

German reaction to Paris shootings: State build-up and anti-Muslim agitation

Ulrich Rippert
12 January 2015

The brutal assassination in Paris of the staff of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* led to expressions of grief and shock in Germany. Immediately, after news of this became known, a few hundred people gathered in front of the French embassy at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. They laid flowers and lit candles as a sign of solidarity and grief.

For its part, the political establishment and media immediately exploited this widespread outrage for their own extremely reactionary political goals. This is presently concentrated on two demands: first, the call for the unity of all political parties and, secondly, the need for strengthening the security apparatus through the development of the intelligence agencies, an increased police presence and rearming at home and abroad.

As in France, where immediately after the assassination President Francois Hollande delivered a speech to the nation in which he constantly stressed that France was “united against its enemies,” in Germany too, politicians from President Joachim Gauck to Left Party parliamentary faction leader Gregor Gysi declared that all democratic forces should now pull together.

The terrorist attack was “an attack on freedom,” Gauck said, adding, “We will not be divided by hatred.” The “free speech” must now be defended by all the political camps, he said. “We are neither powerless, nor helpless,” said Gauck, and threatened, “We have laws and institutions to combat bigotry and violence.”

On Thursday, Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chairman and Vice-Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel sent a personal letter to the chairmen of all parliamentary parties and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), in which he called for an “alliance of all social forces.” He

called for a joint demonstration by all parties, all religious communities, trade unions, business associations “and other civil society organizations.” Further on in the letter, cited by *Der Spiegel*, he writes, “The insidious terrorist plot to drive a wedge into society must not be allowed.”

In fact, social divisions had commenced long before the terror attacks in Paris. For weeks, the German media has been pumping out the racist poison of xenophobia and anti-Islamism. Leading German politicians are supporting the right-wing rallies of Pegida, which describes itself as “Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West” and agitates against foreigners.

The mobilization of the fascist dregs of society is directly related to the increased military build-up and war preparations. Ever since President Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen announced early last year that the period of German military restraint was over, hardly a day goes by without demands for the improvement of military equipment and more support for the army.

This return of militarism and an aggressive imperialist foreign policy go hand in hand with social devastation, mass poverty and a rapid deterioration of living conditions for more and more people. Opposition to this policy is constantly growing. Less than half of all eligible voters participated in the recent state parliamentary elections, and of those few, the majority voted against the government parties.

In the name of unity, the terrible attack in Paris is now being used to support the very government policy that has brought forth this bloody act of violence.

According to media reports, responsibility for the Paris attack has been claimed by Al Qaeda. The growth

and influence of Al Qaeda is a direct result of US and NATO war policy in the Middle East. Even the most modern weapons possessed by Al Qaeda often come from US or NATO stocks.

At the end of October, the British *Daily Telegraph* reported that extensive weapons supplied by the US to the so-called “moderate units” in Syria were then passed on to the Nusra Front. These included not only modern handguns, but also heavy military equipment such as armour-piercing missiles and Grad rockets. The *Daily Telegraph* commented, “For the United States, the transfer of arms supplied by them to Al Qaeda was a nightmare.”

The call for unity in the wake of the Paris shootings is the continuation and intensification of this policy.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) has announced that Germany is increasing its security precautions following the attacks. “We are in close contact with the [German] states and have a plan for such eventualities, which we have activated,” de Maizière said in Hamburg on Friday, without going into details.

He spoke out against overly hasty judgements on the work of the French police, who shot dead three suspected terrorists on Friday. Four hostages were also killed. The French government had also admitted the leader of the National Front, Marine Le Pen, to the Elysée for “democratic consultations.” Le Pen has called for the reintroduction of the death penalty in Europe in response to the attacks.

Prior to the EU interior minister meeting in Paris on Sunday de Maizière announced his plan was “to mutually discuss if and what should be done differently.” The interior minister, who was one of the first high-ranking German politicians to give succor to the far-right Pegida movement, is intent on using the situation to further tighten up the German government’s anti-immigrant policy and move towards the setting up of a police state.

De Maizière reiterated his support for the demand raised by the government coalition partner, the Christian Social Union, for a massive expansion of data collection by the security services. This was the only way to detect criminal networks on the Internet, he said. He also boasted that the government has already undertaken plans to ban the Islamic State in Germany and introduce sweeping travel restrictions.

Influential media outlets and politicians are already calling for even more drastic measures. In a commentary headline, “Sanctions instead of sermonising,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* complains, “For the ‘Islamic State’ and its sympathizers in the West, the countries whose citizens they attack do not appear as resilient democracies. Jihadists can roam free.” In an interview in *Focus* magazine, the former general secretary general of the CDU, Heiner Geissler, calls for the expulsion of Islamists and a ban on Islamic veils. There can be “no special privileges for Islam” in Germany, he said.

In Germany, spokespersons for Pegida have described the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* as evidence that Islamists “are not ripe for democracy, but rely instead on violence and death.” On Monday, the right-wing and neo-Nazi movement has called for marches in solidarity with *Charlie Hebdo* and the “terror victims of Paris.”

One of the most remarkable developments is the integration of the Left Party into the reactionary “Unity and solidarity policy.” A statement by the Left Party titled “#Je suis Charlie—The hard struggle for freedom” states, “The challenge, ‘to be Charlie’, is great,” and then asks, “Do we have the courage, the determination, to poke our fingers time and time again into the wounds of our society?”

The statement is basically an appeal directed to the German government and Pegida. The Left Party defends the anti-Muslim cartoons of *Charlie Hebdo* as the struggle “for the freedom of thought” and calls for “intransigence in the pursuit of the criminals, and an appropriate judgement and sentencing in the courts.”



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