

CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

GERMANY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Right-wing extremism and xenophobia are again clearly noticeable in Europe. Here negative attitudes to “the other” are, as a phenomenon, not restricted to individual countries. Rather, it is accurate to speak of a “nationalistic Internationale”. What is the situation in Germany? What characterises right-wing extremism

& xenophobia here – that is, how might the two aspects be defined? How is “the other” constructed, what are the “ingredients” for this view? What cultural, social and lifestyle-related opinions are dominant? To what extent is the strengthening of right-wing extremist and xenophobic positions a reaction to the financial crisis, the destabilisation of the euro project, the very perceptible gap between rich and poor, indeed to what extent do they respond to the economic & societal consequences of an economic system that is based on the exploitation of human & natural resources, of mankind & environment? How might democratic values, attitudes and ways of behaving be promoted such that racism & xenophobia are deprived of the soil they grow on? What contribution might religious communities make?

The following explores the situation of right-wing extremism and xenophobia in Germany, Europe and [the satellite town] Berlin-Marzahn. For this, reference is made first to a) the study “Fragile middle – hostile conditions” that was issued in 2014 by Ralf Melzer on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung [a social-democratic think tank] and b) to the 2011 survey “The disparagement of Others. A description of the European situation with regard to intolerance, prejudices and discrimination”. Finally, a report is given of the findings from interviews that were undertaken in the district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf of Berlin in April and May 2015.

II. On the study “Fragile middle – hostile conditions”

The study “Fragile middle – hostile conditions. Right-wing extremist attitudes in Germany in 2014” by Andreas Zick and Anna Klein focusses on “Fractures of a fragile middle”. The further topic is attitudes that were examined using the [sociological] concepts “Group-focused enmity” and “Market-shaped extremism”.

The emphasis was not on a description of the state of a society on the basis of economic or demographic factors. The authors directed their view rather to the much more complex and multilayered social condition. Centre-stage of their interest was the principle of freedom & equality of human beings that is anchored in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany: “The credo of equality is the most sensitive criterion of the social state of a democracy. The issue is the question of integration or disintegration, recognition or disrespect, and opportunities or discrimination.” (page 12)

The survey is based on telephone interviews of 1,915 German citizens selected to be representative. The data was collected from 1,007 women (52.6%) and 905 men (47.3%). Their ages ranged between 16 and 95, with the average being 49.9.

How is “extremist right” (or: far right) defined? According to the authors, it is assumed that “... right-wing extremism, at core, is an ideology of differential value, which is to say it draws its ideological legitimization – in contrast to left-wing extremism – from self-revaluation by denigrating others.” (Pages 9-10) Right-wing extremism is accompanied by thought patterns that are described as extreme: „.... radical economism, hostility to Europe, hostility to democracy, misanthropy – often in connection with the approval of violence and willingness to become violent.” (page 10)

A key finding of the study is that extreme right-wing attitudes have actually declined in recent years. The indicator “far right leanings” stood at 2.4% in 2014 (2.4% east, 2.5% west). This indicator refers to the playing down of National Socialism, the endorsement of a right-wing authoritarian dictatorship, ideological social Darwinism, hostility to foreigners, chauvinism and anti-semitism (Pages 32-48).

But the study was not only directed at obtaining statements on right-wing extremism located politically at the far right of society. The subject was, rather, the societal centre. How might this centre be defined? It is, the authors assert, “a difficult political construct” (page 16). Distinctions are drawn according to both socio-economic and political criteria. Of relevance is also where the respondents position themselves. On this basis, the middle classes includes persons that, in terms of their social and economic status, may be classified neither in the lower nor in the upper income categories. Politically speaking, the “Middle” – the centre ground – is constituted by leaving out groupings and parties of the left-wing and right-wing spectrum (pages 16, 41). For this reason, conceptions of the centre ground in politics and society – and ideas about values and order – are revealing whenever the subject is the mentality of a society. Therefore the researchers expanded the horizon to encompass more subtle forms of discrimination. These are, *inter alia*, subsumed in the syndrome of “group-focused enmity” (i.e. hostility to specific groups). The authors refer to attitudes that demonstrate that, for the respondents, not all people and groups are of equal value.

