

Revised Second Edition

EXIT-Germany

WE PROVIDE THE WAY OUT

De-Radicalization and Disengagement



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WHO WE ARE

EXIT-Germany is an initiative assisting individuals, who want to leave the extreme right-wing movement and start a new life. EXIT-Germany was founded by criminologist and former police detective Bernd Wagner and former neo-Nazi leader Ingo Hasselbach. EXIT-Germany has been working since summer 2000 to provide assistance to dropouts from extreme and violent right-wing environments. Being the first to start such an endeavour in Germany, EXIT-Germany constitutes one of the most experienced and successful programs in de-radicalisation and exit-assistance in the world, looking back to the first de-radicalization experiences by its founder Bernd Wagner starting in 1989. EXIT-Germany since then as been continuously working to help individuals from all back-

grounds, but mainly from highly radicalized milieus (group leaders, terrorists, party leaders) to leave the movement and to develop methods and programs in the field. Since the year 2000 over 500 individual cases have been successfully finished with a recidivism rate of approx. 3%.

The success of EXIT-Germany has been acknowledged by several institutions and authorities, most recently the German government and the European Commission/European Social Fund. A comparative study by the German government between EXIT-Germany and the de-radicalisation program of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (German Internal Intelligence Service), which are the only two projects working nationwide, found that EXIT-Germany achieved a far better success rate (lower recidivism) and an almost four times higher overall number of received and handled cases. In recognition of EXIT-Germany's work, the initiative has been decorated with several awards, such as the Erich Maria Remarque Peace Award 2013 and the Politik Award 2012.



Help To Save Yourself

AIMS

EXIT-Germany helps individuals who want to leave the right-wing radical milieu to develop new perspectives outside the right-wing environment. We arrange contacts, provide practical aid and answer questions regarding personal safety, social problems and individual reappraisal. We will also clarify what may not be feasible. Accordingly, EXIT-Germany aims to counter right-wing extremism and hate crime by assisting in breaking with this scene. Here we would like to emphasize that freedom and dignity of every human being as well as the establishment of the principles of equality and mutual respect are the cornerstone of our work. Thus, we challenge and counter every extremist ideology that rejects these values but actively engage the individual human being. EXIT-Germany aims at offering right-wing extremists different forms of help. Firstly, by providing new perspectives on right-wing extremist movements and ideologies, we attempt to show an alternative world view



and outlook on life. By addressing societal questions, critical reflections arise, which constitute an integral part within the dropout process. In addition, leaving the extreme right-wing movement often comes along with certain risks and dangers. EXIT-Germany, therefore, attempts to provide security and safety to the dropout (e.g. moving nationally/internationally, changing identity or receiving police protection), especially as most of the clients come from long term involvement and high positions within the hierarchy. EXIT becomes a safe haven for the dropout to rely on for any kind of help, as long as these persons are willing to break with their radical ideology and past. Personal reflection is of great importance prior to ultimately leaving right-wing groups.

In order to really 'exit' this scene, dropouts have to cut all connections to their former group. Finally, EXIT-Germany has a large range of institutional and practical contacts, for example, to psychologists or employers. However, EXIT will not provide any financial aid to former radicals and also will not offer protection from judicial persecution. The essential core of EXIT-Germany's philosophy is, that the critical reassessment of the person's past and the dismantling of the radical ideology are absolutely necessary to leave a radical milieu.

Moreover, our goal is to provide the public with information about right-wing extremism; either in form of workshops at

schools or other institutions, presenting our work at conferences, or answering calls or letters with questions regarding right-wing extremism or leaving this scene. For that purpose EXIT-Germany has helped to establish a research division dedicated to the issue, the Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM www.istramo.com) and the world's first peer reviewed journal on de-radicalization (JEX www.journal-exit.de).

Although EXIT-Germany focuses on right-wing extremism, violent extremism is a problem larger than right-wing ideologies. Thus EXIT-Germany is part of a unique NGO network: the Centre for Democratic Culture in Berlin (ZDK) hosting partner organizations addressing for example also Islamic extremism, such as the family counselling program HAYAT for the relatives of "Foreign Fighters" since 2011. In addition, Exit cooperates with similar organizations in the field world wide.



