

15 Theses

Cohesion in Diversity

Foreword

Cultural integration is the key to a peaceful coexistence of all people in our country. We, the members of the Initiative for Cultural Integration, stand for cohesion through cultural integration in diversity.

In 2017, our broad alliance of representatives of social partners, the media, religious communities, civil-society organisations as well as politicians and administrators presented, for the first time, fifteen theses on “Cohesion in Diversity”. They were received with great interest and are still the subject of intense discussion today.

Current social controversies demand even greater integration efforts from all of us. The debates about attracting qualified workers and integrating them as well as the wide-ranging discourse on strengthening democracy caused the members of the Initiative for Cultural Integration to carry out a fundamental revision of those fifteen theses six years later.

The following fifteen theses form the basis of further work by the Initiative for Cultural Integration.

They address fundamental issues such as the factors

that shape a pluralistic society, the integrational effect of gainful employment, the importance of the German culture of remembrance and the relevance of cultural diversity.

The members of the Initiative resolutely oppose antisemitism, racism, and any form of group-related enmity.

Cohesion in diversity is the unifying link of the Initiative for Cultural Integration as well as our agenda and our mission.

Olaf Zimmermann

Spokesperson for the Initiative for Cultural Integration

Director of the German Cultural Council

Preamble

The people in Germany as well as those in other countries are facing huge challenges. The effects of the pandemic over the last few years, the continuing climate change, globalisation and geopolitical changes, the resulting migration movements as well as war in Europe and in many other regions of the world unsettle many people in this country. Existing certainties are collapsing. Familiar habits are increasingly questioned. What is all too easily forgotten are the upheavals that Germany and Europe have already mastered. It remains the goal of the European unification process to stand up for a democratic and peaceful Europe that fosters cultural exchange. – The Initiative for Cultural Integration stands for a society that anticipates and accepts challenges so that it can join forces to shape them.

For hundreds of years people of different origins have been living together in Germany. Different biographies, experiences and regional traditions have shaped our country and are part of our cultural diversity, which our society can rightly be proud of. This means that people migrate to Germany and become part of our society regardless of their origin and nationality.

- The Initiative for Cultural Integration stands for a society that promotes diversity and facilitates participation.

Immigration in any form, whether caused by flight, targeted recruitment or for family reasons, changes a society and requires openness, respect, acceptance, and tolerance on all sides. Societal change is a continuous process of negotiations. It is a wrestling contest between different positions. It is a process that involves daily interactions and includes all the people living here. If shaped constructively, this process is beneficial for our society and its cohesion. Stoking fears and hostility divides society. Problems associated with integration must be addressed. - The Initiative for Cultural Integration stands for an open, cosmopolitan society that creates togetherness based on the fundamental rights and values of the German Basic Law combining it with jointly negotiated rules. Participation in society and integration affect everyone living in Germany.

Living diversity strengthens social cohesion. Cultural institutions promote cultural integration. They enable people to engage with the values of a society, they convey knowledge about past and present-day Germany and open up room for new perspectives.

– The Initiative for Cultural Integration stands for cohesion in diversity.

We have based the following fifteen theses produced by the Initiative for Cultural Integration on the definition of culture provided by UNESCO, which says that “culture in the widest sense of the word is a set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs”.

Thesis 1

The fundamental rights and values of the German Basic Law are the basis for coexistence and cohesion in Germany.

Article 1, paragraph 1 of the German Basic Law states unequivocally: “Human dignity is inviolable.” This principle, which is also laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, applies worldwide and to all people living in Germany regardless of whether they were born here or have immigrated for various reasons, regardless of their sex, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, religion, regardless of whether they are able-bodied or disabled. Respecting and protecting human dignity is a non-negotiable condition for anyone living in our liberal democracy and the basis for all government action. The intention behind the fundamental rights laid down in the German Basic Law was to protect people against arbitrary rule by the State and ensure the protection of human dignity.



Thesis 2

A culture of debate and productive disagreement is part of democracy.

Liberal democracy thrives as long as there are democrats who actively stand up for it and embrace all associated negotiation processes. Controversies involving people who listen to one another and are engaged in constructive disputes are part of the democratic culture of debate and productive disagreement. They make an important contribution to a society based on peaceful and respectful coexistence and foster the development of individual and social positions. Any process involving negotiations requires a willingness to compromise. It is the opposite of populism and helps keep social polarisation at bay. A strong democracy must resolutely oppose any form of extremism and anti-democratic behaviour.

