



Text zum Podcast „Verschwörungsfragen“

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Antisemitismus

***Fighting Digital Dualism as State Commissioner
against Antisemitism***

Folge 50 von
„Verschwörungsfragen“

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Dear friends,

this is the 50th episode of my official podcast „Verschwörungsfragen“ as the State Commissioner against Antisemitism in Baden-Württemberg, recommended by our two main Jewish Communities and confirmed by our Parliament, the Landtag.

And as we got a lot of interest such as serious scientific requests and journalistic inquiries as well as a lot of hate and trolling, I decided to do this special episode in Swabian English. The text will also be available on my science blog „Natur des Glaubens“.

Let us just start with our State of Baden-Württemberg, which is one of the bigger German States. With more than 11 million inhabitants, we are having more people than neighbouring Switzerland, as Austria, Ireland, Israel, more than the British capital of London and the U.S.-state of Georgia. In fact, our State merged from 3 smaller regions after the Second World War by referendum. And it became one of the economic powerhouses of the European Union, with a lot of bigger corporations such as Daimler and Bosch as well as a lot of smaller companies mirroring the range of middle-sized and smaller cities and villages. Travellers from abroad are coming to see the Black Forest and Lake Constance as well as a lot of castles and museums such as those showing famous relicts from the Stone Age.

The combination of a strong economy and sinking birth rates led to a strong need of migration, so more than half of our younger generation are having a migrational background mostly of other European States. Although our mainstream Churches are still large, our cities are thriving with a plurality of religions ranging from Jewish and Muslim to Ezidi, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh and Bahai

communities – and many more. We are having strong ties to the Republic of Israel, with the first Zionist congresses taking place in the Swiss canton of Basel, our direct neighbour.

Our State parliament, the Landtag of Baden-Württemberg, is elected by proportional representation. Currently, there are 5 parties represented, four of which endorsed my installment as the first German State Commissioner against Antisemitism in the spring of 2018. After a number of Ministerpräsidenten from the centrist Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Winfried Kretschmann became elected as the first and as of now only Ministerpräsident of the Green Party in 2011.

So you can see that we are having very strong democratic and federal traditions; many of us are rather critical about centralistic politicians and media in Berlin. But on the flipside of liberal criticism, there are libertarian conspiracy myths: Our regions are riddled with traditions of esoteric, anti-vaccine and antisemitic mythologies; the German version of the QAnon-cult, Querdenken, emerged in our State capital of Stuttgart.

So, to work against Conspiracy Myths and especially Antisemitism in Baden-Württemberg means to take a lot of hate and anger from within and from right-wing trolls abroad, wishing for our democracy to fail. As a scientist and a Christian married to a Muslim, as a close friend of the Jewish and Ezidi communities, as a blogger, podcaster and author of a range of scientific books, I did not want nor chose to become a symbol, but here I am.

My name is Dr. Michael Blume, I am a 46 year-old academic in religious and political studies, „Religions- und Politikwissenschaft“. My parents escaped from Eastern Germany, then the socialist dictatorship of the GDR. They built a life of hard work, with my dad delivering

newspapers every morning and my mother working as a nurse. I was born in Filderstadt in 1976, being very grateful and active about democracy due to imprisonment and torture my father had had to endure by the Eastern German Stasi.

Being raised without religious affiliation, I met a Muslim girl of Turkish origin in high school and started a lifetime experience in interreligious dialogue. Zehra had been with me at my baptism in our mainline Protestant Church and we are now married for 25 years with 3 children, all of whom became active in Church youth organizations.

After a prolonged service in our Army, the Bundeswehr, I got trained as a banker, but switched to religious and political studies at the university of Tübingen.

In 2003, I was hired as a young expert on interreligious affairs by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg to help to build dialogue with various Muslim communities. Two years after Nine-eleven, this was a tough job and I got my first splatter of hating internet trolls. Most of them were just dumb racists or religious fanatics, but some constructed conspiracy myths depicting me as a „secret Muslim“ and my family as a part of a bigger, international cabal. Trolling became part of our everyday lives for now almost two decades.

Nevertheless, I helped to build a lot of bridges and managed to bring together German, American und Israeli perspectives as the remnants of Jewish victims of the Holocaust were found near what is now the US-Army-Airfield of Stuttgart Airport in 2005. After that, the Jewish communities asked Ministerpräsident Günther Oettinger to retain me as an understanding contact man and we managed to form a new relationship including a Staatsvertrag, a treaty between the State of Baden-Württemberg and the Jewish communities in Baden and

Württemberg.

In those good years, I was not only invited to participate in German-Israeli exchange programs, but also to the Inauguration of US-president Barack Obama in 2009. I also did my doctorate thesis on religion & brain sciences and enjoyed teaching and blogging. Although the number of trolls and haters grew, I was not yet aware what was about to happen.

On Christmas 2014, Ministerpräsident Kretschmann asked me to lead the Special Quota Project for 1.000 mostly ezidi women and children from Kurdistan-Iraq, that had been subjected to traumatizing violence by the so-called Islamic State, Daesh.

