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Abstract: *Beyond the Sect-Paradigm? Did attitudes in monitoring religious groups change in Austria during the last decades?*

As religious freedom ends, where inflictions of the rights of individuals by religious groups or denominations begins, monitoring of those groups is an important concern for maintaining those rights guaranteed to the citizens by secular states. During the last decades, changing attitudes in monitoring religious groups and spreading information on those groups can be noticed in the German-speaking world. An awareness of infliction of the rights of individuals by has first arisen in the German-speaking World during the Seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when so called "Youth-Religions" (Jugendreligionen) came into being, which were soon labelled sects.

Two kinds of groups focussing on monitoring religious movements came into being in Austria as a reaction to this process: 1. More or less privately led incorporated societies, which are led by persons concerned, be it relatives of converts or ex.-members of religious groups. 2. Institutions run by "traditional churches". Meanwhile, as a relatively recent phenomenon, also a governmental institution for monitoring religious movements, that to not belong to the group of the 11 officially acknowledged religions in Austria, has been established, the "Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen". Interestingly, the much discussed term "sect" is used in this context, although, for example, the former "lexicon of sects, non-standard groups and world-views" (Lexikon der Sekten, Sondergruppen und Weltanschauungen; edited by institutions of mainstream Christian churches) has become the "lexicon of new religious groups, scenes and world-views" (Lexikon neureligiöser Gruppen, Szenen und Weltanschauungen) in its latest editon, attempting to adapt a more "neutral", scholarly language.

In my paper I will give an outline of the actual situation in this field in Austria, focussing on two questions: what is the position of non-governmental organisations monitoring religious groups vis-à-vis the governmental institutions? For this purpose I have led interviews with representatives of such societies. The second issue at stake will be a brief discussion of whether one should use the sect-paradigm within that field, taking into account the vivid discussion of the term "sect" within German-speaking scholarship of religions during the last decades. This term seems to be laden with theological connotation, that make its use contra-productive in establishing, what the German scholar of religion, Hartmut Zinser, has called "religious consumer-protection".