Group-focused enmity such as antisemitism, racism and all other forms of discrimination and exclusion weaken the foundations of democratic culture. They have no place in a liberal democracy. Those who stir up hatred or use violence against people must face the legal consequences.



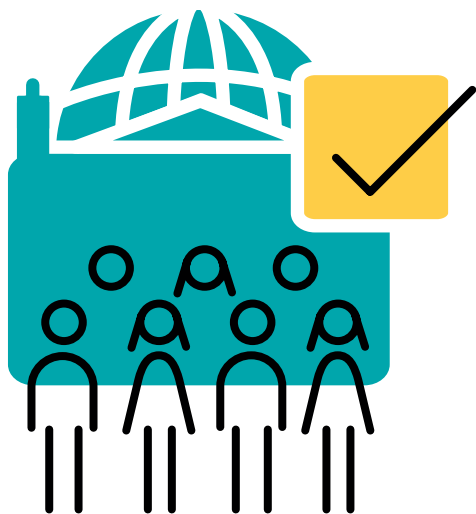
Thesis 3

Parliamentary democracy thrives on commitment and respect for decisions.

Parliamentary democracy cannot be taken for granted. It took democratic movements centuries to develop, fight for and shape parliamentary democracy. It requires clear rules, stable institutions, the commitment of individuals as well the respect and appreciation of the entire society. Majority decisions must be respected as much as minority rights. Freely elected parliaments are the legitimate representation of all citizens.

Democratic parties as well as civil society are called upon and must ensure that their members reflect the diversity of society. Opportunities enabling participation and transparent decisions strengthen the internal democratic process of any organisation. The common good is more than the sum of individual interests and guarantees cohesion in diversity.

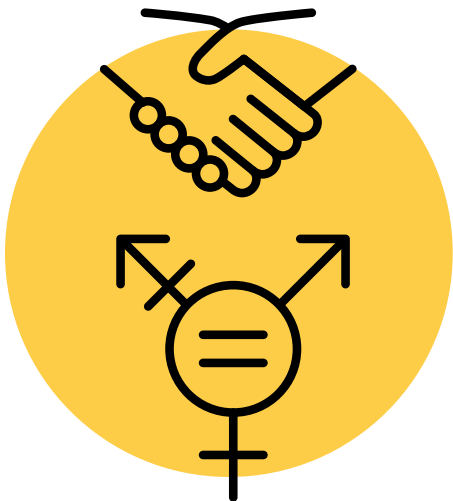
Parliamentary democracy thrives on competition for the best ideas and concepts for the society of today and tomorrow.



Thesis 4

Gender equality is a cornerstone of our society.

Gender equality and equal rights are some of the fundamental principles of our society. They are enshrined in the German Basic Law as a constitutional commandment calling for equal rights for men and women. It remains a task for the State and society to achieve gender equality in all its facets and to counteract existing discrimination. Society's understanding of gender has changed in the last few years. This also includes strengthening the acceptance and protection of sex- and gender-based diversity. At the same time, the mission to achieve equality between men and women has lost none of its relevance.



Thesis 5

Religion belongs in the public sphere.

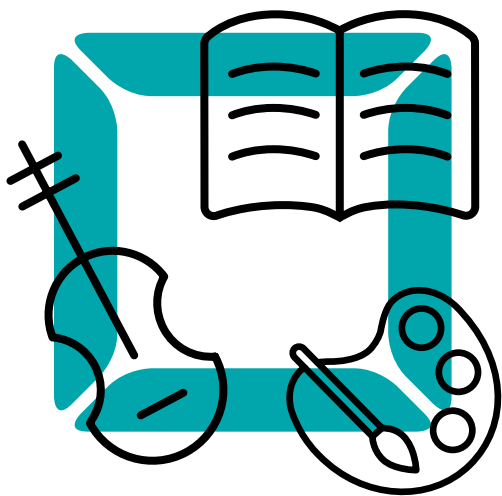
Religions can make an important contribution to cultural integration and participation. While in Germany, there is a clear separation between the State and religion, they do refer to one another. Religious communities may, if they choose to, have a visible public presence, and actively participate in social life. At the same time, they are subject to the applicable rule of law and public discourse. This relationship between the State and religion has worked well in Germany. Ecumenical understanding, interreligious dialogue and the peace-building power of religions must be strengthened. We do not tolerate the abuse of religion to promote extremist views. This is the only way to find common ground and deal constructively with existing differences.