According to the study, “group-focused enmity” is in decline, but still widespread. Negative assertions were made very often against the long-term unemployed (48%), and resentment was registered against asylum-seekers (44%), Sinti & Roma (27%) and Muslims (18%). 38% of the respondents spoke in favour of vested rights, i.e. the idea that priority (precedence) should be given to those persons or groups who have been in place for a long time in contrast to new arrivals. Traditional and so-called secondary anti-semitism had declined in June 2014 in comparison with 2004.



Image: The syndrome of Group-focused Enmity in Germany in 2014, Study “Fragile Middle”, chart 4.1, p. 64

The researchers enquired furthermore about attitudes that they subsume under the concept “Market-shaped extremism”. Here they pursued the “question of whether and to what extent neoliberal normalcy opens up the way for general entrepreneurial thinking and the evaluation of people in terms solely of cost-use criteria, and whether they therewith make the centre ground in Germany, as it were, fragile, i.e. susceptible to differential valuations.” (Page 103) In particular, they posed questions about entrepreneurial universalism, competition ideology, and economic values. In reply to the question whether progress is only possible via competition, the researchers received assent of 62% (page 106). Almost every second respondent shared the widespread principle of self-optimisation, and this applied, in particular, to people that see themselves in the middle or the upper classes. People who adopt this perspective would also tend to assess people on cost-use criteria (page 109). According to the authors, feeling threatened causes susceptibility for thinking that asserts the differential value of people.

Statements were taken on the mentality of German society and its centre ground in particular, and also on attitudes towards democracy, Europe and handling right-wing extremism.

The authors come to the conclusion that there is broad assent to fundamental doubt about the democratic parties and the political elites. Almost 75% of the respondents also found the statement right that: “In the final analysis it is business that makes decisions in our country and not politicians.” 74 % also gave their assent to the statement: “There is too little protest in Germany against social misery”

Attitudes towards the European Union and to Europe have deteriorated markedly since the banking and financial markets crisis of 2008 and the following years. Although 76% of respondents expressed themselves positively on the European Union, 45% were in favour of a stronger focus on Germany. They come to the conclusion that the criticism of the EU is accompanied by xenophobic and far right attitudes.

How should right-wing extremism be combatted? Nearly 83% of respondents gave their assent to the view: “Something must be done urgently against right-wing extremism.”

However, the statement “The best thing is to ignore the far right” was given assent by 49%. (Summary, page 9)

CONCLUSION

The researchers note that far right attitudes have declined although more subtle forms of discrimination remain widespread. These were registered using the concepts of group- focused enmity and market-shaped extremism, and also via attitudes towards democracy, the European Union and handling of right-wing extremism. The researchers infer from this that “There are no far right orientations without misanthropy but there is misanthropy without allegiance to extreme right-wing parties, organisations or milieus. Group-focused enmity unites people right across society and is also a passage to many other fractures.” (pages 18-19) The danger of right-wing extremism is greatest where a) group-focused enmity is especially strong; b) there is overlap between the convictions of far right milieus and the population / the centre-ground of society; and c) citizens do not (wish to) perceive right-wing extremism or oppose it. (page 32)

The research approach of the authors is to enquire about ideas that “precede” far right attitudes and work in favour of these. Their concern is the normative power of attitudes that exclude and that question the equal value of human beings. Their attention was therefore directed at phenomena of the “establishment of a normalcy that is destructive for groups and persons because it attacks their guaranteed equality or else does not allow this to emerge. The subject was the normalisation of enmity (i.e. hostility, misanthropy) to a degree such that disintegration and discrimination against groups in society appears to be “normal” and evades the suspicion of extremism, of appearing deviant.” (pages 13-14)

III. “The disparagement of others.” Intolerance, prejudices and discrimination in Europe

How do the findings about the fragile centre-ground and misanthropic attitudes compare at a European level? This topic was addressed in 2011 in the publication “Intolerance, Prejudice and Discrimination: A

European Report” issued by the social-democratic think- tank Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