STEREOTYPES & CLICHÉS

Stereotypical thinking constitutes an integral part of right-wing extremist world views but becomes also apparent in attitudes towards neo-Nazi groups within democratic societies. Accordingly, when unemployment rates increase, university places become scarce and perspectives for the future lacking, people start to question the causes for this development. To blame immigrants and the multicultural society is very easy. Rhetoric that makes use of nostalgia often justifies these ideas, and consequently renders right-wing ideologies attractive in their attempt to 'safeguard the German nation'. These ideas may generate a vi-

olent attitude towards anything and anybody that is not considered part of the nationalist project. Accordingly, EXIT attempts to argue against these convictions and open right-wing extremists' eyes for the positive aspects of a diverse society.

However, EXIT also encounters other forms of stereotypical thinking within democratic societies directed against the radical milieu. One of these stereotypes is the idea that right-wing extremists are always male, grew up in broken families, are socially deprived and originate from Eastern Germany. Based on more than a decade of practical experience and over 500 finished de-radicalization cases, EXIT-Germany affirms that these are indeed solely stereotypes that have only a marginal meaning in reality. In fact, right-wing extremist groups rather mirror the diversity within society. All socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. university students, teachers, lawyers, police officers, social workers, doctors) are represented, as are women, children and entire families. Even though the majority remains male, the active involvement of women in influential positions as well as the appeal of right-wing extremist organizations should not be underestimated. In addition, the development of second and third generation neo-Nazi families is now becoming a common phenomenon in Germany. This severely affects the scope of the problem of right-wing extremism. EXIT, therefore, also offers family counselling and exit-assistance to parents who want to leave the movement, to reach a broader part

of society. Furthermore, we have been involved in publically addressing problems with German family law related to right-wing extremism. For example, there has been no debate at all about problems faced by mothers or fathers who want to leave the right-wing extremist scene with their children, despite the former partner remaining active in the scene and being severely threatened by them.

In addition, EXIT-Germany has learned that the regular use of violence stems from extreme ideologies and not, as often thought, one's personal background. Moreover, the use of violence has changed over the past 20 years in an essential way, as the case of the National Socialist Underground (NSU) has shown. A highly strategic and clandestine form of right-wing terror has developed over the years



with very skilled and determined highly radicalized individuals. Statistically 2-3 violent hate crimes are committed in Germany every day and since 1990 an estimated number of 184 persons have been killed with an extreme right-wing motive with over 700 cases of attempted or completed murder under reinvestigation after the NSU discovery. Without recognizing this development as well as the importance of ideology underlying these movements, the complex problem cannot be understood or tackled effectively.

EXIT-Germany understands itself as an essential part of the national counter-terrorism architecture – to be specific: as the civil society part of it. To help highly radicalized group leaders to leave the movements destroys internal hierarchies, sometimes to the extent that whole groups collapse. The group constantly needs to explain to the remaining members the event and usually does so by denouncing the former comrades as corrupt or psychological unstable. However, they can not explain, why the ideology or group was not able to detect these “deficiencies” earlier or cure them. Thus, the event of continued exits forces the radical milieu to stay in an “explanatory drift”, which prevents it from settling down and reproduce more effectively.



RESEARCH

The study and analysis of new developments and phenomena within right-wing extremism with high scientific standards are key objectives of EXIT-Germany. Therefore, we make use of particular analytical skills, insights and experience from our work in order to carry out research projects with various scientific partners. We can assist not only through archival research, advice and networking with established professionals, but also by conducting individual analyses together with our experienced case managers, academic experts and the 'working group of former right-wing extremists'. This combination of scientific and practical expertise in collaboration with dropouts with unique insights results in



EXIT-Germany's particular scientific and analytical insight. To combine the research efforts and coordinate with other fields and partners, EXIT-Germany has founded the Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM www.istra-mo.com) in 2012 and the world's first peer reviewed journal on de-radicalization: JEX www.journal-exit.de

Archive

Over the past decade, EXIT-Germany has accumulated an enormous range of primary and secondary sources in regard to right-wing extremism. These include books, magazines, music records, stickers, flyers, posters, clothing and interviews with dropouts conducted by EXIT. For years it has been the aim of EXIT to make this archive accessible online for the general public and to use the materials we gathered over the years to the fullest. Solely at EXIT, primary sources stemming directly from right-wing extremist dropouts can be analyzed and contextualized regarding political, economic, social and cultural aspects. In many cases, dropouts were involved in archiving their materials; assisted in making it public and shared knowledge on the meanings, histories, and makers of the diverse range of materials. As a result through its work with right-wing extremist dropouts, EXIT aims at establishing the largest archive in Germany that provides access to a collection of German and English material.