Thesis 6

Art is free.

The arts are a means to engage with fundamental personal, philosophical, societal, and political issues. They transcend any direct experience, open up new horizons of meaning and widen our experience. According to the UNESCO, human beings transcend their limitations through their ability of creating and interpreting art. Due to the artistic freedom enshrined in the German Basic Law, the arts can thrive. The acceptance of artistic freedom is indispensable in a liberal society. Art can be unsettling. Works of art can cause displeasure. They need to be questioned and re-interpreted time and again as well as be open to critical debate. Artistic freedom must, however, not be used as a cover-up for group-focused enmity. Those in charge of cultural institutions and cultural events also have a responsibility when it comes to cultural policy.

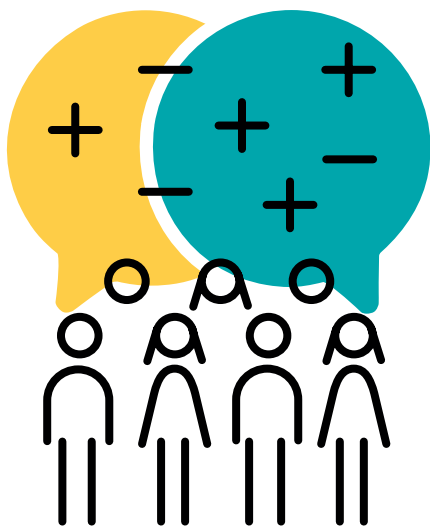


Thesis 7

Freedom of opinion strengthens democracy.

Part of a liberal democracy is the right to the freedom of opinion. Regardless of the distribution channels used, journalistic and editorial offers foster the discourse in society. They inform, entertain, stimulate discussions, offer background information, convey values and, by doing so, make a crucial contribution to the opinion-forming process. The freedom of the press, the freedom of broadcasting and the freedom of opinion are an indispensable part of German democracy.

Disinformation, hate speech or incitement to violence must be resolutely opposed in any democracy. Those who fight against the principles of liberal democracy must face the full force of the law.

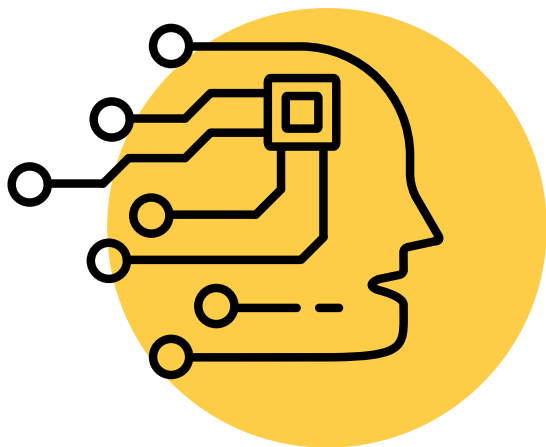


Thesis 8

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence must be used and organised sensibly.

Advancing digital innovations, especially developments in the field of artificial intelligence, are changing our society in many areas. They do, for example, speed up communication, widen access to knowledge and information, simplify everyday procedures and shape society in many fields. The digital transformation also leads to new forms of cultural exchange.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence have a massive impact on our cultural and social life. The consequences of that change are yet to be seen. Hence, it is indispensable to come to an understanding concerning the principles underpinning these developments. Artificial intelligence, used as a tool, can help with many things. But, just like digitalisation, it needs to be regulated as a whole, considering especially human dignity and personal rights. This also applies to copyright. Ethical and political decisions must not be left to artificial intelligence. This is a field where human beings must have the last word.



Thesis 9

Germany is an immigration country.

Germany is a multiethnic country, made up of people with different origins, different religions, languages, and cultural backgrounds. Immigration and integration are a part of who we are. This applies to the past when Germany experienced different phases of immigration, as well as to present times with a view to global migration movements. The right to asylum is a fundamental human right.

