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PRESS RELEASE

Ensuring social cohesion – Strengthening democracy

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is increasing its efforts to promote social cohesion. Although the latter is still intact, it is being severely challenged by today's multiple crises. Those are the most recent findings from the Social Cohesion Radar, which the foundation presented at its annual press conference. The current results are a warning signal for German society. Against that background, the foundation's topic for 2024/2025 – "Strengthen democracy!" – gains even greater significance.

Gütersloh – April 17, 2024. Social cohesion in Germany has come under considerable pressure since 2020. On the one hand, it is still robust according to the longer-term assessment of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Social Cohesion Radar. From the end of 2017 to the beginning of 2020, it essentially maintained a value of 61 (on a scale of 0 to 100) on the overall index, which measures a number of factors. On the other hand, the overall index fell by nine points last year compared to 2020 and, at 52 points, just made the top half of the scale. Given the numerous challenges affecting communal life in Germany, this value can still be considered stable. Nevertheless, the findings are a warning that the developments impacting German society must be taken seriously and that countermeasures are needed.

"The multiple crises we've currently faced, from the Covid pandemic to the war in Ukraine and its consequences, have given rise to uncertainty about the future and to ruptures in social cohesion," explained Ralph Heck, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung. "We are all called upon to counteract the tendencies dividing society and to highlight and defend the values underpinning democracy. This is yet another reason why the Bertelsmann Stiftung is using 'Strengthen democracy!' as its annual topic for 2024/2025 to put an even greater focus on safeguarding liberal democracy in Germany."

The Bertelsmann Stiftung presented the findings from its Social Cohesion Radar at its annual press conference in Gütersloh. Attending the conference were Ralph Heck, Brigitte Mohn and Daniela Schwarzer, the members of the foundation's Executive Board.

Brigitte Mohn noted that, in all its areas of work, the Bertelsmann Stiftung aims to strengthen democracy. "Disinformation is a threat to liberal democracy, which also applies to the health sector," she said. "According to the Federal Ministry of Health, three-quarters of the German population have difficulty dealing with digital health information. Respondents have the most trouble by far assessing whether digital health information is trustworthy and unbiased." In its project InfoQ, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is addressing the problem of disinformation in the health sector by giving greater visibility to trustworthy information on the major platforms. This is being done in close cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), Brigitte Mohn said.

“In 2024, groundbreaking decisions will be made affecting democracies worldwide,” explained Daniela Schwarzer, who was appointed to the Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board last year. “In Germany, we will be closely watching the European elections, as well as the parliamentary elections taking place in three of the country’s eastern states. In addition, the outcome of the presidential election in the US will have a decisive impact on Europe. We must act now to further develop our social and democratic model if we want it to withstand the pressures resulting from new and more challenging conditions. Through our activities for promoting democracy, we want to make democracy more participatory and increase the resilience of democratic institutions.” For example, she noted, in its project Forum Against Fakes, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is testing a new format for participation which features a globally unique combination of widespread online consultation and a citizens’ council. This has allowed the foundation to reach more than 190,000 people, Schwarzer said.

Schwarzer also announced that the Reinhard Mohn Prize, which will be awarded by the Bertelsmann Stiftung next year in Gütersloh, will be dedicated to the topic “Strengthen Democracy. Counter Disinformation”.

Commenting on the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s current efforts, Heck concluded by saying, “We want our projects to have an impact on society. That applies to all our topic areas, from Europe’s Future to education to sustainable social market economies. And this year, it applies in particular to our goal of helping strengthen democracy through the work we do.”

Since its founding in 1977, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has made approximately €1.9 billion available for its nonprofit activities. In 2023, expenditures for its project work totaled €76 million. It employs 334 people in its offices in Gütersloh, Berlin and Brussels. It also has affiliated organizations in Washington and Barcelona.

Additional information:

In its Social Cohesion Radar project, the Bertelsmann Stiftung examines the state of social cohesion and how it has changed since 2013. In a forthcoming study, it focuses in particular on the developments taking place between 2017 and 2023.

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About the Bertelsmann Stiftung: Inspiring people. Shaping the future.

The Bertelsmann Stiftung is committed to enabling social participation for everyone – politically, economically and culturally. Our programs include Education and the Next Generation, Democracy and Social Cohesion, Digitalization and the Common Good, Europe’s Future, Health, and Sustainable Social Market Economies. In our work, we focus on people, since only they can change the world and make it better. We share knowledge, promote expertise and develop solutions. A nonprofit foundation, the Bertelsmann Stiftung was established in 1977 by Reinhard Mohn.

For more information, please visit: www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de

