

freiewelt.net

A right-wing, anti-immigration website covering national and international politics that does not disclose its agenda or issue corrections.



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 44.5/100

Ownership and Financing

The site is owned by Zivile Allianz e.V., a Berlin-based nonprofit founded in 2019. The site was previously owned by Zivile Koalition e.V., a Berlin-based nonprofit founded in 2005. Both organizations were founded by Beatrix von Storch, a member of Parliament for Germany's major right-wing party, Alternative for Germany (AfD). She runs the groups with her husband, Sven von Storch, a German-Chilean businessman.

Through Zivile Koalition e.V., the couple leads a variety of political initiatives, including campaigns that oppose sex education in schools, gay marriage, abortion, and assisted suicide.

Beatrix and Sven von Storch also own the websites Abgeordneten-Check.de and CivilPetition.de, both of which promote right-wing populist campaigns and AfD's policies.

The site runs advertisements and solicits donations.

Content

FreieWelt.net describes itself as "the Internet and blog newspaper for a civil society" ("Die Internet- und Blogzeitung für die Zivilgesellschaft"). The site covers national and international news in sections for Politics, Business, Family, Christianity, Lifestyle, and Interviews. Articles often are critical of immigration, LGBTQ rights, and Islam, and are supportive of AfD initiatives and views.

Typical articles have run under headlines including "Ministries of the Interior: No basis for AfD surveillance" ("Innenministerien: Keine Basis für Beobachtung der AfD"); "Left-wing extremists are now also violently attacking Leipzig" ("Linksextremisten überziehen jetzt auch Leipzig mit Gewalt"); and "USA: Gay and lesbian organization receives a slap in the face in court" ("USA: Lesben und Schwulen-Organisation erhält vor Gericht eine schallende Ohrfeige").

- ✓ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✓ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✓ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✓ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

FreieWelt.net includes a section called Freie Welt TV, which includes videos featuring Beatrix von Storch conducting interviews.

Credibility

FreieWelt.net sometimes relies on reporting by reputable news outlets, including Die Welt and Handelsblatt, press releases, and official statements. However, the site often does not provide any sources for its claims, and sometimes draws on content from sites that NewsGuard found to have published false and misleading information, including Wochenblick and JournalistenWatch.

FreieWelt.net itself has published misleading information. For example, a March 2020 article, titled “The official version remains questionable - Coronavirus a biological weapon?” (“Die offizielle Version bleibt fragwürdig - Coronavirus eine biologische Waffe?”), reported false claims about COVID-19 made by American lawyer Francis Boyle. “Conspiracy theory or not,” the site stated, “American bioterrorism specialist is certain: the coronavirus is a ‘biological warfare agent.’”

There is no evidence that the COVID-19 virus was created as a bioweapon. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” An earlier study, published in February 2020 in the journal Nature, found that the COVID-19 virus is “96% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.” In an April 2020 statement, the U.S. intelligence community said it “concurs with the wide scientific consensus that the COVID-19 virus was not manmade or genetically modified.”

FreieWelt.net has also published false claims about immigration and Islam. For example, an April 2019 article titled “Increasing Islamophobia apparently to blame for anti-Semitism among young Muslims” (“Angeblich zunehmende Islamfeindlichkeit schuld für Antisemitismus bei jungen Muslimen”) claimed that Muslim immigrants, in reaction to anti-Muslim feelings, were responsible for most anti-Semitic crime in Germany, stating that “it turns out more and more often that young Muslim migrants ... are responsible for the vast majority of these anti-Semitic crimes.”

The article does not cite sources for this claim. An authoritative 2017 Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern) report on anti-Semitism in Germany concluded that “most of the anti-Semitic crimes identified are committed within the still male-dominated right-wing extremist spectrum.” NewsGuard could find no reputable source for the claim that Muslim immigrants are responsible for most anti-Semitic crimes.

A July 2018 article titled “Caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi lives in Germany” (“Kalif Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi wohnt in Deutschland”) claimed that the slain ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was living in Germany. By living in Germany, the article stated, “Abu Bakr doesn't have to worry about being exposed,” because “there are many refugees with up to seven different identities,” and because Germany “has a sufficient number of Sunnis and Arabs to ensure that the Caliph's holy words fall on fertile ground.”

There is no evidence that al-Baghdadi ever lived in Germany. Deutsche Welle, The Associated Press, and other news organizations, citing intelligence officials and other experts, reported that since 2014, al-Baghdadi had been living in Syria, until his death during a U.S. raid in October 2019.