The authors examined and contrasted the phenomena of group-focused enmity in France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Hungary and Germany. They directed their interest at attitudes towards groups that are perceived as “different” and “not normal” and that are associated with a low social status. In particular they examined xenophobic, racist, anti-semitic, anti-islamic, sexist and homophobic orientations. They ascertained that group-focused enmity is widespread in the countries examined, i.e. that it is a Europe-wide phenomenon. This was not a matter merely of political groups at the margins, but was located in the centre of society. For instance, about 50% of the respondents of all countries were of the opinion that there were too many immigrants and they characterised Islam as a religion of intolerance. Similarly, almost half of the respondents were in favour of the native (i.e. incumbent, indigenous) population being granted priority for jobs in times of crisis. None the less, almost 70% of respondents saw immigrants as representing an enrichment of their own culture. About a third of the respondents considered that there was a natural hierarchy between people of different ethnic origins. More than half were, furthermore, in favour of a traditional distribution of roles between the sexes, and they expressed sexist attitudes. 17% of respondents in the Netherlands, and 88% of those in Poland, rejected equal rights for homosexuals. Differences were ascertained between countries with respect to the extent of antisemitism, sexism and homophobia. The disparagement of other groups and people was lowest in the Netherlands – excepted opposition to Islam – and a high rejection of all minorities was observed in Hungary and Poland.

The following findings are also of interest:

- a) With age, group-focused enmity increases but is less pronounced among the well-educated and well-to-do – with the exception of Italy.
- b) In all countries the majority of respondents expressed the sentiment that politicians did not listen to them. Those who situated themselves more on the right or felt themselves to have no political power tended, on average, to greater group-focused enmity.
- c) As explanatory factors for group-focused enmity in the countries surveyed, the researchers name: 1. a basic attitude that is authoritarian and in favour of hierarchies; 2. the feeling of being threatened by immigrants; 3. the feeling of a lack of orientation in the present time; and 4. a lower income as well as the subjective perception of being disadvantaged.

The survey also addressed the topic of exit strategies. The researchers speak of “protective factors” that contribute to countering group-focused enmity or preventing its emergence. They mention a) trust in other people; b) the feeling of being able to form firm friendships; c) contact with immigrants; and d) a positive attitude to diversity. They emphasise that religiosity does not protect against group-focused enmity. Above all, though, they see overcoming or preventing group-focused enmity as a political task: Citizens are not “fundamentally uninterested” in political events, but they see themselves as being disconnected from the “sphere” of politics. If diversity is to obtain broad acceptance, then the “needs for political involvement and participation of all members of society” must be taken seriously and the political process shaped accordingly. (All details from the press communiqué and summary of the main results of the study by Zick, Andreas et al.)

IV. The survey on right-wing extremism and xenophobia in Marzahn-Hellersdorf

In the survey for the Berlin suburb of Marzahn-Hellersdorf the focus was on attitudes towards right-wing extremism and xenophobia. In April and May 2015, 205 persons (69% women and 31% men) were surveyed at different places in the district which included Alice-Salomon-Platz, the handout venue of the Berliner Tafel food charity, socio-cultural centres, etc. The respondents received a standardised questionnaire that they filled out themselves or else they were taken through.

The questionnaire used had a number of extra questions compared to the version of the Turkish partner and coordinator. One matter was the topic of “Definition of racism & xenophobia”. The basic statement “One group of people are thought to possess certain negative characteristics” was adopted and an inference was made

to stand “above” this group or to be superior to them. The following statements were added: “Racism is based on drawing conclusions from the biological features of a group (e.g. skin colour) to the character of people belonging to this group.” “Racist thoughts serve the justification of relationships of dominance (groups of people oppress other people or groups of people)” ; and “All people can be racist independently of their education, income or origin.”

Similarly, there was elaboration of the concept of “xenophobia” such that the respondents could adopt a position.

The heading “Causes of racism and xenophobia” was expanded to include three aspects: a) experience of social exclusion and resulting humiliation; b) fear for one’s employment; and c) fear of losing one’s way of life (customs, habits).

Under the heading “Proposals on overcoming racism & xenophobia” the following two statements were added: “More education is needed to develop understanding for people who are different,” and “Anyone can practise respect, tolerance, and courage.”

The respondents were invited to rate their attitudes on a scale ranging for all questions from “agree entirely”; “agree”, “neither agree nor reject”, to “reject entirely”.

What were the results of the survey?

