

Press release

Phase 2: Business Democracy Initiative enters new trajectory as Business Council for Democracy (BC4D) programme against online threats and disinformation opens up to 100 Companies

Berlin 22.06.2021 Hate is not an opinion. Fake news is no substitute for careful journalism and science. Democracy in the digital age is taking on a new form and a new approach is needed to strengthen resiliency among adults against outside threats. Under the umbrella of the Business Council for Democracy (BC4D), civil society and companies are uniting to push back against polarisation on the internet.

Pioneers of the sophisticated BC4D training programme, six nationally and globally leading German companies have engaged their employees to identify and counter digital dangers to democracy. The programme is unique in Germany as it explicitly trains and focuses on adults in the workforce. The results of the pilot project reveal that the majority of anonymously surveyed workers want to consciously counter the spread of disinformation and online threats using the tools they have acquired. One participant said after the course: "I didn't realise beforehand how I could contribute to making the net safer myself."

Moving forward: broadening the programme to 100 companies

The project is growing exponentially, now expanding to offer this programme to employees of 100 companies over the next two years. Starting in September, interested companies can again have their employees trained by experienced educators. Participation of employees in this new format of political education is voluntary. Participants are accompanied by experts in interactive webinars over a period of two months, and acquire knowledge and skills for communication on the internet, ranging from dealing with hate comments to classifying information channels and social media formats. These tools have been proven essential as manipulative, false, and even violent, content continues to spread rapidly and virally over the internet. The BC4D training courses have also proven their worth from the standpoint of the participating employers: **All six pilot companies- Evonik, Kion Group, Volkswagen AG, NOMOS Glashütte, UFA and the ALBA Group- want to continue** as partners of BC4D and with their own additional initiatives.

The BC4D is a joint initiative of the Gemeinnützige Hertie-Stiftung, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD Germany gGmbH) and the Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH. It was launched in autumn 2020. Huberta von Voss (Director ISD Germany): "We are very happy to have set a ball rolling for our democracy with our initiative in the business community. The latest report on the protection of the constitution has shown that political violence in our country has risen dramatically.

The flood of manipulated news and hate attacks on the internet is deepening the rifts in our society and distorts election campaigns."

"A strong democracy cannot exist without a healthy culture of debate, both online and offline," says Elisabeth Niejahr, Executive Director of the Gemeinnützige Hertie-Stiftung. "We want to contribute to this with educational offers for adults and at the same time support entrepreneurs who want to do more here. The first experiences show: The willingness is there. These are good prerequisites for a strong network in the BC4D."

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Gemeinnützige Hertie-Stiftung

The work of the Hertie Foundation focuses on two key issues: brain research and strengthening democracy. The foundation's programmes and initiatives provide best-practice examples and inspiration within these areas. The focus is always on people and on making tangible improvements to their living conditions. The foundation was established in 1974 by the heirs of the department stores' owner Georg Karg and is today one of the largest ideologically independent and entrepreneurially unaffiliated foundations in Germany. [Hertie Foundation](#)

Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH

The Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH is one of the large, corporate-affiliated foundations in Europe. In its charitable work, it addresses social issues at an early stage and develops exemplary solutions. To this end, it develops and implements its own projects. It also supports third-party initiatives that fit its goals. The Robert Bosch Stiftung is active in the fields of health, science, education, civil society and international understanding and cooperation. Since its foundation in 1964, the Robert Bosch Stiftung has spent around 1.8 billion euros on its charitable work. [RobertBoschStiftung](#)

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

ISD Global is a London-based international think & do tank with a subsidiary organisation in Berlin (ISD Germany). ISD analyses the digital amplification of polarisation and extremism worldwide. For 15 years, the not-for-profit organisation has been driving the implementation of evidence-based policy and operational responses to these threats and developing sustainable soft power strategies to counter the propaganda machineries of populist and extremist state and non-state actors. Building on innovative analysis, ISD develops projects that help political leaders, businesses, citizens and local influencers protect democracy, their communities or themselves from these threats. [ISDGlobal](#)

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