Germany's cultural wealth is partly due to the influence of immigrants. This is proof of successful historical integration processes and encourages us all to be open to immigration. People with a family background of immigration are a natural part of our society. Many have responsible positions in the world of politics, business, culture, and other social areas, and help shape our society. Obstacles and marginalisation must be overcome.

Due to the demographic change, Germany also needs immigrant workers as many industries are looking for skilled and qualified staff. Companies and the public

sector in Germany are competing for the best talent worldwide. A liberal democracy, adequate structures, and a welcoming culture (*“Willkommenskultur”*) that considers people together with their different needs such as education, culture, and neighbourhood, are the prerequisites for successful immigration. Such a welcoming culture acts like a magnet that can help acquire and keep skilled workers and qualified staff.



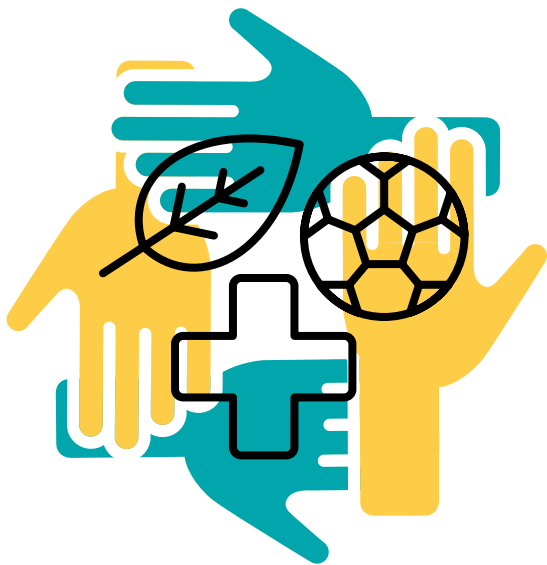
Thesis 10

Living democracy through civic engagement.

Any liberal democracy depends on the local engagement of its citizens, be it formal or informal, be it in political parties, associations, trade unions and employers' organisations, in religious communities as well as various civic organisations. They make their concerns part of the democratic discourse. People who are engaged in civic activities, regardless of whether they were born in or have immigrated to Germany, assume responsibility and by doing so, make an indispensable contribution to the cohesion of society. Their engagement gives them a sense of belonging.

Continuously changing civic engagement is an integral part of the concept of government based on the principle of subsidiarity that, initially, enables the smallest units in society to become active. While civic engagement cannot replace public services, it serves as a useful and active addition in many socially relevant areas.

Apart from the civic engagement that promotes cohesion within society, there also exists exclusionary, anti-democratic and misanthropic engagement. That engagement, whose aim is to undermine the foundations of our society, must be resolutely opposed.



Thesis 11

Access to society through education.

Education is key when it comes to personal development and participation in society and the world of work. In a liberal democracy it is important to ensure that everyone has access to the formal and informal education system. On the one hand, education takes place within a formal context such as nurseries, schools, vocational colleges, companies offering apprenticeships and universities, and on the other hand, within an informal context such as the family, associations, religious communities, parishes, corporate training providers, cultural institutions, the media, and other contexts. Both, the formal as well as the informal education are indispensable for personal development and participation in the labour market. Education enables people to be in charge of their own lives and take on responsibility for themselves and others. A flexible education system ensures equal opportunities regardless of the starting conditions. Scientific and artistic freedom are essential for a liberal democracy. Cultural and political education are key factors when it comes to integration; they enable people to take part in society and embrace its culture. With their help

people learn to deal with and tolerate differences and tensions.



Thesis 12

Language is more than a means of communication.

German as the common language is key for all people living in Germany to take part in society. It is indispensable to ensure communication on an equal playing field. But language is more than a means of communication. It also is a cultural asset reflected in poetry and literature that enables people to access the culture and society of a country. Teaching language and promoting language acquisition is one of the core responsibilities of the education system, which is assisted by the language-learning culture in society and the public domain.

