

While Neo-Nazis kill, German authorities stonewall

By Marianne Arens
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The murder of Kassel district president Walter Lübcke shows more and more clearly that the German state is lending a protective hand to far-right terrorists.

Lübcke was apparently the victim of an organized right-wing terrorist cell, which had caches of dozens of weapons and explosives in different hiding places. Its members were known to the Hesse state secret service for years. Moreover, the secret service made sure that one of them, the well-known neo-Nazi Markus Hartmann, was given an official firearms license by the city of Kassel.

As the *Tagesspiegel* reported on August 20, the alleged murderer Stephan Ernst, his accomplice Markus Hartmann and their arms dealer Elmar J. had at least 46 firearms, in addition to combat knives, explosives and other material. This arsenal had been seized in more than 30 raids and house searches between 8 June and 19 July, at a time when the public was being fed trivialities and blatant lies about an “lone offender”.

Just a few days ago, members of the German parliament were informed about what had been seized, which had only reached the media on 20 August, one month after the last raids. The information came from the government’s response to a question tabled by Left Party Bundestag (federal parliament) member Martina Renner and her group on 8 July. While this question can be found on the Bundestag website, the answer (in whole or in part) seems to be only available to selected editors.

According to the *Tagesspiegel*, the police found the weapons in unspecified hiding places in Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Baden-Württemberg. They included pistols, a sub-machine gun, rifles and machine guns, as well as “other items such as firecrackers, knives and sports bows”—an arsenal sufficient to equip a small militia.

Almost simultaneously, joint research by the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* and the broadcasters NDR and WDR revealed that Mark Hartmann apparently possessed and used these weapons completely legally. The Hesse secret service itself had ensured Hartmann received a firearms license, including for ammunition, in 2015. This was also confirmed by the *Hessische Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, a Kassel region newspaper, based on its own inquiries with the authorities.

The city of Kassel knew Hartmann as a violent right-wing extremist and because of this did not want to issue him a firearms license. After two rejections, however, he brought a legal case in the Kassel administrative court. After a year-long legal dispute, a

decision was reached to grant the license based on a rationale provided by the Hesse state secret service branch with the outrageous statement that there were no evidence about Hartmann that spoke against his “reliability within the meaning of the weapons law”.

The Hesse secret service had known for years that Markus Hartmann was a diehard neo-Nazi and violent right-wing thug. As with Stephan Ernst (45), who explicitly confessed to the murder of Lübcke, but later retracted his confession, there are numerous photos and statements connecting Hartmann (43) to the neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD) and other organizations such as “Combat 18”, “Blood & Honour” and even the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU), responsible for a string of murders committed against immigrants and a police officer.

Ernst and Hartmann belonged for years to the “Kassel Free Resistance”. Both have participated in NPD marches and systematically attacked foreigners and dissenters. On May 1, 2009, they attacked the May Day rally in Dortmund with stones and wooden slats together with about 400 right-wing thugs. Before that, Hartmann had received at least one fine from the city of Kassel for shouting “Sieg-Heil” and making the Hitler salute. Using the the pseudonym “Stadtreiniger” (City Cleanser) he wrote on the internet, “If I think about it, there should be another Reichskristallnacht [the November 1938 pogroms carried out by the Nazis against Jews throughout Germany].”

After the attack on May 1, 2009 in Dortmund, both Markus Hartmann and Stephan Ernst were arrested, and were investigated for grievous bodily harm and breach of the peace. While Ernst was sentenced to prison, albeit on probation, Hartmann got away without punishment. Subsequently, both officially disappeared from the “radar” of the authorities.

Like Ernst, Hartmann continued to live in Kassel, where, in 2014, they both worked for a while for the same employer, the rail supplier Mobiltechnik Hübner. The alleged Lübcke murderer Ernst was employed by Hübner until 2019, when he was arrested. He hid the murder weapon and other weapons on the company’s factory premises.

Markus Hartmann meanwhile kept himself afloat as an arms dealer. According to research by *Zeit Online*, he made a total of 480 sales, mostly of rifles and accessories, on a German website “for hunters, shooters and anglers”. In May 2019, shortly before the murder of Walter Lübcke, he is said to have suddenly discontinued this internet trade and deleted his provider profile.

Hartmann used his gun license intensively for shooting practice at different shooting clubs, above all the “rifle club 1952 Sandershausen”, in which later he and Stephan Ernst sat on the board. He also provided his firearms to Ernst and put him in contact with the arms dealer Elmar J., who equipped him with the murder weapon, a .38 calibre handgun. This prepared Ernst well for the 2nd of June 2019, the Saturday night when, according to his withdrawn confession, he drove to Wolfhagen-Istha and shot a bullet through the head of the Kassel district president.

