

The Luxembourg government resigns over secret service scandal

Peter Schwarz
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The Luxembourg government resigned Wednesday evening due to a scandal involving the country's secret services.

Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker announced the resignation of the government and new elections in October after a parliamentary committee came to the conclusion that Juncker had lost control over the country's intelligence service, SREL (Service de Renseignement de l'État du Luxembourg). For years, the SREL led a life of its own and bugged senior politicians, including Juncker himself.

The parliamentary committee accused Juncker of failing to properly inform the relevant parliamentary control commission of the malpractices of the secret service. Despite the fact that the service was guilty of flagrant violations of the law, Juncker failed to take disciplinary action against SREL staff. He only informed the state attorney about the offences committed after it was no longer possible to prosecute those responsible.

In a long and heated parliamentary debate on Thursday, Juncker, a Christian Democrat, denied any personal responsibility. His social democratic coalition partners turned against him, however, and supported the investigation report. As a result, Juncker dissolved the government. He is expected to run for the office of prime minister once again in the upcoming elections.

Juncker has governed the Grand Duchy and its half-million inhabitants since 1995. He is the longest-serving prime minister in Europe and plays an important role in the European Union (EU). From 2005 to 2013, he was chairman of the Euro Group. He failed to win the post of EU president in 2009, however, because he was considered by Berlin and Paris to be too headstrong. Instead, the Belgian Herman Van Rompuy received the newly created post.

The dubious activities of the Luxembourg intelligence service date back to the so-called bomb-planting affair in the 1980s. Between 1984 and 1986, 20 bombs exploded in the Grand Duchy, with no information emerging about the background to the bombings or who was responsible.

Only now, nearly three decades later, are two members of an elite unit of the gendarmerie on trial. They are accused of carrying out the bombings in order to create a climate of fear and thereby gain additional funding for law enforcement agencies. The defence lawyers for the pair insist, however, that the NATO secret operations Gladio, or the Stay-Behind Network, was behind the attacks (see "Luxembourg trial into 1980s terror bombings reveals involvement of German police, intelligence agents," June 12, 2013). The official remit of the top secret Stay-Behind Network was to commit acts of sabotage behind the lines in the event of a Soviet invasion. In fact, the organisation was riddled with extreme right-wing elements and carried out a series of terror attacks in several countries aimed at provoking a political shift to the right. The organisation's "strategy of tension" in Italy left dozens dead and is well-documented.

There are many indications that Luxembourg's security forces were also involved in the Stay-Behind Network and played the main role in the bombings. These links, however, only played an indirect role in the deliberations of the parliamentary committee, which led to the resignation of the government.

The central event dealt with by the committee was a telephone call held by Juncker and a small circle of confidantes with SREL chief Marco Mille in January 2007. Evidently, one topic of the call was the possible involvement of members of the Grand Ducal family in the bombings. Further details are not known.

Mille turned up at the meeting with a specially made watch and secretly recorded the whole conversation. Juncker is alleged to have found out about the bugging operation two years later but then took no disciplinary action against his chief of intelligence. By his own admission, he tolerated this massive abuse of loyalty in order not to strain the relationship with other intelligence services. Mille remained in office until 2010 and then joined the German company Siemens as head of security.

The significance of the Luxembourg intelligence scandal extends far beyond the borders of the Grand Duchy. It permits a glimpse into the inner workings of intelligence agencies that are far removed from being politically neutral “intelligence services” committed to the security of the population.

While much remains obscure, it is clear that the Luxembourg intelligence service played an active role in the politics of the country behind the scenes for many years. In so doing, it maintained close links with other Western intelligence and right-wing political forces. Now, the network has finally led to the resignation of Jean-Claude Juncker, a respected figure in the European political establishment.

The threatening nature of the comprehensive monitoring and interception system uncovered by former US secret service employee Edward Snowden becomes even clearer. The huge amount of data collected has nothing to do with the “struggle against terrorism”, but is rather the basis for the persecution of political dissidents and political manoeuvres and provocations aimed primarily against the working class.



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