mosque and resentment against the building – sometimes mixed with prejudice against Islam in general – has been expressed by quite a few people, some of them are notable people. Pro Cologne stirs resentment against the mosque and Muslim people. Apparently they are aware that the issue is suitable to gain mainstream acceptance. The flyer says: “After the events of 09/11 we have to be alert, particularly in Cologne. In a Hamburg mosque terrorist Mohammed Atta prepared the assault. So far the islamic associations in Cologne have not distanced themselves from the islamic extremists trustworthily. Therefore it is quite possible that the new big mosques will become a dangerous haven for islamic extremists. We don‘t need that in our city!”

These are just some examples where web-users are confronted with discriminatory content in various forms. I perfectly agree with sanctions if the materials are illegal – however, the key factors to deal with the problem are public awareness and media competence. The focus will be on these issues tomorrow. Particularly in a militant democracy extremist websites need attention from both sides: state and civil society. If there is a need to protect and promote democratic values the state alone will not be able to do so. Among many

others it is the task of the departments for protection of the constitution to provide information on extremist right wing ideas, strategies and action – on the internet and elsewhere. Young people are the top target group of the right-wing extremist movement. So information and awareness among young people and their social circles is particularly necessary. This will be a long-term challenge and it will take many organizations and offices to play their roles – if possible not on their own but together with others – in other words: in a network. So last but not least I would like to take this opportunity to say that I thoroughly appreciate the activity of the International Network Against Cyber Hate and I would like to thank my colleagues of jugendschutz.net for great cooperation over the last couple of years.

Thank you very much