The website of COMPACT, a monthly German magazine that publishes false content to advance right-wing views of the AfD party, along with Russian disinformation.

Ownership and Financing

COMPACT-Online.de and the magazine are owned by COMPACT-Magazin GmbH. The company’s shares are evenly divided among Jürgen Elsässer, COMPACT’s editor-in-chief; publisher Kai Homilius; and Nordheide Kontor GmbH, a management company owned by businessman Arne Fischer-Van Diepenbrock.

The magazine was founded in 2010 by Elsässer, Homilius, and the German publisher Andreas Abu Bakr Rieger, who publishes the Islamische Zeitung, an independent newspaper that promotes Islamic culture.

Elsässer, according to a biography posted on the website, previously worked for liberal newspapers and magazines such as Junge Welt, Neues Deutschland and Konkret. However, “as he increasingly emphasized that social security can only be defended by the nation state, he was demonized by his comrades as a ‘right winger’ and robbed of all publication possibilities,” the biography says, prompting him to found COMPACT.

Rieger left the magazine in 2014 due to what he described in a 2016 statement to the Otto Brenner Stiftung as the “increasingly radical-subjective attitude” of Elsässer, and the magazine’s “racist and nationalist positions.”

COMPACT runs advertisements and generates revenue from subscriptions and the sales of other products on the site, such as books. Its About Us page also says that the publication is financed by “a few individuals that made the foundation of the newspaper possible.” COMPACT publisher Kai Homilius told NewsGuard in an

Score: 20/100

\[ \times \] Does not repeatedly publish false content (22 points)
\[ \times \] Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
\[ \times \] Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
\[ \times \] Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
\[ \times \] Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
\[ \checkmark \] Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
\[ \checkmark \] Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
\[ \checkmark \] Reveals who’s in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
\[ \times \] The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)
email that the individuals who are referenced are shareholders who initially invested their income to form COMPACT-Magazin GmbH.

In May 2017, German nationalist and anti-Islam group Pegida sponsored yearlong free subscriptions to COMPACT. COMPACT hosts annual paid conferences under different themes, including German history, border protection, freedom, and sovereignty.

**Content**

COMPACT-Online.de describes its point of view on its About Us page as "not left, not right, but front" ("nicht links, nicht rechts, sondern vorn"). The page says that the website does not have a political orientation, but aims to "bring democratic left and democratic right, Muslims and Islam critics together." It says that, as an independent magazine, it does not "bow to the guidelines of political correctness."

COMPACT covers national and international politics, business, culture, and technology from a nationalist viewpoint. Frequent topics include immigration and legislative proposals of German parties, particularly the far-right AfD (Alternative for Germany) party.

Articles often feature interviews with AfD members and leaders. COMPACT also publishes notices about AfD demonstrations.

The website provides links to the personal blog of Elsässer and to the website of Kai Homilius’ publishing company, as well as to a page that publishes some COMPACT articles and videos in Russian. The site also embeds YouTube videos from Russian outlets, such as RT.

**Credibility**

Most articles on COMPACT-Online.de typically summarize and add commentary to reports from other news organizations, which include credible sources such as the Frankfurter Allgemeine, Spiegel, and n-tv, as well as RT, Sputniknews, and The Epoch Times, organizations
that NewsGuard has determined to have published false content. Some stories feature interviews conducted by its staff.

The site regularly publishes false claims to advance far-right nationalist views.

For example, a February 2020 article that asked “Is it a biological weapon” in its headline, (“Handelt es sich um eine Biowaffe?”) claimed that the virus was a lab-designed bioweapon. “The starting point of the epidemic was therefore not the fish market in Wuhan, but a bioweapons laboratory located near the metropolis of millions,” stated the article.

Although there is a laboratory at the Wuhan Institute of Virology that works with dangerous pathogens, there is no evidence that the new strain of coronavirus was developed in such a lab. Scientists have linked the virus’ origins to bats. A February 2020 study published in the journal Nature found that the virus is “96% identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.”

A May 2019 COMPACT article, titled “New federal program: citizens to pay rent to ‘refugees’” (“Neues Bundesprogramm: Bürger sollen ‘Flüchtlingen’ die Miete zahlen”), falsely claimed that a new federal program would accept more than 1 million immigrants to Germany, and allow them to bypass asylum proceedings. The article, which repeated claims that appeared in an AfD Facebook post a day earlier, stated, “According to information from the UNHCR, another 1.4 million ‘particularly vulnerable persons’ are waiting for space to be made available for them: Old, sick, handicapped, pregnant women, who should benefit from the direct inclusion in the Turbo-All-Inclusive measure. WITHOUT asylum proceedings.”

The German federal program only called for “the reception of initially up to 500 refugees,” (“die Aufnahme von zunächst bis zu 500 Flüchtlingen”), not 1.4 million, according to a brochure describing the program. The brochure shared an estimate from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that
up to 1.4 million migrants across the world were seeking to resettle. However, it did not say that Germany would accept all of them. The false claims in the article were first reported by the German investigative newsroom Correctiv.