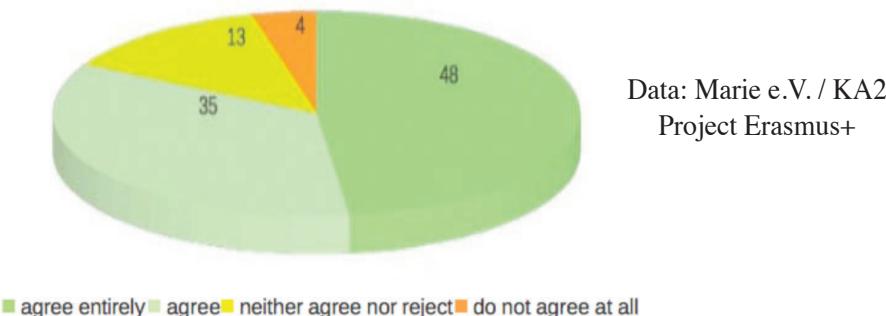
74% agreed with the statement that all people can be racist – independently of education, income or origin. For 57%, racist thoughts serve the justification of relationships of dominance. Somewhat more than half, namely 54%, agreed with the definition that racism is based on the idea that biological features allow an inference to be made to the character of a group. A lower number, in turn, shared the view that racism means that one group of people are thought to have certain negative qualities and this led to the self-perception of standing above this group. In an open-ended question, in which the respondents could express further thoughts on the concept of racism, the following statements were made, among others:

“Racism is based on supposed biological features and attributions”; “Racism needs historical continuity”; “Racism can only be exercised by a group of privileged people and in hierarchical power relationships”. One further person noted: “Structural racism, communicated by politics and media.”

Can differences in the answers be ascertained between men and women, or by age and educational level? In the case of gender and age this is not the case. With regard to the connection between educational level and the answers given, it is noticeable that 92% of the unskilled, 77% with a vocational training, 79 % with a polytechnic-level education and 70 % with a university degree agreed completely with the statement: “A nyone can be racist – independently of education, income or origin.”

The definitions of xenophobia given in the questionnaire found broad consent. 80% agreed, or agreed entirely, with the statements: “Xenophobia designates a rejection of everything that is experienced as different, foreign and threatening in comparison with one’s own life” and “Xenophobia is displayed in exclusion, physical attacks, expulsion or destruction of population groups.” With regard to the last statement, the answers gave the following picture:

Xenophobia is seen in exclusion, violent attacks, expulsion or destruction of groups of population:



Under the heading for the open-ended question about further dimensions of xenophobia, among the thoughts observed were the following:

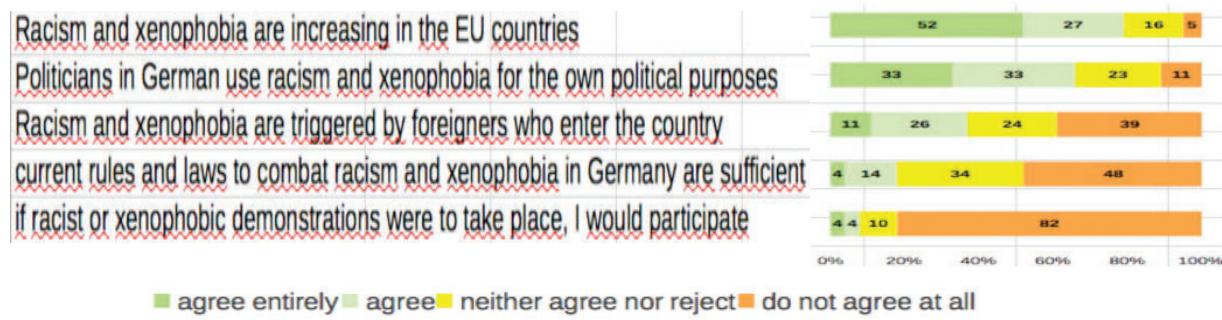
“Xenophobia is also reluctance to accept refugee homes close to where one lives,” “Patriotism and nationalism are the pillars of xenophobia.”

“Seeing migrants only in terms of their usefulness”

“Verbal exclusion, more radically: social Darwinism (with respect to cultures, social customs?)”

There was no difference in the answers according to gender, age or educational level.