EXIT-ASSISTANCE

EXIT-Germany does not actively search for dropouts; the initiative to leave the scene comes from individuals themselves. We support people who want to turn away from right-wing extremism completely, and do anything in our power to assist their exit process. Anyone can contact us via phone, e-mail, text message and/or letters. However, the first step to reach out to EXIT is psychologically important to us. It shows a genuine motive to leave the environment. We do not think that actively contacting and persuading individuals to leave the movement would be very successful. Indeed this approach would also be morally questionable, as EXIT includes the ideological change as a core in the de-radicalization process.

WHAT IS 'EXIT' FOR US?

An 'exit' is considered completed by us when a critical reflection, reassessment as well as successful challenge of the old ideology have taken place. Thus, 'exit' to us means more than simply leaving a party or group.

It also goes beyond changing the aesthetics of expression or refraining from violence. An exit is successful when the fundamental ideologies and purposes of the previous actions have been resolved.

CASE MANAGEMENT

We have case managers at EXIT, who help dropouts going through the process of starting a new life. The duration of this process varies and depends on each individual, yet, on average it takes about two to three years. Every case is specifically tailored to the individual, but follows the general guidelines of the following model. This method was invented by Bernd Wagner, who has more than 20 years of practical experience in the field of political extremism.

Making the Decision

Doubts about the right-wing extremist ideology or future prospects in the scene might be entertained years before EXIT is being contacted for the first time. A turning point is reached and results in the personal decision to break with right-wing extremism. Initial communication with EXIT-Germany takes place; mails and letters are exchanged, personal meetings scheduled, trust tested, scenarios prepared and practical issues preparing the actual dropout from a clients' group discussed

Leaving the Scene

The decision is followed by an entire break with the right-wing extremist scene, extensively prepared and discussed beforehand. This is always a complex procedure, and extremely dependent on the specific case. Due to EXIT having assisted dropouts for such a long time we have the experience, knowledge and contacts to successfully help clients to exit their scene. During this period, important questions are addressed: what is my identity? Will I be safe? How will I find work? Where will I live? How will my social life change? And what are the



perspectives after my involvement in the scene? In almost all cases leaving the scene means leaving behind social networks, including friends, partners and sometimes family. Dropouts who find themselves in the difficult position of having to start over on their own, have always the EXIT-team to rely on for social support. Additionally, EXIT-Germany plays an essential part in psychological assistance as well as regarding more practical issues such as ensuring protection of data privacy. These forms of protection are of utmost importance in order to prevent revenge or oppression by ex-comrades.

Restructuring

With the decision to leave the right-wing extremist scene behind, restructuring of a new life commences. Gaining control in regard to potential suppression and life threatening situations, a feeling of freedom arises; the product of hard work together with EXIT. EXIT provides appropriate, systematic assistance to handle the situation. Case management also includes help with coming to terms with the past, the right-wing ideology and criminal actions. This also includes finding new ways to support for one's life, new options for education, employment and social environments. It might include workshops in schools with students, media projects, publications, participation in research projects and similar activities fostering the personal reassessment of one's past ideology.

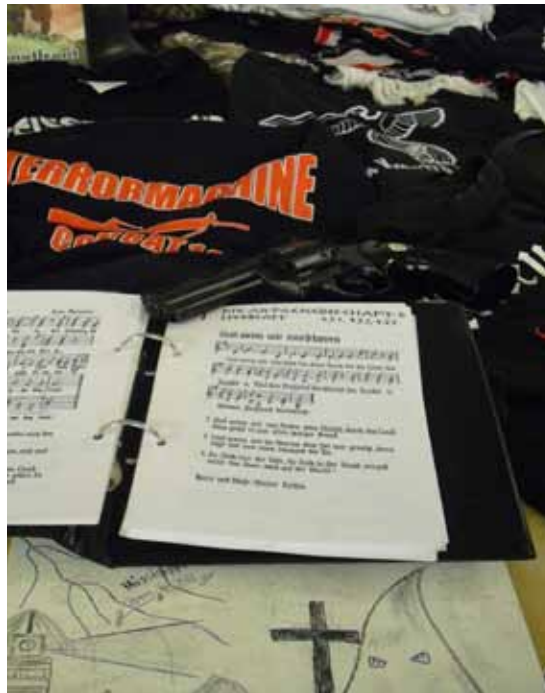
Family Counselling

EXIT-Germany also counsels families affected by right-wing extremism and analyzes critical situations. We create new scenarios to make opportunities available and counter helplessness and anxieties. Likewise we help to disentangle family members from the scene. We establish contacts to former right-wing extremists and accompany the process to motivate right-wing adolescents in avoiding or leaving the movement. We counsel teachers, policemen, institutions, individuals and anyone who is in need of advice.