A June 2019 article, titled “Supposed shipwrecked filmed changing from fishing boat to wooden boat” (“Angebliche Schiffbrüchige bei Umstieg von Fischerboot auf Holzboot gefilmt”), claimed that migrants were purposefully getting themselves stranded at sea in order to be rescued and receive asylum. “This process [is] the typical procedure on the Mediterranean route: “a 'mother ship' carries an initially empty, small boat with it, then on the open sea the 'refugees' are moved by the migrant smugglers into the small boat, leaving themselves to their fate.” The article relied on a June 2019 video by the European border and coast guard agency Frontex.

According to Correctiv, in posting the video on Twitter and YouTube, Frontex explained that it showed migrants being loaded from a big trawler into a smaller boat. Frontex did not say that this was a trick by smugglers or a deliberately created problem. There is no evidence that migrants are purposefully getting themselves stranded in the open sea.

Because FreieWelt.net sometimes publishes incorrect or misleading claims, often without citing sources, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly.

FreieWelt.net does not articulate a corrections policy, and NewsGuard did not find corrections on the site.

FreieWelt.net states that it adheres to “the principles of the democratic constitutional state and the separation of powers, the social market economy in the spirit of Ludwig Erhard and the human image of the Jewish-Christian tradition in its historical diversity, as well as the protection of civil rights.”

The site purports to separate news from opinion by publishing news articles in a dedicated News section and opinion articles in a Blog section. However, NewsGuard found that the site frequently publishes opinionated articles in its News section.

For example, a May 2019 News article titled “Merkel government spent 23 billion euros on ‘refugees’ last year” (“Merkel-Regierung gab im Vorjahr 23 Milliarden Euro für ‘Flüchtlinge’ aus”) stated, “The Merkel government is spending several billion euros on immigrants coming from all over the world. For the people in need in one's own country, however, there is supposedly no money. It's high time we changed that.”

A November 2019 News article, titled “Left-wing totalitarian ideas at the UN - Communism best suited to stop global warming” (“Linkstotalitäre Ideen bei der UNO - Kommunismus am besten geeignet, um globale Erwärmung zu stoppen”) stated, “Almost all left-wing environmental organisations have a similar tone: they want to patronise citizens, ban things, [and] dictate lifestyles to others.”

Another November 2019 News article, titled “Son of AfD delegates threatened with death by classmates - death threats in the classroom” (“Sohn von Abgeordneten der AfD von Mitschülern mit dem Tod bedroht - Morddrohungen im Klassenzimmer”), stated, “The harassment incited by certain left-wing politicians, especially against the AfD ... has led to the germination of a seed in the brains of children and adolescents that is extremely alarming. Those people better keep their loose mouths in check.”

Because FreieWelt.net frequently publishes opinionated content in articles presented as news, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

FreieWelt.net did not respond to two NewsGuard emails inquiring about the articles cited above, its approach to corrections, and its differentiation between news and opinion.

Transparency

The site's Imprint page discloses its ownership by the nonprofit Zivile Allianz e.V. and identifies the members of the site's two-member editorial board (Redaktionsbeirat), which oversees the site's content. It also names Sven von Storch as the nonprofit's chair and the publisher of FreieWelt.net.

However, the site does not name Beatrix von Storch as the nonprofit's co-chair, nor does it disclose her position as a parliamentary member for Alternative for Germany (AfD). Moreover, the site often reports on the AfD and quotes party leaders, including Beatrix von Storch, without noting that she is the founder and co-chair of the nonprofit that owns FreieWelt.net. The site also does not disclose the nonprofit's donors. All of these factors have led NewsGuard to determine that FreieWelt.net does not meet the standard for clearly disclosing ownership and financing, including notable ideological or political positions held by its owners.

Advertisements are distinguishable from editorial content.

Most articles do not name the writer, and the site does not provide biographical or contact information for content creators.

FreieWelt.net did not respond to two NewsGuard emails inquiring about its lack of disclosure regarding ownership and content creators.

History

The site was launched in October 2008, according to a Whois domain search.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on May 15, 2020, to include a new example of the site's coronavirus coverage.

Written by: [Marie Richter](#)

Edited by: [Eric Effron](#), [Florian Meißner](#)

Sources

Ownership and Financing

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