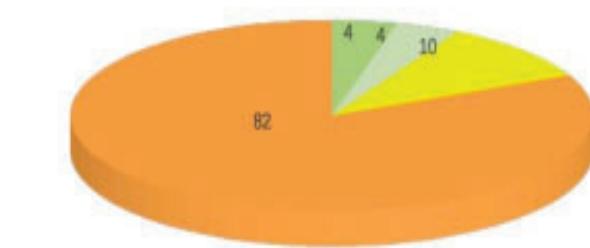
The present situation is clearly seen sceptically with regard to the appearance of racism & xenophobia. 52% of respondents thought that both phenomena were on the increase in the countries of the EU. 33% think that politicians in Germany use racism & xenophobia for their own political purposes. Of note here is a clear difference between men and women: Whereas only 25.8% of the women agreed entirely with this statement, the figure for men was 44.8%.



Data: Marie e.V. / KA2 Project Erasmus+

There were conflicting judgements, especially in the age group 18-25, about the sentence “Racism & xenophobia are triggered by foreigners coming to the country.” Of these 39.6% rejected the statement, but 20.8% gave their assent to it. Here it is of interest to note the connection between answers and educational level: Whereas 6.3% and 4.5% of those qualified to enter university and, respectively, graduates agreed entirely, among unskilled and persons with a specialist skill the figures were 20% and 14.3%.

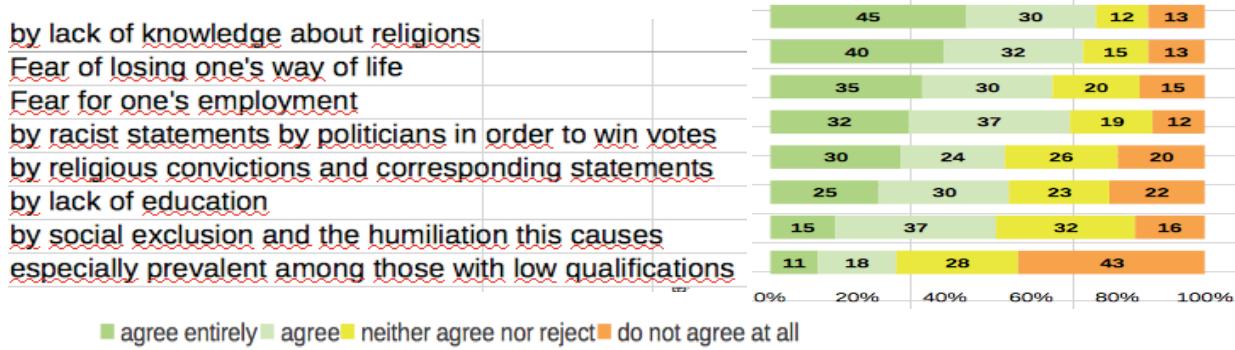
The picture was pleasantly definite in response to the question of whether there was any willingness to participate in racist or xenophobic demonstrations. The majority of 82% said they would not.



Data: Marie e.V. / KA2
Project Erasmus+

■ agree entirely ■ agree ■ neither agree nor reject ■ do not agree at all

The respondents were also asked about possible causes of racism & xenophobia. A large majority, 75%, agreed with the statements that both come from a lack of knowledge about religions (45% agreed entirely, 30% agreed). A major influence on the emergence of racist and xenophobic attitudes was seen in fear of losing one's way of life (72%) and fear for one's employment (65%).



Data: Marie e.V. / KA2 Project Erasmus+

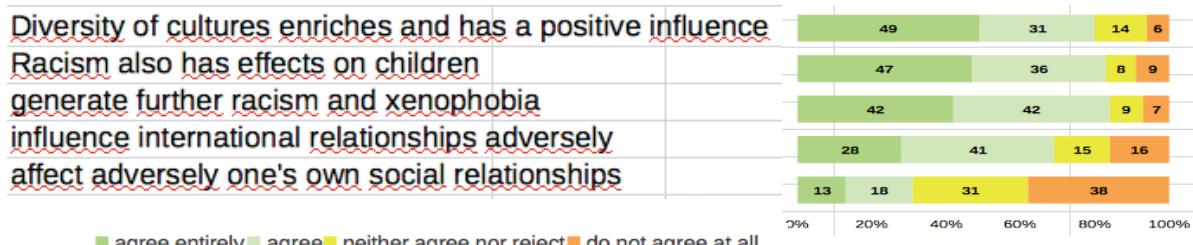
Men and women responded somewhat differently to the statement that racism & xenophobia have their origin in religious convictions. 49.1% of women agreed or agreed entirely whereas the figure for men was 66.1%. If the replies are broken down by respondent age, 63% of those between 36 and 45 and 34% of those 46 and older considered that racism & xenophobia stemmed from religious convictions. This opinion was shared by only 17% of those between 18 and 25 and by 19.4% of those between 26 and 35.

