



For Academic Freedom in a Democratic Society

Joint Declaration of the
Department of Political Science

February 2019

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In recent years we – professors, lecturers, researchers, students and administrative staff of the Department of Political Science – have been witnessing a significant rise in the activities of the extreme right at the university and in the city of Marburg. We observe a greater visibility of groups and students who belong to the spectrum of the so called 'new right' and the extreme right – also at our department and in our seminars. This development should be seen in the context of a general shift towards the political right in parliamentary debates and in social media, where racist, anti-Semitic, anti-feminist and anti-democratic positions are gaining ground and influence. These positions increasingly translate into subtle discrimination, verbal and violent attacks against all those who do not fit into the right-wing, nationalist or even fascist world views.

The increased visibility of the authoritarian right-wing actors and the accompanying shift to the right in the public discourse in Germany, as well as in other European and non-European countries, jeopardize the chances of realizing democratic and egalitarian societies. Universities are also affected by these developments. Critical scholars, for example in the field of gender studies, are increasingly targeted by radical right-wing campaigns in Germany. In Hungary, the government has effectively abolished research in this area. In Austria and Italy, gender studies are increasingly under pressure from radical right-wing government parties. In Turkey, thousands of scientists critical of the government, and societal developments more generally, were laid off and/or driven into exile after the autocratic turn in the country.

We consider this historical juncture as an opportunity to point out that academic freedom and a democratic society are fundamentally dependent on each other. Democracy requires constructive debate. Inhuman and fascist positions cannot be part of such discussions. Democracy cannot be reduced to procedures. The idea of people's right to self-determination in free and equal societies regarding their fate and their history is fundamentally incompatible with ideologies of inequality and misanthropy that devalue, marginalize and disenfranchise individuals or groups. As a way of life, democracy is based on material and ideational conditions that enable people to be different without fear and yet to meet each other as equals.

Universities have a central role in the creation of such democratic conditions. As members of the University of Marburg, we take the responsibility resulting from this role seriously. We reiterate our commitment to taking a firm stand against authoritarian, racist, anti-Semitic and anti-feminist statements and practices. We hereby declare that we are fully committed to democracy, freedom, equality and anti-discrimination. We defend the critical examination of the social relations of nature, power and domination as a fundamental component of the freedom of research and teaching. In this sense, we call upon the members of the University of Marburg – students, lecturers, researchers and other colleagues – to take a stand against ideologies of inequality and to courageously face the actions resulting from these views.