At the same time, multilingualism is something to be truly treasured. People who can communicate and express themselves in different languages can build bridges and enable access. The mastery of several languages is proof of cultural wealth, requires appreciation and must be encouraged to a greater extent. This also applies to the minority and regional languages recognised in Germany. Especially with a view to globalisation, which also means that people from Germany

live temporarily abroad or people from abroad who stay in Germany for a while, multilingualism is a great asset. At the same time, the non-verbal forms of expression, which have a rule book of their own as is the case in sport, music, dance, etc., must not be ignored either.



Thesis 13

Engagement with history is never-ending.

Active engagement with the past remains a continuous task. The NS dictatorship and the Shoah have a special place in Germany's culture of remembrance (*"Erinnerungskultur"*). Keeping their memory alive and passing it on is a lasting obligation for German-born people as well as immigrants. This includes fighting against any form of antisemitism, racism, and all other forms of group-focused enmity.

Other periods of German history such as the democracy movements, the history of the German partition or colonialism are also part of the German culture of remembrance and need to be given appropriate consideration. The culture and places of remembrance are always part of the history of cities, towns, and regions. At the same time, the different histories of those who have immigrated to Germany must be taken into account and become part of the culture of remembrance. This means that we are tasked with further developing our culture of remembrance within a society that includes immigrants.

Participation-orientated forms of dialogue that always include the reflection upon discriminating or racist attitudes are an essential part of our culture of remembrance. Narratives, artefacts, pictures, media, music, film, dance, architecture etc. offer emotional access to past events that may open the door to further engagement with German history.



Thesis 14

Gainful employment is important for participation, identification, and social cohesion.

Work, either in the form of employment or self-employment, is a great driver of integration. It is a way of bringing together society and individuals. It produces self-confidence and identification with one's own achievements. It lends structure to everyday life, facilitates communication and, by doing so, is a decisive factor when it comes to ensuring social cohesion. Since gainful employment plays such an important role, facilitating access to the labour market for all persons who are capable of working is essential regardless of their individual circumstances. In our work-based society, people's talents are meant to thrive irrespective of sex, nationality, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, and identity. The employment structure needs to reflect social diversity. This applies to the public as much as the private sector.

In the social market economy, close cooperation on economic and social policy between employers' and

employees' associations, within the self-governed social institutions and with the Government makes an important contribution to our democratic system. The German model of social partnership is the defining attribute of the social market economy and fosters social cohesion. The freedom to form coalitions is enshrined in our constitution and forms the basis for societal understanding and social peace.



Thesis 15

Cultural diversity is a strength.

The acceptance of diversity is indispensable in a liberal democracy. It manifests itself in tolerant, appreciative, and respectful daily interactions. Diversity also means a multiplicity of voices as well as the responsibility to perceive and take seriously the various voices, listen to them, and not consider one's own life as the only valid model.

As a result of German history, the cultural diversity of Germany's cities, towns, districts, and municipalities as well as the federal states is outstanding. This applies to the language as well as to particular cultural forms of expression, a wide range of cultural offerings and a great wealth of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The diversity of our society is reflected in the diversity of artistic forms of expression. It is shaped by an international exchange of artists as well as by all people who live in Germany. Cultural diversity in Germany also includes the culture of exiles. Importantly, culture contributes to a sense of belonging among all the people who live in Germany. It enables people to become part of the fabric of our society. While cultural diversity

can lead to greater engagement, it can, at times, also create new conflicts. That is part of its dynamic nature. However, art and culture must never be used for the purpose of exclusion.

Cohesion in diversity thrives on respect, acceptance, and mutual appreciation. This ensures that everyone living in Germany feels part of our liberal democratic society.



About us

The Initiative for Cultural Integration was set up in 2016 at the suggestion of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration who is also the Commissioner for Anti-Racism as well as the German Cultural Council. It is made up of 28 organisations and institutions that represent various social sectors. The members¹ represent a wide range of institutions and organisations, different political levels, and interests. They stand for multi-faceted engagement and cohesion in a pluralistic society.

In 2017, the Initiative for Cultural Integration presented 15 theses on “Cohesion in Diversity”². The intention was to promote self-reflection in a pluralistic society that faced great challenges in view of the influx of refugees in 2015 and 2016. The Initiative for Cultural Integration extended an explicit invitation to analyse and distribute the theses as well as fill them with life.