Do racism & xenophobia affect especially people with low levels of education? The answers were definite: 43% said not. 28% neither agreed nor rejected this statement, a figure which might signal a need for clarification or else hesitancy. If one examines the answers in terms of the educational level of the respondents, it is noticeable that 37.5% of those who were unskilled, 61.3% of those with vocational training and 50% of those with a specialist skill reject the statement. On the other hand, 27.9% of graduates and

25.8% of those qualified to attend university considered that racism & xenophobia are unconnected with an educational qualification. It should be noted, though, that of the unskilled, again, 25% considered that racism & xenophobia are especially widespread among people with low qualifications.

48% of unskilled, 59% of those with a vocational qualification and 37% of those with a specialist qualification agreed entirely that racism & xenophobia have their origin in fear for one's employment. Only 17.2% of those qualified to enter university and 7.3% of graduates expressed themselves this way (41% of the latter assented to the statement).

The positive and the destructive aspects are seen clearly in the effects of racism & xenophobia. 80% of respondents agreed with the statement: "The diversity of cultures enriches life and influences the social community in a positive way." (49% agree entirely, 31% agree) It is also considered that racism & xenophobia "spread out", are strengthened and are "transmitted". 83% of respondents thought that racism also has effects on children; 84% thought that racism generated further racism & xenophobia; and that they influence international relationships negatively (69% – the last three figures combine "agree entirely" and "agree").

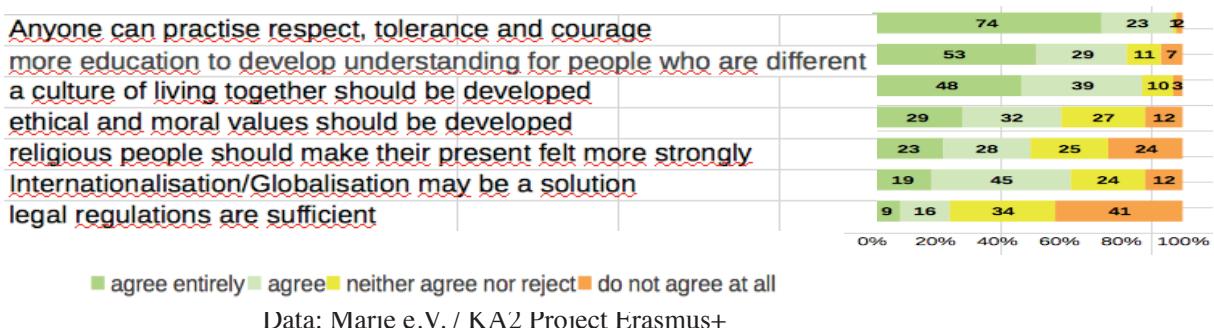


Data: Marie e.V. / KA2 Project Erasmus+

Of note is that young respondents in particular (i.e. between 18 and 25 and between 26 and 35) see racism & xenophobia as having an adverse influence on international relationships. 31% of the former, and nearly 47% of the latter agreed with the statement entirely. Of older cohorts, only 4% of respondents between 36 and 45 shared this view, and 24% of those aged 46 and above. Looking at the connection with educational level, the picture that emerges is as follows: among those qualified to enter university, nearly 43%, and among graduates 48.8% agreed with the statement whereas 20% of unskilled, 10% of those with vocational training and nearly 26% of those with specialist skills gave their assent, in each case “agree” and “agree entirely” combined. Considering now the educational level of those who believe “entirely” that racism & xenophobia generate further racism & xenophobia, the proportion of those qualified to enter university is noticeable at 55%, as too is the proportion of graduates at 48.8%. Among the unskilled the corresponding figure is 33.3%. Among those with vocational training or a specialist skill the proportions are 29.5% and 40% respectively.

