

Right-wing radicalism in the FRG

In November 2011, an extremely radical three-person group, previously unknown to the police, was exposed. Their members confesses to the murder of ten people, including nine foreigners (8 Turks and a Greek), in the years 2000 – 2006. The whole Federal Republic of Germany was shaken. A discussion arose when it turned out that the assassinations committed by the Neo-Nazis had been previously attributed by the police to the Turkish mafia or gangster wars between foreigners. The questions were: What is the true dimension of the right-wing radicalism in the FRG? How could the investigation have been so incompetently conducted? Was it the people who failed or the security system? Is the whole issue related to the social frustration within the area of the former GDR?

Right-wing radicalism has always been present in the FRG, but it started to take the form of terrorism in the eighties. The phenomenon escalated after the reunification. Its outbreak was especially powerful in the new federal states of the former GDR, as their citizens did not participate in the West German debates on the Nazi past. In the frustrating conditions of rapid changes and the accompanying revaluations, the far-right seemed interesting and worth supporting, especially with its actions aimed against foreigners, who were believed to have been taking jobs from the Germans. The number of attacks increased significantly and the majority of the Germans did not consider it worrying. The fact that the police in the western states of the federation acted sluggishly in such situations pointed to the extent of the problem. One could get the impression that the police was in fact willing to tolerate such manifestations of right-wing radicalism, including acts of violence.

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Attacks on foreigners in Rostock and Hoyerswerd received social acceptance. It had not been until the tragic events in Mölln, Schleswig-Holstein, in September 1992 when the atmosphere changed. Two houses of Turkish families were set on fire and 3 people were killed. In reaction, protests were organized throughout Germany and the police took more decisive actions, which visibly suppressed this type of violence.

Because, at about the same time, the far-left terrorists ceased fire, the general impression was that the German ideological terrorism was finally defeated. The attention of both the public and German security services focused on the Islamic radicals.

Since then, the domestic Neo-Nazis have not been considered particularly dangerous. This view was evidenced by the subsequent annual reports of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution which emphasized, that there are no right-wing terrorist structures in the FRG. Also the published statistics supported this state of affairs. According to these, the right-wing armed gangs were supposed to have killed 47 people since the reunification. However, the calculations performed in November 2011 by independent experts show, that there may be several times more casualties – from 137 to over 140. The police stated that the unexplained cases are now being analyzed.

The most serious accusation that turned up during the debate concerned the downplaying or unnoticed of right-wing violence by the police and officials from the Offices for the Protection of the Constitution. Commentators pointed to the fact, that the activity of the three Neo-Nazis was not exposed by the police, but provoked by the perpetrators themselves, who launched a gruesome propaganda campaign. The information concerning the group's activity comes from a CD sent by the terrorists themselves to various institutions and from a pen-drive found by the police. According to these materials, apart from the murders, the group also attempted at least 14 bank robberies. The recording also suggest, that the group could also be responsible for the series of arsons from 2006 – 2011 in the town of Völklingen in Saarland, during which 20 people were harmed and significant property damage arose.

The people started wondering whether it is possible that the police showed such lack of professionalism in this matter or if the officers helped the three Neo-Nazis on purpose, turning the investigations to other directions. The motives of such actions could have been diverse: political views of particular officers, the willingness to whitewash their country, incorrect understanding of the protection of Germany's good name or even pure laziness, the acceptance of the thesis that, if the perpetrators are foreigners, stopping the pursuit is justified. Maybe the three Neo-Nazis were the informants of the police or some other institution? Maybe they had their own informants in those institutions, which made it possible for them to act undetected for 14 years? It is now difficult to pinpoint a cause. It is, however, worth remembering that the same



phenomenon had previously appeared in Italy and Austria. The police there was also ready to turn a blind eye on the actions of right-wing radicals or even covered their tracks and turned investigations to different directions. In both cases it was about political sympathies.

The issue of the informants reminded the public about the attempt, made in 2001 by the then minister of Foreign Affairs, Otto Schilly, to outlaw the Neo-Nazi NPD party (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*). The motion, carefully prepared by the Federal Constitutional Court, was suspended after it was revealed, that many members of this party worked as informants. For the same reason the Court rejected the motion in 2003. Questions were asked about how it was possible for national institutions to cooperate with Neo-Nazis charged with sedition. This question returns also today.

