

Germany's grand coalition appoints new state secretary for intelligence services

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Klaus-Dieter Fritsche, a member of the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) in the grand coalition, is to head the German chancellery's newly created post of secretary of state responsible for the coordination and management of the intelligence services. This task was previously performed by an ordinary department head.

Fritsche is a secret service insider who has consistently promoted the interests of the state apparatus to the detriment of the population's democratic rights. He enjoys close relations with the current head of the intelligence agencies, as well as Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière.

From 1993 to 1996, as an attorney he ran the office of former Bavarian interior minister Günther Beckstein, who was known as a right-wing rabble-rouser and hardliner with respect to foreign policy and the fight against terrorism.

Fritsche became deputy head of the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution (the German intelligence service) in 1996, the chancellery's coordinator of secret services in 2005, and permanent state secretary at the federal interior ministry in 2009.

In this role, he was instrumental in helping to conceal the surveillance of the US National Security Agency (NSA) in Germany. Following Edward Snowden's revelations of the wide scale monitoring of private communications, Fritsche's former boss Hans-Peter Friedrich (CSU) declared that any suspicions about the NSA had “vanished into thin air”.

In November, Fritsche spoke in favour of the expansion of surveillance and re-introduction of state data retention—policies which have since been adopted by the federal government. At the autumn meeting of the Federal Criminal Investigation Agency (BKA), he demanded that “not only traffic data, but also the contents of e-mails” should be retrieved and stored,

especially if they are encrypted. In addition, he described as a “threat to the Internet” the *Tor* online software network, which helps Internet users to a certain extent evade state monitoring.

Fritsch's time as deputy head of the intelligence department and secret services co-ordinator also covered the period from 2000 to 2006, when the “National Socialist Underground” (NSU) far right-wing terrorist organization committed at least nine racially motivated murders and killed a policewoman.

Since the exposure of the NSU in November 2011, new evidence continues to emerge, indicating that the intelligence service and police were aware of the terrorist cell but covered up its activities. Some evidence even suggests that the authorities themselves were implicated in the attacks and killings of the NSU.

Fritsche personally contributed to closing the investigation into the three known NSU members. When the interior ministry asked the secret service in 2003 about the possible existence of a “Nazi RAF” or right-wing extremist terrorist organization, Fritsche expressly rejected the idea. Although the hunt for the terrorist trio had been in progress since 1998, he wrote in his response to the ministry that there was “no evidence...such a group existed in the extreme right-wing milieu”.

Fritsche referred to press reports, which drew attention to “three bomb-makers from Thuringia, who have been in hiding for several years”, and expressed the opinion, “that there may well be a network of potential supporters (of these crimes) from (wider) extreme right-wing circles”.

According to Fritsche, this is wrong. He claimed the media “held to the contrary view that these people are fugitives and—as far as is known—have not committed any acts of violence since they have been on the run.

Support for them is, therefore, not to be compared with support for armed attacks from wider criminal circles”.

When Fritsche wrote these lines, the three NSU members had already murdered four people. The intelligence agencies had planted at least two dozen spies within their base of supporters, who are presently estimated to number between 100 and 500. Moreover, there were numerous clues as to the whereabouts of the trio and those behind the murders, but neither the police nor the secret service took any action. Witnesses therefore accuse the intelligence agency and police of deliberately thwarting the investigation.

It is assumed that the intelligence service knew more in 2003 than Fritsche wanted the public to believe. When invited in October 2012 to testify before the Bundestag's (federal parliament's) NSU inquiry committee about his 2003 statements, he said little about this suspicion. Instead, he accused the media of “scandal mongering” and objected to the fact that “biting criticism, mockery and ridicule are raining blows on a whole branch of police and intelligence service”.

Things came to a head when Fritsche finally cautioned the deputies, claiming they were not entitled to inspect intelligence agency files and they themselves constituted more or less a security risk. The meeting was terminated, but later continued in a session closed to the public.

The appointment of this same Fritsche only a year later to the chancellery post of secretary of state for the intelligence services shows the character of the new federal government. The coalition partners are well aware that their agenda of war and social attacks is incompatible with the democratic rights of the population. That is why they are bolstering the state apparatus and strengthening the intelligence services.



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