

# PRESS RELEASE

ezra - Counselling for victims of right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence in Thuringia

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Erfurt, 10 April 2024

## **ezra specialist counselling centre for victims of violence publishes annual statistics for 2023: Racist violence remains at previous year's very high level - Sonneberg district hotspot of right-wing motivated attacks in Thuringia for the first time**

Today, Wednesday, the specialist counselling centre for victims of violence ezra published its annual statistics for the independent monitoring of right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence in Thuringia for 2023. A total of 147 cases (2022: 186 cases) were registered in which at least 291 people were directly affected or attacked. This puts the number of cases well above the annual average of 117 attacks since the victim counselling centre was established in 2011. With 85 attacks, racist violence remains at the very high level of the previous year and is therefore still the most common motive for the crime. For the first time, the district of Sonneberg has joined the cities of Erfurt and Weimar as a hotspot for right-wing motivated attacks in Thuringia.

Theresa Lauß, a consultant at ezra, has the following comments on the alarming continuity of racist violence in Thuringia: "Following an increase in 2016 and 2017, racist violence has worsened again in recent years. Compared to 2022, there has been a significant increase in attacks on refugee accommodation centres. We see the cause of the renewed increase in violence in a social atmosphere in which racism has been further normalised on the basis of a public debate. The extreme right-wing party AfD is acting as a source of inspiration here, including for politicians of democratic parties." In 2023, ezra once again registered many cases in which children and young people were affected. In total, they were affected in particular by racist violence at least 85 times.

With 20 registered attacks, the district of Sonneberg is a hotspot of right-wing motivated violence for the first time in the independent monitoring of the specialist counselling centre for victims of violence. ezra project manager Franz Zobel sees the cause of the sharp increase in the high approval ratings for the AfD and the success of the extreme right-wing party in last year's district council elections: "It's like looking through a magnifying glass to see how right-wing violence is on the rise wherever perpetrators recognise that their actions have broad support among the population.

The Höcke-wing of the AfD, which has been officially categorised as right-wing extremist, must at least be named as a central support group for right-wing perpetrators of violence. This means that it already poses a concrete threat to the human dignity guaranteed by the Constitution and therefore to the life and limb of all people who are labelled as its enemies." This analysis is supported by a representative study by Prof. Dr. Dancygier from Princeton University. This is the first study to analyse the interactions between hate crime and political processes in Germany and to identify so-called support groups for perpetrators of right-wing motivated attacks. According to the study, almost half of AfD voters support statements such as "xenophobia against refugees is sometimes justified, even if it turns into violence". In addition, the specialist counselling centre for victims of violence is aware of several cases from the past year in which AfD politicians were themselves perpetrators. A recent investigation by the media organisation CORRECTIV has also revealed that the AfD tolerates elected representatives at all levels who have attracted attention through physical, verbal or indirect violence.

In view of the record number of people receiving counselling and the support services provided by the Thuringian counselling centre, Theresa Lauß concludes: "The funding programmes at the federal and state level must now respond and ensure the long-term expansion of ezra by increasing the financial resources and creating regular funding. We are already at a point where we can no longer guarantee a prompt counselling service in all cases. We fear further cuts if the situation worsens, as can be expected this year." The ezra counsellor confirms that this naturally applies to all specialist victim of violence counselling centres that are part of the VBRG. In addition, there is a need to expand further counselling services in the areas of democracy support, anti-discrimination and violence against women and domestic violence.

ezra works under the auspices of re:solut e.V. (Rundum engagiert: solidarische Unterstützung in Thüringen e.V.), an independent organisation of the Protestant Church in Central Germany (EKM). Since April 2011, the counselling centre has been supporting people who have been attacked because the perpetrators assign them to a group of people they reject. The counselling centre for victims is funded by the federal programme "Demokratie leben!" and the Thuringian state programme for democracy, tolerance and cosmopolitanism "DenkBunt".

### **Further information:**

The study "Hate crime supporters are found across age, gender, and income groups and are susceptible to violent political appeals" by Prof. Dr. Dancygier (Princeton University): <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2212757120>

The investigation by CORRECTIV "Gewalt als Alternative": <https://correctiv.org/aktuelles/neue-rechte/2024/04/05/gewalt-als-alternative-14-verurteilte-afd-mandatstraeger-im-amt/>

The VBRG analysis "Besorgniserregende Gewaltbereitschaft bei AfD-Funktionär\*innen":  
<https://verband-brq.de/analyse-gewaltbereitschaft-bei-afd-funktionaer-innen/>

**Note:**

Only those cases are included in the statistics in which a right-wing motive is recognisable on the basis of fixed criteria set as quality standards by the Association of Counselling Centres for Victims of Right-wing, Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence (VBRG) and which are based on the Federal Office of Criminal Investigation's definition of "politically motivated crime - right-wing". Not all cases that are published in the ezra chronicle are included in the statistics and vice versa.