In addition, migrants who were admitted into Germany under the program did have to seek asylum, according to a December 2018 order issued by the Federal Ministry of the Interior. The order specifies that migrants were selected based on criteria that includes an evaluation by security officials, and “integration competency,” determined by the migrants’ education, vocational training, and language skills.

In April 2019, a COMPACT-Online.de article claimed that climate change is a myth promoted by the German political parties die Grünen, CDU/CSU, and FDP. “Is man really responsible for CO2, pole melting, and the greenhouse effect? Who are the scaremongers, the climbers ... those who run amok against electricity customers, corporations, business and industry, our prosperity and last but not least against drivers?” the article begins. “Only the uprising of reason and science can help against climate lies and their profiteers" ("Gegen Klimalügen und deren Profiteure hilft nur der Aufstand von Vernunft und Wissenschaft"). The article then blamed party leaders Winfried Kretschmann of die Grünen, Peter Altmaier of CDU, and Christian Lindner of FDP for airing false claims about global warming. “Mercy be to God with eunuchs like Peter Altmaier or metrosexuals like Christian Lindner, who will enforce solar energy with nuclear hardness,” the article said.

Multiple studies and government agencies have concluded for years that the world’s temperatures are rising, and blame the increase on rising carbon dioxide levels that are caused by humans. A 2015 U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration study found that “the rate of global warming during the last 15 years has been as fast as or faster than that seen during the latter half of the 20th century.” A 2014 report by a United Nations panel concluded that greenhouse gas
emissions had gone up since the pre-industrial era, “driven largely by economic and population growth, and are now higher than ever.”

In July 2019, the 50th anniversary of the moon landing by U.S. astronauts, COMPACT claimed in an article, “Lying in space - the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing” (“Lügen im Weltraum – zum 50. Jahrestag der ersten Mondlandung”), that the Apollo 11 mission never took place. The article referred to the discovery of plastic, Teflon, and animal products that were found in rock samples identified as moon rocks as evidence that the material was not recovered on the moon.

The article also falsely claimed that parts of the video of the moon landing were “filmed in a Hollywood studio.” A video of the moon landing was broadcast on live television to millions in 1969. And while Andrew Steele, a NASA astrobiologist, did find materials from Earth on moon rocks, he determined that the material was transferred to the rocks from the U.S. astronauts who brought them back, according to Discover magazine.

COMPACT-Online.de has regularly published articles that advance the Russian government’s false claims, including stories alleging that Russia-backed Syria did not launch chemical attacks on its own citizens, and stories that suggested other countries were to blame for the poisoning of a British spy in 2018.

For example, a March 2018 article, “The Russian is always to blame: The 2018 Skripal affair is a cheap remake of the 2006 Litvinenko affair” (“Schuld ist immer der Russe: Die Skripal-Affäre 2018 ist ein billiges Remake der Litwinenko-Affäre 2006”), claimed that Russia was falsely accused of the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, and linked that poisoning to the November 2006 attack on Alexander Litvinenko, a former officer of the Russian Federal Security Service and KGB. “The perpetrators [of the two poisonings] may be the same, but they’re not in Moscow,” the COMPACT article said.
The British public inquiry into Litvinenko’s poisoning concluded in 2016 that there was “a strong probability” that the two men who carried out the assassination acted “under the direction of the FSB,” the Russian Federal Security Service. The British report said that “The FSB operation to kill Mr Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr Patrushev and also by President Putin.”

In September 2018, the U.K. charged two men suspected of being Russian military agents with attempted murder in Skripal’s poisoning. Former British Prime Minister Theresa May said that the two men were Russian military intelligence officers.

Several other 2018 articles falsely reported that the poison gas used in the Skripal case was not traced to Russia, as a British investigation found. The April 2018 article, “Swiss Laboratory: Poison in Skripal attack not from Russia!” (“Schweizer Labor: Gift bei Skripal-Anschlag nicht aus Russland!”), claimed that Spiez, a Swiss lab certified by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), had determined that the poison used to attack Skripal was a toxin called BZ, one that has been used by the U.S., U.K., and NATO-backed countries. Spiez publicly denied the article’s claim, affirming the OPCW’s findings that the poison was Novichok, a chemical agent developed in Russia.

An April 2018 article, “False-flag war in Syria: The Islamic Card” (“False-Flag-Krieg in Syrien: Die islamische Karte”), said that Western powers staged the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks to wrongly cast blame on Islamists. “Everyone is aware that the 9/11 attacks were an inside job par excellence, even though al-Qaeda’s and CIA’s fatal joint venture is also known in the mainstream, and even the more recent attacks in Europe show clear signs of external control ...” the article said.

The 9/11 Commission and multiple other investigations concluded that the al-Qaida terror network and Osama bin Laden masterminded the 2001 terror attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people.
Because COMPACT has regularly published untrue and unsubstantiated claims to advance its views, NewsGuard has determined that the website repeatedly publishes false content, does not gather and present information responsibly, and publishes deceptive headlines.

