

Fifth German secret service resignation in NSU far-right terror scandal

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3 December 2012

The resignation of Berlin secret service chief Claudia Schmid on November 14 was the fifth resignation by a secret service chief over the cover-up of information about the far-right National Socialist Underground (NSU) in Germany. Federal Secret Service (BND) President Heinz Fromm and the heads of state secret services in Thuringia, Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt have already resigned on similar grounds.

Schmid's resigned over the destruction of files containing information relevant to the on-going inquiry into a trio of far-right terrorists from the NSU, whose activities came to light last year. The secret services apparently maintained extensive networks of agents inside the NSU and its periphery. The destruction of files also led to suspicions that the secret services were attempting to block the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the NSU affair.

As in previous cases, politicians played down the resignation, referring to "regrettable mistakes" (Claudia Schmid), "chaotic files" (Green Party parliamentary deputy Benedikt Lux) and "highly problematic official structures" (Left Party deputy Hakan Tas).

Both the increasing number of these resignations and their timing strongly suggest the deliberate destruction of evidence, however.

On June 28 of this year, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (the German domestic secret service) admitted that it had destroyed hundreds of files on agents on the NSU's periphery. The files were shredded shortly after the NSU flew apart in November 2011. (See, "Germany: Secret service chief resigns following scandal over destruction of neo-Nazi files")

The next day, on June 29, the Berlin state secret service was also busy shredding documents. The section head for right-wing and left-wing extremism,

along with two co-workers, destroyed 57 files on right-wing extremism. Some 32 of these files had been ordered to be deposited with the state archive, and so would not normally have been scheduled for destruction.

The remaining files should also not have been destroyed, since the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the NSU had agreed in March that all files held by security agencies about the NSU should be re-examined.

Among other things, the destroyed files contained information about far-right activist Horst Mahler, the so-called Reich Citizens Movement, the *Heimattreue Deutsche Jugend* (Homeland-loyal German Youth), the *Initiative für Volksaufklärung* (Initiative for Popular Enlightenment) and the neo-Nazi band "Landser".

In the context of the NSU investigation, the destruction of files on the "Landser" band is explosive. Far-right activist Thomas S was a supporter of the band; he testified that he had had an affair with Beate Zschäpe, one of the NSU trio, and supplied them with explosives. He had been an informant for the Berlin state criminal police (LKA) since 2000.

Berlin State Interior Minister Frank Henkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), responsible for the secret service and LKA, already knew since March 9 about the existence of this informant, but told neither the NSU committee of inquiry nor the Berlin state legislature. Thomas S's activity as an informant first became public knowledge in mid-September, long after the files were destroyed by the secret service. At this point, Henkel claimed to have known nothing; he also held back information about the destruction of the files for several weeks.

The final impetus for Schmid's resignation was the revelation that the destruction of files this year was by

no means a unique case. Two years ago, files regarding the right-wing extremist “Blood & Honour” organisation, banned since 2000, were also shredded. Numerous links existed between “Blood & Honour” and the NSU.

Schmid is now serving as a scapegoat for her superiors. Had Henkel resigned, this would have led to the collapse of the shaky coalition in the Berlin state executive between the CDU and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), leading to early elections in the capital.

Scandals run like a red thread through the history of Berlin's secret services. The so-called “frontline city” of the Cold War was the setting for numerous Western and Eastern secret service agencies to conduct illegal cloak-and-dagger operations. The West Berlin authorities continually fanned fears that West Berlin might be overrun by “the Russians” and employed all sorts of forces to protect “freedom”, including those with dubious and even Nazi backgrounds, so long as they were anti-Communist.

Already in the 1950s, no one in Berlin was safe from the surveillance of the secret service. Even functionaries of the SPD and Free Democratic Party (FDP), as well as journalists, were spied upon if they were suspected of maintaining contact with communists.

In the late 1960s, Peter Urbach, an agent provocateur of the Berlin state secret service, supplied protesting students with Molotov cocktails, firearms and bombs. In 1969, one of his bombs was detonated outside the Jewish Community House on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, the night in November 1938 when thousands of Jewish businesses and synagogues were attacked. Urbach also supplied Andreas Baader and other members of the Red Army Faction (RAF), contributing considerably to the establishment of the terrorist organisation.

Another undercover agent, Ulrich Schmücker, joined the “June 2 Movement”, an anarchist terrorist organization in West Berlin, and was found murdered in 1974 under circumstances that remain unexplained. Legal proceedings to shed light on his murder lasted 15 years and were finally wound up in 1991 without a result. The secret service hindered and manipulated the work of the courts, withholding evidence and placing false evidence. Based on the testimony of one suspect, who was also probably in the pay of the secret service,

several innocent persons were sentenced to long periods in jail.

Scandals continued to surface even after the unification of West and East Berlin in 1990. While relatively harmless so-called “unofficial collaborators” (IMs) of the East German *Stasi* (state security) were denounced and banned from their jobs, the West German secret service employed former *Stasi* officers as experts in their craft.

In 2000, as a result of the numerous scandals, then-state Interior Minister Eckart Werthebach (CDU) dissolved the State Secret Service Agency as an independent body and integrated it into the state interior ministry. Since then, Claudia Schmid led the organisation. A member of the free-market Free Democratic Party, Schmid also headed the state secret service while the SPD and Left Party headed the Berlin state executive. Little has changed, as the recent scandals show.



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