

# Ten years since the neo-Nazi attack in Cologne, Germany

Dietmar Henning  
12 June 2014

Tens of thousands gathered in the Cologne district of Mülheim earlier this week under the slogan “Birlikte”—Turkish for “Together” or “Shoulder to shoulder”—to protest against racism and far-right violence. Here, exactly 10 years ago, the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU) perpetrated an atrocity on Keupstraße, a commercial street frequented by Turkish immigrants.

The fascist bombing injured 22 people, 4 seriously. It was only by chance that no one died. Given the nature of the bomb and the place chosen to detonate it, residents of the district as well as independent observers immediately concluded it was a racist, terrorist attack.

However, from the beginning, the authorities sought to downplay or dismiss the political character of the crime. Only after the death of Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos in 2011, when a video came to light in which they claimed responsibility for placing a bicycle carrying a remotely detonated nail bomb outside the barbershop in Keupstraße, did the public learn that the NSU had perpetrated the atrocity. The trial of a third NSU member, Beate Zschäpe, is currently under way in Munich.

Just one day after the attack in Cologne in 2004, the then-minister of the interior, Otto Schily (Social Democratic Party—SPD), said an attack by far-right forces could be excluded and that it had to be assumed the culprits came from the local criminal milieu. The same was said later by North Rhine Westphalian State interior minister Fritz Behrens (SPD).

The web site of the Birlikte solidarity festival states: “The consequences [of the attack] for the victims were dramatic: Victims were turned into culprits, the injured and their family members were interrogated for hours, doors were kicked in and telephones tapped. Businesses, which suffered as a result of the attack, faced intrusive investigations by the tax authorities in the following years.”

This “ordeal of suspicion and mistrust” lasted for seven years. “The one-sided investigations and corresponding media reports not only silenced those affected, the racist attributions continued what the bombing had begun.”

The festival organisers wanted to send “a visible sign of solidarity.” They wrote: “We want a common future, we want more social solidarity! Against neo-Nazis, racism and exclusion. For a just and caring society.”

That was certainly the idea of singer Mario Rispo some time ago when he considered how to help the victims of the terrorist attack in Keupstraße. Growing up in a high-rise estate in Hamburg, Rispo had been inspired by the Turkish music he heard at the homes of his neighbourhood friends.

Today, Rispo sings classic Turkish songs and advocates mutual understanding between Germans and Turks. After the background of the NSU killings became known, he wanted to do “something to bring people together” and counteract discrimination against Turks born in Germany, Rispo said.

When the magazine *Stern* learned of his idea, a process began that is now routine. Event companies and groups that organise festivals against the far right took over the preparations.

As well as Rispo, the “Action Alliance Birlikte” included the organisation “Courage Against Right-Wing Violence” set up by *Stern*, the concert organiser Roland Temme, the Cologne city administration, the Cologne Theatre, the Keupstraße Community Association, and the Cologne organisation “Arse Up Against the Right.”

On Monday, well-known German bands such as BAP, Eko Fresh, Clueso, and the Fantastic Four played. Concerts by Udo Lindenberg and Peter Maffay fell victim to a storm. The concert had to be stopped at about 8:30 p.m.

Many visitors to the rally and concerts, as well as many of the participating artists, undoubtedly wanted to take a stand against racism and neo-fascism. But it is not possible to advocate solidarity, tolerance and opposition to far-right violence without addressing the social origins and political background of this phenomenon.

The growth of xenophobia and right-wing violence is an expression of a political climate in which the official parties are closing ranks to destroy the social gains and democratic rights of the working class. The social devastation being imposed at the behest of the European Union and the German government provided succor for right-wing and fascist parties in the European elections at the end of May.

As mass unemployment and rising poverty make life in Europe ever more difficult, those already disadvantaged, especially immigrants and their offspring, are made the scapegoats for society’s problems. Just two days before the festival in Mülheim, the Bundestag (federal parliament)

debated a further tightening of the right to asylum, especially as it affects Roma. This climate of intolerance encourages the most backward and right-wing sentiments.

