

German Secret Service destroyed more files on neo-Nazi murders

By Dietmar Henning
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On the instructions of the German Ministry of the Interior, the Secret Service has destroyed files relating to the neo-Nazi killers of the so-called National Socialist Underground (NSU).

NSU members Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and Beate Zschäpe were responsible for the murders of nine immigrants and a policewoman, as well as the planting of bombs and robbing of banks between 2000 and 2007. They lived unmolested in East Germany from 1998 to 2011.

A few weeks ago, it came to light that a department head of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV)—as the German Secret Service is known—had disposed of the records of undercover agents in the far-right scene in the state of Thuringia, out of which the NSU terrorist group emerged.

The Secret Service, the Christian Democratic (CDU)-led government of Chancellor Angela Merkel and the media continue to refer to the destruction of these documents as a mistake, accident, etc. At the same time, the destruction of documents is admitted to have been carried out by the responsible department head and other officials on their own cognisance. Three officials face disciplinary proceedings.

It is now clear, however, that the shredding was done deliberately in order to destroy evidence.

In November 2011, just before and just after the exposure of the NSU killings, files containing information about “Operation Rennsteig” were shredded. As part of this operation, the BfV and other intelligence agencies had recruited at least 15 undercover agents in the neo-Nazi group Thuringia Homeland Security, which included the NSU terrorists.

Records on the NSU and its periphery in the state offices of the Secret Service (LfV) in Thuringia and Saxony were also destroyed or withheld. The president of the BfV, Heinz Fromm, as well as the presidents of the

LfV agencies in the two states have resigned.

Meanwhile, Fromm’s deputy and successor, Alexander Eisvogel, also wants to leave his post. “In parliamentary circles”, according to the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, it is being said the official may have had something to do with the disposal of records”. The 47-year-old Eisvogel has worked for the BfV for years and served as head of the LfV in the state of Hesse.

Last week, Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich of the Christian Social Union (CSU) declared that on instructions from his department, the BfV had destroyed records that could provide information about the activities of the Secret Service in the right-wing scene. The order was issued by the Interior Ministry on November 14, 2011, just ten days after revelations about the racist murders by the NSU.

This contradicts all talk of breakdowns or failures by a few employees. The shredding was clearly carried out as a matter of policy.

In contrast with previous claims, Interior Ministry spokesperson Jens Teschke admitted last Friday that the destruction of the records of six interceptions involving right-wing extremists took place at BfV offices in November and December 2011 and in April and May of this year. The most recent records to be destroyed were from 2005.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the files destroyed in December related to neo-Nazis Jan W. and Thorsten H. Both were suspected of having had contact with the three NSU terrorists and of supporting them. Jan W. is suspected of procuring a weapon for a terrorist cell while working as an undercover informant for the Saxony Secret Service.

Citing security circles, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported that Thomas S. may have also been referred to in the files. Thomas S. was said to have had a liaison with Beate Zschäpe for a time.

The Interior Ministry defended the destruction of records as a “routine measure” mandated by law. Section 12 of the Secret Service Act calls for the deletion of personal data, but only when “it is no longer necessary to complete tasks”. This was clearly not the case.

The fact that the Interior Ministry, as the supervisory authority of the BfV, ordered the destruction of records raises the question of whether it was not informed of or even involved in the targeted destruction of the files of “Operation Rennsteig”. So far, this has been presented as the responsibility solely of the department head at the BfV, about which the Interior Ministry allegedly knew nothing.

The revelations coming to light piece by piece show that the murders carried out by the NSU would have been impossible without the active support of the secret services. Under constant observation by the Secret Service, and lavishly funded by means of undercover informants, a far-right scene was created and supported in the late 1990s out of which a right-wing terrorist organization arose.

The question is not whether, but how and to what extent the Secret Service was directly or indirectly involved in the crimes of the NSU. The precise answer to that question is being suppressed, in part through the destruction and withholding of evidence and documents by the intelligence agencies and the Interior Ministry.

Meanwhile, four committees are investigating links between the secret services and the NSU terrorist attacks—in Saxony and Thuringia, in the federal parliament, and in Bavaria, where five of the ten NSU murders were committed and where the committee will begin its work after the summer. Those involved see their task not as illuminating the real relations between the secret services and far-right scene, including the NSU, but restoring the damaged reputation of the intelligence services.

Government spokesperson Steffen Seibert has made clear that Chancellor Merkel stands behind her interior minister. Seibert said that no laws were violated.

The opposition Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and Left Party are seeking to obscure the involvement of the intelligence agencies with right-wing terrorism and cover up for them.

Left Party parliamentary deputy Wolfgang Neškovic, a former federal judge and a member of the Parliamentary Control Body (PKGr), which has unrestricted access to secret service documents, recently compared the secret services with the “fire brigade”. It had, indeed, made

mistakes, he said, but could not so easily be abolished. He regularly calls for the Secret Service itself to make its work transparent. In the face of perhaps the most serious and brutal right-wing terrorist attacks in the history of post-war Germany, he has appealed to the security agencies to “wholeheartedly engage in the credible explanation of [their] failures.”

Interior Minister Friedrich told Neškovic; to clarify his statements regarding the destruction of files “without delay”. He warned that “otherwise the impression could arise that data protection rules were being used to justify ministerial cover-ups.”

Neškovic’s parliamentary colleague, Petra Pau, the chairwoman of the Left Party in the parliamentary committee investigating the NSU, told the media, “I am stunned that after the NSU flew apart, the Interior Ministry ordered the destruction of files without knowing whether they are still relevant to the investigation.”

But her declaration of shock was undercut by the SPD committee chairwoman, Eva Högl, who said, “We [the NSU committee joint chairs] already knew of the secret files.”

The committee chairs should be compelled to answer questions about their knowledge of the events. What do the joint committee chairs of the PKGr, who have access to all files and documents, know that the public does not?

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, protesters occupied the headquarters of the Stasi (East German State Security Service). They wanted to prevent the East German Secret Service from destroying its files, in which the crimes of the Stalinist regime were documented. What crimes are being covered up by the destruction of the documents of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution?

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