DISCARDING EXTREME RIGHT- WING IDEOLOGIES

EXIT-Germany is one of the few organizations in this field that specifically target the ideological aspects of right-wing extremist thinking. This is an essential part of leaving the scene, which is only possible by also taking a critical stance towards the ideology that dominated the former life. Opinions, emotions, interests and actions were motivated by right-wing extremist thinking and being part of a larger 'movement' with a 'national mission'. This highly internalized collective identity was a central part of making sense of the world and formulate the appropriate answers to any problem encountered in life. Consequently leaving a radical group or milieu without critically dealing with the underlying ideology is simply not a complete break with the radical milieu. It is not easy to find a new position within the democratic society, e.g. in regard to finding a job or starting all over with education. Many people hold onto the idea: once a Nazi, always a Nazi. A strong will and conviction to take a new path is absolutely necessary and will result in a successful reintegration into our diverse society.



PREVENTION

EXIT-Germany combines intervention and prevention work, using the unique insights gained and biographies encountered during the de-radicalization work. With workshops by former right-wing extremists in schools on different topics (e.g. music, groups, entry and exit processes) the students get a close contact to highly credible persons and their stories, being much more effective

in countering the appeal of extremist groups and lifestyles than presentations by individuals who had no personal connection to the respective group or scene. EXIT-Germany also trains teachers, police officers, lawyers, social workers and anyone who is in need of specialized knowledge about right-wing extremist groups, ideologies and radicalization processes. Convinced that only an intimate understanding of the inherent logic and psychology of extremist ideologies and groups can establish effective prevention methods and programs, EXIT provides this knowledge and understanding of how exactly these extremist groups reproduce and what exactly lies behind the appeal to adolescents.

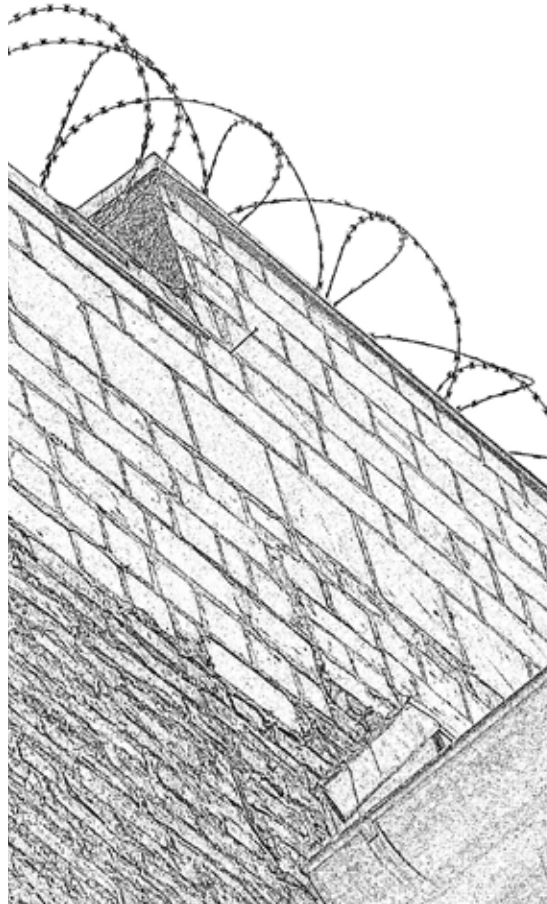


EXIT AND PRISON

Right-Wing Extremism in Prison

There is no concrete data on the proportion of right-wing extremists who are convicted and imprisoned. What we know is that right-wing extremist groups closely monitor their members or 'comrades', know their whereabouts and, consequently immediately realize when someone attempts to leave the scene. For this reason security is an essential aspect in our dropout work, and might also be relevant in work in prisons.

There are inmates who continue to spread right-wing propaganda in prisons or establish political extremists groups. Due to the exceptional environment in prison, right-wing extremists groups might have a strong influence on other prisoners. The feeling of powerlessness and injustice by the law as well as structural and personal discrimination or violence in prison can result decreasing trust in the state and growing support for various forms of propaganda. Especially the search for power and control combined with the



fascination for the right-wing extremist collectivism render these groups attractive. Moreover, many inmates also use the time to further ideologically educate themselves or train their bodies to resemble the masculine and warlike ideals of the scene. Breaking with the scene while imprisoned is extremely difficult since social control is very strong and the possibility to contact EXIT case managers limited. Consequently, these difficulties can only be overcome through persistence and resilience.