Following the racially motivated attack that took place

in Hanau/Germany on 19 February 2020, the Initiative for Cultural Integration passed the resolution “Against Racism and Exclusion! For Cohesion in Diversity!”³. In view of the changing civic engagement, the Initiative for Cultural Integration further clarified its position on that topic in the paper on “For Cohesion in Diversity. Shaping the Future of Civic Engagement”⁴.

Apart from the documents referred to, the Initiative for Cultural Integration has, since the public presentation of its fifteen theses in May 2017, been focused on raising awareness of the theses, putting them up for discussion and, by doing so, stimulating the discourse about cohesion in diversity.

To this end, the Initiative for Cultural Integration carried out annual conferences⁵, initiated competitions⁶ and organized meetings⁷. It took part in events and used the www.kulturelle-integration.de website to regularly publish news about the broad field of cohesion in diversity.

Six years after the public presentation of the 15 theses on “Cohesion in Diversity”, there was a need, in view of the worldwide changes taking place, to look at the theses with fresh eyes. These updated fifteen theses on

“Cohesion in Diversity” are the result of months of discussion within the Initiative for Cultural Integration.

¹ The following are members of the Initiative for Cultural Integration: the ARD (German Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations), the Federal Association of Non-Statutory Welfare Services, the Federal Association of Immigrant Associations in Germany, the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Federal Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers, the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, the German Bishops' Conference, the German civil servants' association and collective bargaining union (dbb), the German Trade Union Confederation, the German Association of Journalists, German Cultural Council, the German County Council, the German Nature Conservation Association, the German Olympic Sports Confederation, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, German Association of Cities, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration who is also Commissioner for Anti-Racism, the Protestant Church in Germany, the Forum of Migrants based on Parity, the Coordination Council of Muslims, the Conference of Ministers of Culture, the MVFP Media Association of the Free Press, new German organisations – the post-migration network, the German Association of Private Media (VAUNET), the ZDF (German national public television broadcaster), the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

² Cohesion in Diversity - 15 Theses by the Initiative for Cultural Integration
https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/IKI_15-Thesen_Publikation.pdf

³ Against Racism and Exclusion! For Cohesion in Diversity!
https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Resolution_Gegen-Rassismus-und-Ausgrenzung.pdf

⁴For Cohesion in Diversity. Shaping the Future of Civic Engagement
<https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/IKI-Grundsatzpapier-Buergerschaftliches-Engagement.pdf>

⁵First annual conference: “Put up for discussion...” on 29.05.2018. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/jahrestagung-der-initiative-kulturelle-integration-zur-diskussion-gestellt/>
Second annual conference: “Integration, Democracy and Media” on 03.09.2019. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/zweite-jahrestagung-der-initiative-kulturelle-Integration/>
Third annual conference: “Civic Engagement: Shaping Diversity” on 15.09.2020. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/dritte-jahrestagung-der-initiative-kulturelle-integration/>
Fourth annual conference: “Cohesion in Diversity: Integration through Work” on 08.06.2021. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/vierte-jahrestagung-der-initiative-kulturelle-integration/>
Fifth annual conference: “Cohesion against Racism” on 02.06.2022. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/fuenfte-jahrestagung-der-initiative-kulturelle-integration-zusammenhalt-gegen-rassismus/>

⁶Photo competition: “Cohesion in Diversity – Jewish everyday life in Germany” in 2020. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/aktuelles/fotowettbewerb/>

Writing competition: “L’Chaim: Write something about Jewish life in Germany” in Jahr 2022. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/schreibwettbewerb/>

School theatre meeting: “Hanau – School theatre for cohesion in diversity” in 2023. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/schultheater-hanau/>

⁷Conference: 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp – “Engagement with history is never-ending” on 28.01.2020. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/tagung-erinnerungskultur/>
Theme day on “Changing Media Image: Jewish men and women in Germany” on 07.10.2021. More at: <https://www.kulturelle-integration.de/termin/thementag-medienbild-im-wandel-juedinnen-und-juden-in-deutschland/>

The fifteen theses produced by the Initiative for Cultural Integration can also be found in the form of an accessible PDF document on the website of the Initiative: www.kulturelle-integration.de. The QR code on the envelop of this publication will take you directly to the PDF document.

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