What proposals would the respondents support for overcoming racism & xenophobia? The overwhelming majority, namely 74%, were of the opinion that anyone can practise respect, tolerance and courage. 53% considered that more education was needed to develop understanding for other people. Similarly, a large number (48%) of respondents were in favour of developing a culture of living together. Not a few (41%) considered that the legal regulations were insufficient.

The question of whether religiously committed people should be more prominent was judged very differently. Equal proportions of respondents were in favour, rejected this, or were undecided. A not insignificant influence is attributed to the development of ethical and moral values, with 61% agreeing or agreeing “entirely”. Here there is a noticeable difference between the genders. Assent in entirety among women was 36% against 28% among men.



■ agree entirely ■ agree ■ neither agree nor reject ■ do not agree at all

Data: Marie e.V. / KA2 Project Erasmus+

V. Summary

Studies were presented on racism & xenophobia in Germany, Europe and the Berlin district of Marzahn-Hellersdorf. They were based on surveys that were made before the influx of large numbers of refugees that began in the summer of 2015.

It was ascertained that racist attitudes are on the decline in the Federal Republic of Germany. However, phenomena of group-focused enmity and market-shaped extremism are pronounced. This brings the danger that the equal value of all people independently of cultural origin, social status and lifestyle is rejected and that such rejection is increasingly regarded as “normal”. The talk must be a “normalisation” of inequality because the researchers did not address developments at the so-called edge of society, but attitudes in the societal centre ground, i.e. middle class.

“The disparagement of the other” and group-focused enmity (i.e. hostility towards specific groups) can be observed in other countries, too, and so it is a pan-European phenomenon. These include, besides generalising disparagement of Islam and a supposed “natural” hierarchy between people of different cultures, the view that the “traditional” distribution of roles between men and women should be upheld or, rather, re-instated.

The answers given by the respondents in Marzahn-Hellersdorf indicate a high awareness of the problem of racism & xenophobia. This is shown in the statements made when defining the two concepts and their

causes, their effects, and associated therewith the spread of corresponding attitudes. The answers also indicate a political consciousness since one third of respondents assume that racism & xenophobia are used by politicians for their own purposes. In reflecting about the causes, social factors and a lack of knowledge were emphasised. The high assent (80%) given to the statement that the diversity of cultures is an enrichment runs counter to the stereotype associating major portions of the population of the district with extreme right-wing attitudes.

Views on how religious people might contribute to a peaceful and tolerant community were ambivalent. Religions are thought to have a high influence on the development of ethical and moral values. At the same time, just as many respondents were in favour of representatives of communities of faith being more prominent as were against.

The survey results indicate that attitudes in the district are more varied than the usual picture would suggest. Here though it should be remembered that only 205 people were surveyed and that they were not selected to be representative. Nor can it be excluded that only those persons responded who are receptive for surveys and the subject matter concerned.

Therefore it would not be appropriate to use the knowledge obtained about Marzahn- Hellersdorf to refute the findings of the studies on group-focused enmity in Germany and Europe. It would nonetheless be the task of a further more detailed study to verify this. Here a discussion would be in place on the thesis presented by the authors of "Fragile Centre":

"Democratic societies need strong groups that (again and again) set, form and control norms, and ideally do this without the control or the urgings of the state. However, if hostile attitudes become normal in groups that set norms, then this has massive effects on the take-up of anti-democratic ideologies such as are found in right-wing extremist environments and irrespective of their terrorist motivation."

Similarly, attention should be given to the way those social conflicts get ignored that give rise to racism & xenophobia. These include certainly not only the experience of cultural diversity and change, but a perceived gap in social justice. Taking up this thread, it would be appropriate to review the (old) thesis by taking as an example the social reality in Marzahn-Hellersdorf: waves of modernisation, social change and a lack of sense & meaning in capitalist societies give impetus to racist & xenophobic thinking. The further question arises of whether religions can counter such a social lack of meaningfulness. If the answer is in the affirmative, there would be the question of whether this would hide the causes from view rather than revealing them. Religion might in this case actually be a cause of conflict because it is associated with social if not indeed political functions and hopes that cannot be fulfilled by religion alone.

All three surveys show that the respondents are not uninterested in politics. This might also apply to those who do not vote. This provides the opportunity to make racism & xenophobia, in the best scenario, unnecessary – to the extent that the “gap in participation” is taken seriously and democratic involvement for all citizens becomes tangible.

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