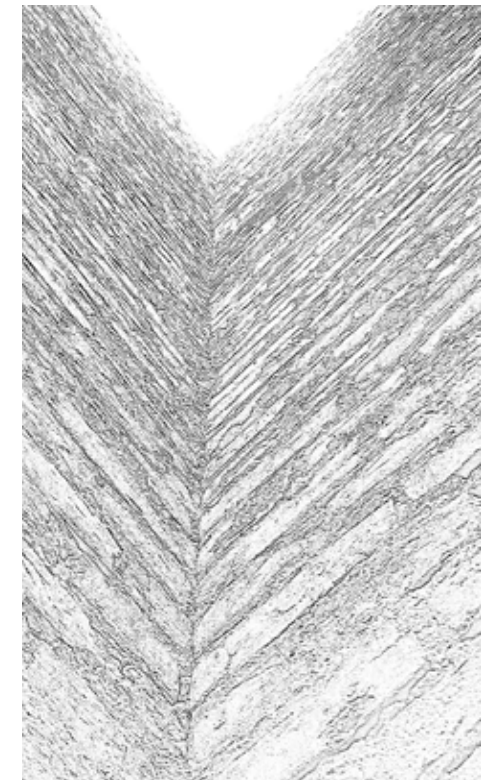
Dropout Assistance in Prison

The assistance that EXIT offers prisoners follows a slightly different logic. Also in prison, EXIT takes a passive role and the initiative for a contact needs come from prisoners themselves when they are considering dropping out. Generally, the process for prisoners does not differ much, however, since there are more obstacles to the contact between the dropout and EXIT, some practical aspects vary.

Firstly, the first contact is often not made via phone but rather through letters. There is also the possibility that the initial communication with EXIT is channelled through a social worker or tutor. This is particularly useful in situations where persons find it difficult to articulate their personal thoughts and feelings in writing. After the inmate made the first step, the individual will receive a letter with important questions about the respective past in the right-wing extremist scene and what motivates him or her to distance themselves from it. Subsequently, a meeting can be arranged as soon as the prison has responded to the letter. However, a further difficulty is that the EXIT team might only gets the chance to meet the dropout 2-4 times a year, especially with prisoners incarcerated for terrorist or homicide offences, instead of on a monthly basis. Hence, the majority of communication has to be realized by exchanging letters. EXIT-Germany also

organizes discussion rounds for inmates with a right-wing extremist orientation on their respective world views.

Besides focussing on assistance in prison, EXIT also draws attention to the period prior to the prison sentence as well as after the release. In addition, the training of prison staff increases the sensibility, awareness and self-reflection regarding political extremism. EXIT-Germany offers this kind of training and shares significant knowledge on how to deal with right-wing extremism in concrete practice.



PROJECTS

EXIT-Germany has initiated a wide range of projects to spread the work and aims across society and extremist groups, but more importantly to provide help to anyone who has questions about, problems with, or interest in right-wing extremism and leaving the scene.

Operation Trojan T-Shirt

‘Operation Trojan T-Shirt’ evolved in cooperation with an advertisement agency in order to target the neo-Nazi scene directly. On August 6th 2011 t-shirts showing a skull with the text ‘Hardcore Rebels’ and a flag of the Free Forces (militant neo-Nazi groups copying left wing strategies and methods) were distributed for free at a rightwing rock festival (‘Rock for Germany’) in Gera, which was organized by the nationalist party NPD in Thuringia. The surprise effect became visible after having washed the T-shirt once. Our message appeared: ‘What your T-shirt can do, you also can do – We help you to free yourself from right-wing extremism. EXIT-Germany’. The goal was to increase the awareness and popularity of EXIT-Germany in the scene



and to particularly target the youths that have not yet firmly settled in the right-wing extremist scene. We are very well aware of the fact that this project does not have an immediate effect, however after the operation the number of persons contacting EXIT and asking for help to leave the movement tripled. In addition, when thinking about leaving the scene, a right-wing extremist might remember us later on. Our “Operation Trojan T-shirt” has been the most successful project in a range of Trojan flyers, postcards and podcasts distributed by EXIT.