As the arms trade shows, Stephan Ernst and Markus Hartmann were anything but reformed, inconspicuous citizens against whom “nothing was available” in the last few years.

For example, Ernst is suspected of being responsible for the attempted murder of an Iraqi asylum seeker on January 6, 2016. This has been confirmed by the Kassel public prosecutor’s office, which has now revived the still unresolved case. Although already at that time, Ernst faced “the initial suspicion of committing a criminal offence”, he has not been prosecuted for it so far.

The crime was carried out close to his place of residence and involved the Lohfelden refugee accommodation center. This facility was also a topic at a town hall meeting where Lübcke had faced right-wing abuse, including from Stephan Ernst. In this meeting, Ernst had yelled at Lübcke, “I cannot believe it” and “Get lost”. He also participated in the subsequent campaign against foreigners, the federal government and Lübcke on the internet.

Last Thursday, 22 August, the Hesse state Interior Minister Peter Beuth (CDU) admitted in an interior affairs committee meeting that the Hesse secret service had both Stephan Ernst and Markus Hartmann “on their radar” all the time.

Following the closed-door meeting, Hermann Schaus, domestic spokesman for the Left Party, wrote that Beuth faced the obvious question of “why two neo-Nazis known to the authorities had disappeared from the radar and been able to amass a whole arsenal of weapons”. He admitted, “that the special danger of Stephen Ernst had been known to the management of the ‘secret service’.”

Furthermore, the Hesse Interior Minister admitted that “the secret service held a personal file even for the neo-Nazi Markus H.”. However, the files had been “deleted from the systems of the secret service and apparently locked in a safe”, according to Schaus.

Torsten Felstehausen, another Hesse Left Party state deputy, commented on the recent revelations with the astonished exclamation, “how insanely blind the security authorities have been”. However, this comment is far from correct. In the case of the Lübcke murder, the authorities were by no means blind. At least since the NSU murder of Halit Yozgat in Kassel in 2006, there can be no innocent explanation for their contradictory and complicit handling of the right-wing terrorist cells.

An official of the Hesse state secret service branch, Andreas Temme, was present at the crime scene, an internet cafe, when the 2006 murder was carried out. However, Temme (former nickname: “Little Adolf”) claims to have heard nothing of the cold-blooded murder of 21-year-old Halit Yozgat. The case has still not been solved, and Temme was moved from the secret service, where he was responsible for confidential informants

(CIs) from the right-wing scene, to the Kassel regional council, whose boss was the recently murdered Walter Lübcke.

The investigations of the Hesse NSU parliamentary committee of inquiry have uncovered an at least indirect relationship between Stephan Ernst and Andreas Temme. Ernst knew the neo-Nazi and CI Benjamin Gärtner (code name “vegetables”), whom Temme had telephoned shortly before the murder of Halit Yozgat. Gärtner confirmed in February 2016 before the Hesse NSU committee of inquiry that he has known Ernst as “NPD-Stephan”. Shortly thereafter, the dossier which the secret service possessed on Stephan Ernst disappeared.

Markus Hartmann appeared as a witness during the NSU investigation into the Kassel murder in 2006. He told the investigators that he had known the murder victim Halit Yozgat “fleetingly”. If one considers that shortly before the murder of Yozgat, the two NSU members, Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos, presumably participated in the birthday party of the Kassel neo-Nazi Stanley Röske, with whom Ernst and Hartmann were also close friends, it is conceivable that the decisive information about Yozgat’s internet cafe came from one of the two.

Hartmann’s file has also since disappeared. Meanwhile, the Hesse state government, led by former Interior Minister Volker Bouffier, has decided to keep the Hesse secret service NSU files under lock and key until 2044.

All of these explosive revelations, which are only partially coming into the light of day, suggest that government agencies are playing an active role in the far-right terrorist scene, which has now also claimed the life of a high-ranking government official.

Were the alleged murderer Stephan Ernst, or his close accomplice Markus Hartmann, or both used for years as Confidential Informants and undercover agents? Or is the murder, whose right-wing extremist background became known only through traces of DNA found at the scene, to be used to stir up fear and tension in order to justify providing the state apparatus with further powers?

In any case, it is certain that Ernst and Stephan—both firmly anchored in the militant neo-Nazi scene for decades—were well known to the Hesse secret service. They were kept out of the line of fire for ten years, while the country’s interior ministers and the federal government ran a targeted disinformation campaign.

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