At the same time, the ruling elite is increasingly working with right-wing and fascist organisations. The participation by German president Joachim Gauck, who opened the rally and concert in Cologne, and federal justice minister Heiko Maas (SPD), who participated in a panel discussion, reeks of hypocrisy.

“We stand together to say to all who are threatened by xenophobic violence: You are not alone,” Gauck said in his short speech. Meanwhile, he is campaigning for the strengthening of the state. “It is important that our institutions face violent extremism with the sharpened senses and loaded weapons of the rule of law,” he declared.

In reality, the state institutions for whom Gauck speaks work closely with violent right-wing extremist organisations—both in Germany and internationally.

In Ukraine, the German government relied on the fascist organisations Svoboda and Right Sector to bring a right-wing, pro-Western government to power. Gauck traveled to Kiev for the inauguration of the new Ukrainian president, the oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who is attacking the population of eastern Ukraine with the help of the fascists.

For his part, Justice Minister Maas said he was ashamed “that the German state has not been able to better protect upstanding citizens over so many years.” It is incomprehensible, he said, that the victims of the attack were even criminalised. He bemoaned the fact that “so many mistakes” were made.

The German government has not made “mistakes” in relation to the NSU murders. It has served as a co-conspirator.

Lost in the paeans to “standing together” and “solidarity” at the festival was the central question: How is it possible that a right-wing gang of murderers could conduct a racist campaign against foreigners for years, under the eyes of the state security authorities and with their toleration and at least indirect support?

The federal and state Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called), the Military Intelligence Service (MAD) and the Berlin Regional Criminal Investigation Department had at least 24 undercover agents working in the environs of the NSU. The right-wing network “Thuringia Homeland Security” (THS), out of which the terrorist group of Böhnhardt, Mundlos and Zschäpe emerged in the 1990s, was set up by an undercover informant of the security services, Tino Brandt, using state funds. An agent of the Hesse state security agency was even present at the NSU murder of 21-year-old Halit Yozgat in April 2006.

It is now evident that the authorities’ treatment of the victims of the terrorist attack in Keupstraße was not a “mistake,” as Maas claimed.

Just an hour after the attack, the police conducting the criminal investigation sent an initial report to the federal and

state ministries of the interior and to the security service referring to “violent terrorist criminality.” Under pressure from the state Interior Ministry, the detectives withdrew the term “terrorist” half an hour later. On the day of the attack, a senior official of the Department of Right-Wing Violence in the security service was added to the investigation.

The police and secret services suppressed links between the attack and the right-wing terrorism of the NSU. When a profiler working for the State Criminal Investigation Department concluded that it could very well have involved a far-right attack, this was kept secret.

On July 30, 2004, seven weeks after the attack, the Cologne Regional Council told the North Rhine Westphalian State Interior Ministry: “The Cologne Police Headquarters would not address...the aspect of a possible xenophobic motivation as part of the press conference” (Quoted in *Homeland Security, the state and the NSU murders*, by Stefan Aust, Dirk Laabs, Berlin 2014, p. 598).

Only a few of the pictures of the two culprits, captured by a surveillance camera on the day of the attack, were made public after several days’ delay. Further video material reached the public only in the course of the Munich trial.

One of the victim’s lawyers gained access to a part of the evidence, which included a list of 129 NSU supporters containing a reference to the neo-Nazi Ronny W. alongside Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos.

For years, the police ignored important witness testimony, including that of Ali Demir. Shortly following the attack, Demir approached the police and said he had seen two armed plain-clothes police officers at the scene of the crime long before the uniformed police and rescue services arrived.

Only eight years after the attack did the authorities admit, under questioning by the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry, that there had indeed been two plain-clothes police officers in Keupstraße. These two allegedly gave evidence to the Committee of Inquiry in Berlin. However, Demir, who saw pictures of the two policemen at the Committee, said they were not the people he had seen immediately following the explosion.

To date, the authorities continue to stonewall and cover up for the pair.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**