I managed to form a 12-member-team of Christians, Ezidis, Muslims and Non-religious and we were able to evacuate more than 1.100 women and children within a year to Germany, among them Nadia Murad, who later got the peace nobel prize, Farida Khalaf and many more. Of course, there was also a strong increase in trolling not only by racists objecting against rescuing kurdish-speaking Ezidis, but also by Muslim extremists especially from Arab nations, Turkey and Iran. Since then, we have to counsel with our police for security measures regularly.

In Iraq, I not only saw the climate crisis destroying whole regions of a nation, but also the resurgence of Antisemitism. Although the old kurdish- and arabic-speaking Jewish communities of Iraq have been attacked and driven away during the 20th century, starting with the Farhud-pogroms in 1942 by a Mufti allied to Adolf Hitler, antisemitic conspiracy myths flourished. I was confronted by what is called in academia „Antisemitismus ohne Juden – Antisemitism without Jews“, as people claimed that Daesh had been founded by the Israeli mossad and the self-declared khalif Baghdadi would be a Jewish CIA-

agent called Shimon Elliot.

I realized that antisemitic conspiracy cults began to organize themselves in the Internet; the so-called „Islamic State“ has been rightfully analyzed as the first „digital caliphate“ of history. In 2017, I wrote a bestselling book „Islam in der Krise – Islam in Crisis“ about this, but I also started to warn about the resurgence of Antisemitism in Europe, in Germany and in Baden-Württemberg.

My scientific publications repeatedly referred to the great book „Not in God’s Name“ by Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, may his memory be a blessing. We’ve had some scientific contact and he even cited me in this greatest of his many great books. Therein, Rabbi Sacks deciphered all kinds of religious and political extremism as traditions of „dualism“, breaking apart the monistic world and humanity into purported „Children of Light“ against utterly evil and conspiring „Children of Darkness“. Since then, dualism became my scientific key term in understanding beliefs in world conspiracies including Antisemitism. If I may be allowed to recommend one book about religious and political extremism in all its forms, it is still „Not in God’s Name“ by Rabbi Sacks, one of the greatest scholars of our time.

In 2018, I attended a regular meeting between our Ministerpräsident Kretschmann and the Jewish communities of Baden and Württemberg, as they suddenly asked for the installment of a State Commissioner against Antisemitism – recommending me.

Surprised and a little bit shocked, I later asked them why they chose not to ask me in advance, but they were right: Maybe, I would have declined.

Because since my installment with the great support of our Landtag, hate and trolling exploded, this time

especially by right-wing trumpers including a so-called journalist of Fox News. I was accused of being part of a global cabal with US-democrats, of hating Judaism, Christianity, Europe and Israel and conspiring against the so-called „white race“, of cheating on my wife and radicalizing our children. My wife, who does not hold any public office, was even harrassed and threatened at her workplace.

Since the second half of 2018, there has not been a single day without hate and trolling in my life. In 2019, I chose to close my personal Facebook-account, which made it into the German national news. But the trolls did not stop, but switched gleefully to other platforms such as Twitter and Blogs. Trump-supporting groups such as the so-called Simon-Wiesenthal-Center in Los Angeles accused me publicly of being antisemitic, after having designated Antifascim, „the Antifa“ as a terrorist organization within the United States.

Of course, I got overwhelming support by the Jewish communities, Churches and other religious communities, by democratic parties, scientists and serious journalists throughout Germany. Our work against Antisemitism in Baden-Württemberg got wide acclaim and I received an invitation by the real Simon-Wiesenthal-Institute in Vienna and got awarded the German-Jewish Otto-Hirsch-Auszeichnung in Stuttgart.

Many people approached and thanked me for standing against and speaking about the dangers of trolling and digital hate. Together with lawyer Chan-jo Jun and HateAid, we even started to bring Twitter to court for violating German and European Laws.

No force in history has been proven stronger in transforming humanity than new media. Judaism has been the first religion of the Alphabet, which brought envy

and hate leading to antijudaism und later antisemitic conspiracy myths. The acceptance of book print in Europe – but not in the Ottoman Empire! – brought turmoil, witch hunts, the splintering of the Churches and the devastating 30-years-War, but also a bold increase in alphabetization and education. Bismarck was misusing the Telegram to start a series of German-French wars and the Nazis misused radio and cinema to destroy the Republic, to unleash the Shoah and the Second World War.

History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes. It is our duty to understand the impact of this fast and global media revolution. We have to use all the constructive potentials of the internet and of upcoming virtual reality, while seeing and fighting the grave dangers that are coming with it at the same time. This is the reason you are just listening to a podcast, which I did in addition to many German lectures, texts, books and videos. As Steve Bannon wanted to have all media flooded by misinformation, destroying civil discourse, we have to bring in more science, more democracy and more dialogue.

Thus, my family and I do have to expect more years of hate and trolling especially by right-wing media. Although I do plan to leave Twitter because of the mass firings by Elon Musk, I plan to stay active as a blogger and podcaster. I do hope that our democracies will be able to fend off the violent attacks of racist and religious dualists this time. And I plan to do my part in this struggle, in German and English, from the State of Baden-Württemberg which I love.

Thank you very much for your time and all your efforts in promoting democracy, the rule of law, science and dialogue.