The exposure of the three-person terrorist group also showed a gap in the German legal system, concerning the gathering of the data helpful in fighting radicalism. It is obvious that the perpetrators could not have been acting on their own. Since they themselves lived under cover, they must have used some external help. Someone must have rented flats and cars for them, as well as help in the purchase of weapons. The number of their associates is not known, however, a few people have already been detained. Phone call billings would be helpful in finding the others, but the Federal Constitutional Court decided in 2010, that the gathering of such data without specific suspicion, only in relation to a potential threat, is illegal and ordered the removal of all the previously collected information. The judges of the Court pointed to the lack of sufficient protection of the gathered information and the lack of regulations preventing potential abuses.

The analyses also point to the unclear division of competences between different offices, as well as rivalry hindering cooperation at various levels. On the one hand, there is rivalry between the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which reached such size in Thuringia during the nineties, that they started competing instead of cooperating with each other. On the other hand, the federal system of the FRG caused the division of the German legal system between the individual federal states. This disintegration was largely overcome after 2001 during the fight with Islamic terrorism. However, it seems to be still present when it comes to the manifestations of domestic radicalism.

The federal authorities reacted quickly. Chancellor Merkel talked about the German disgrace, the President of the Bundestag about the shame caused by the incompetence of the German services which were not able to protect the people murdered by Neo-Nazis, and the Minister of Internal Affairs warned about huge losses in the public trust for the security system. The right-wing radicalism was the subject of the Bundestag's deliberations. They showed an unusual political consensus. All parties were of the same opinion when it comes to the necessity to battle the phenomenon. They all agreed that not only police actions are required, but also legal



and organizational changes. Different means of finally eradicating right-wing radicalism were proposed: a new information center, gathering data concerning right-wing radicalism from different services, another attempt to outlaw the NPD, the introduction of a data storage period for all mobile network and internet operators. Actions must be taken and this view is shared also by the German public. According to the study commissioned by the ARD television, 81% of respondents believe that the right eye of the German judicial system is blind and this situation needs to be changed quickly.

The events of November were also widely reflected in foreign press. The whole issue cast shadow on the German-Turkish relations in particular. The Turkish government quite decidedly reacted to the revealed facts, pointing to the need of commitment to the fight with extremists. They demanded the explanation of all the circumstances and threads of the matter from the German authorities. It was emphasized that investigations must be conducted, regardless of potential involvements. The Turkish authorities declared that they will help all the Turkish victims of the right-wing terrorism in Germany. In the Turkish media, more than anywhere else, there was a discussion concerning the German history and that no lesson has been learned from it.

From the Polish point of view, the fact that the three terrorists came from the FRG is of particular importance, which is put aside in other media coverages. They grew up in a “great plate” housing estate in Jena. Their rightist views were formed during the first years after the reunification of Germany. Just as many other citizens of FGR, they felt great fear, frustration and disillusionment. Even though they came from very different environments, they were united by their aversion to the new, democratic system. They called themselves *Kameradschaft Jena* and with several other opponents of foreigners, leftists and police officers, they became known in the whole city. Searched for by the police, they decided to live in conspiracy. For 14 years they freely moved throughout the country executing their criminal plans as the “National Socialist Underground” (*Nationalsozialistisches Untergrund*).

What is really surprising is the endurance of radical attitudes. At the beginning of the nineties, during the time of abrupt changes, the Nazi sympathies seemed a short-term phenomenon, typical of very young people. After more than 20 years after the reunification of Germany, it points to certain unsolved problems, including the non-adjustment and frustration of some former FRG citizens. Attention should be given especially to the people of the same age as the exposed terrorists – people who are today about 35 years old and have already been called the “Hoyerswerda Generation” by the German media. The press information concerning the districts of East German cities (including Berlin) which foreigners should avoid, testify to the extent of the problem.



The events of November 2011 showed, first of all, that despite the assurances, extreme right-wing terrorism still exists in Germany. On this occasion, several disturbing phenomena were revealed:

- The downplay of the right-wing threat by the police and security services;
- The common use of right-wing radicals as secret informants;
- Legal gaps preventing proper collection of information;
- Unclear division of competences and the rivalry between different services, deepened by the federal structure;
- Non-adjustment and frustration of some former FRG citizens.

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