Pictures of Life

Even though dropouts face similar problems, individual motives to leave the right-wing extremist scene vary to a huge degree. Equipped with a disposable camera, we asked some formers to artistically capture their changing point in life and what motivated them to leave the scene. Portraying their struggles with the past, present and future, this project also fuelled important discussions on worldviews. The pictures were discussed and rearranged by university students, who created a mobile exhibition out of the pictures together with texts written by the formers.

Working Group of former Right-Wing Extremists

In a continuous working group, former right-wing extremists can discuss their political extremist past and leaving behind dehumanizing and violent worldviews. In light of exit-oriented youth work, former Neo-Nazi’s become active in discussions with right-wing oriented youths in order to motivate them to avoid or leave the neo-Nazi scene. With their unique insights, they help to create new media projects and give advice for further research.



Deine Freiheit...
...für die es sich lohnt zu kämpfen

Du findest keine Freiheit in den Ketten einer Ideologie, die Dich und Deine Persönlichkeit einschränkt.
 Findest Du Freiheit in einer Kameradschaft, in der Du nur solange Akzeptanz findest, wie Du nach dem nationalsozialistischen Weltbild funktionierst?
 Was bringen Dir Zwänge und menschenverachtende Ansichten, wenn sie Dich Abseits einer offenen Welt bringen?
 Schau Dir deine Musik und Kleidung an, ist sie nicht nur die Kopie eines bunten Lifestyles? Geklaut aus allen möglichen Kulturen und Subkulturen der Welt?



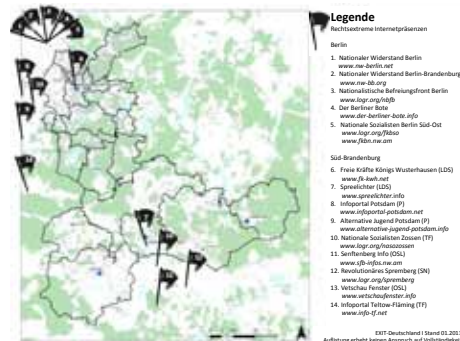
Community Coaching

We counsel institutions, communities, governments and individuals in setting up deradicalization and disengagement programs and strategies. We've worked - nationally and internationally - with smaller municipalities as well as large cities. The counselling ranges from individual assessments to formulation and execution of strategies and projects.

Local civil society institutions, networks and projects are of utmost importance in countering extremism. Systematic and effective action, however, also requires an analysis of the concrete problem situation, the options for intervention as well as the accompaniment and assistance of practitioners in order to avoid uncoordinated activism and the deterioration of social energy and motivation. This analysis, support and monitoring is being provided by the 'Community Coaching' of the Centre for Democratic Culture (Zentrum Demokratische Kultur ZDK). The methodology of 'Community Coaching' of the ZDK is an offer to communities with all their various actors to strengthen processes of democratization. It attempts to raise awareness of anti-democratic 'threats' within a particular community and to establish local networks, comprising various practitioners and institutions, in order to promote and strengthen democratic structures. The general goal of 'Community Coaching' is to provide respective communities with scientific analysis, coordi-

nation of civil society practise and political counselling. The ZDK thereby sees itself as independent, external partner of local engagement while generating a common process, which identifies the crucial local difficulties as well as sustainable perspectives and opportunities for democratic developments.

Prerequisite for any involvement for the ZDK is an impulse or inquiry by a person of the local community. Together with the ZDK team an initial clarification on the desires, requirements and expectations of the local employer/sponsor is essential. Conceptual action first and foremost requires a common general understanding of the phenomena at hand. Thus, the first goal of the 'Community Coaching' process is the generation of a



concrete analysis of the local situation. After this empirical depiction, the ZDK advises different local actors on how these problems can be targeted and how long-term engagement and preventative approaches for safeguarding and strengthening democratic structures can be set up most effectively. Through the 'Community Coaching', local initiatives and institutions are being brought together and strengthened in developing long-term options for action. Net-

working, the organization of discussion rounds and trainings as well as thematic publications serve as main tools throughout the process.

Though having been developed to target right-wing extremism, 'Community Coaching' has been already applied in the realm of Islamic extremism as well.

For publications and the most up to date information please see our websites:

www.exit-deutschland.de | www.facebook.com/exit-deutschland
www.zentrum-demokratische-kultur.de | www.hayat-deutschland.de

Further important websites:

www.journal-exit.de | www.istramo.com

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