In an emailed response to NewsGuard’s inquiries seeking comment about false content on the site, COMPACT publisher Kai Homilius said, “We consider that your opinion. Therefore no further comment.”

COMPACT-Online.de publishes detailed mission statements, saying on its About Us page that it “brings together democratic leftists and democratic rightists, Muslims and Islam critics in open dialogue” (“es demokratische Linke und demokratische Rechte, Moslems und Islamkritiker im offenen Dialog zusammenbringt”). On a “Why COMPACT is not a right-wing radical magazine” page (“Warum COMPACT kein rechtsradikales Magazin ist”), the site denies that it is right-wing, populist, anti-Semitic, racist, or Islamophobic.

However, COMPACT regularly includes right-wing opinion, particularly favoring the AfD and the Kremlin, in its coverage that contradicts its mission statement, which is why NewsGuard has determined that the site fails to handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

For example, a July 2019 COMPACT article about the U.S. withdrawal from a nuclear treaty with Russia said, “Now follows the next step in this repetitive game: Russia is to be pushed into the role of the evil aggressor.” Referring to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, the article added, “One can only shake one’s head at Stoltenberg’s explanation, but it follows the well-known NATO line of turning Russia into a fearsome enemy.”

In the August 2019 article “Everyone against the Alternative - Ex-SED General Egon Krenz now warns against AfD” (“Alle gegen die Alternative – Ex-SED-General Egon Krenz warnt nun auch vor AfD”), about
German politician Egon Krenz’ plea to not vote for the AfD, a COMPACT author wrote, “At least in the range of the 'anti-fascist' alliances, the Federal Republic by now seems to have reached GDR [German Democratic Republic, also called East Germany] levels." Other pro-AfD articles include the July 2019 headline, “Hurray, the AfD is the strongest party in Brandenburg with a four percent lead! What now, Mr Berndt?” (“Hurra, die AfD mit vier Prozent Vorsprung stärkste Partei in Brandenburg! Was nun, Herr Berndt?”) a reference to party leader Christoph Berndt.

The articles all appeared on the site’s breaking news section, and were not labeled as opinion.

Homilius told NewsGuard in an email, “We follow exactly the political orientation indicated on our website. We are not influenced by the 'Kremlin' or other organizations. [...] We consider your classification as your opinion. In fact, we respect and fight for freedom of expression, including yours.”

COMPACT does not articulate a correction policy on its website, and NewsGuard did not find corrections on the site. The site has also not removed or corrected its false articles.

Homilius told NewsGuard that “If possible, corrections are also made retrospectively,” and that “Updates are marked where possible.” However, he did not provide examples of published corrections when asked.

The Imprint (Impressum) page discloses the site’s ownership by COMPACT-Magazin GmbH and lists Elsässer as the company’s CEO.

The About Us (Wir Über Uns) page names Elsässer as the site’s editor-in-chief. Users can reach the site through a generic contact form.

COMPACT articles generally are attributed to authors, and bylines sometimes link to profile pages with the writer’s photograph and previous work. However, no
biographical or contact information is provided for the writers, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for providing information about content creators.

Asked about the lack of information about content creators, Homilius said “We generally publish very little information about the authors. We see no reason to do so.”

Advertisements are clearly distinguishable from editorial content.

History

In 2008 and 2009, the Kai Homilius Verlag publishing company published books and DVDs under the COMPACT name, under the supervision of Elsässer, with titles such as “The Lies Around 9/11.”

In 2010, Elsässer published the first edition of the magazine, and launched COMPACT-Magazin GmbH a year later.

COMPACT started its YouTube channel, COMPACTTV, in 2011.

In April 2014, the liberal journalist Jutta Ditfurth described Elsässer as a "glowing anti-Semite" on German television. Elsässer sued Ditfurth for libel and won his case in both the District Court and the Higher Regional Court of Munich.

Corrections: An earlier version of this Nutrition Label misstated the date that German publisher Andreas Abu Bakr Rieger left COMPACT-Online.de. Rieger left the publication in 2014. An earlier version of this Nutrition Label also erroneously attributed conclusions of NASA astrobiologist Andrew Steele about the material found in moon rocks to an interview with Discover magazine. An earlier version of this Nutrition Label also misstated the dates that the Kai Homilius Verlag publishing company first published COMPACT books and DVDs, and misstated the date that COMPACT launched a YouTube channel. NewsGuard apologizes for the errors.
Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was last updated on March 4, 2020. This Nutrition Label was updated in 2019, and its rating was changed, following comments from COMPACT’s publisher and shareholder, Kai Homilius. Based on information provided by Homilius, NewsGuard determined that COMPACT-Online.de currently meets its standard for revealing ownership and financing. The criteria changed accordingly. This Nutrition Label was also updated earlier in 2019 to add that false claims in a COMPACT-Online.de article cited in this label were first debunked by the German investigative news site Correctiv.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

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