

New details on connections between German intelligence and neo-Nazis

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1 June 2015

Thomas Richter, who worked for the German federal intelligence agency (BfV) in the far-right milieu under the alias of Corelli for 18 years, is emerging as a key figure in the intimate relations between the country's security authorities and neo-Nazis.

Corelli was unmasked as a spy in 2012 and has since lived under a false identity as ward of a witness protection programme run by the national intelligence agency, which continued to meet with him on a regular basis. In April 2014, the 39-year-old was found dead in his apartment, the day before the Federal Prosecutor General was to interrogate him a second time in relation to the right-wing National Socialist Underground (NSU) terrorist group. Allegedly, he died of a severe sugar imbalance due to a previously undiagnosed diabetic condition.

Since Corelli's exposure, a great deal had been revealed about him. Operating under the nickname of "Tommy HJ", he had played a key role in the extreme-right milieu and was regarded as a leading informant of the BfV. He came into contact with the Nazi underground on numerous occasions.

It therefore seems very unlikely that the security authorities were totally ignorant of the NSU until late 2011, when Uwe Böhnhardt and Uwe Mundlos allegedly committed suicide, and the surviving member of the group, Beate Zschäpe, set fire to the group's flat and then sent video film to several media outlets, claiming responsibility for the arson.

Corelli had already been in contact with Mundlos before the NSU went into hiding and began its killing spree. The authorities are sure that at least one meeting between the two occurred, because evidence emerged that Corelli had passed on information about Mundlos to the secret service in 1995. In 1998, his name was found on Mundlos' contact list, along with the names of 30 other people connected with the neo-Nazi Thuringian Homeland Security (THS) group. The THS, to which the later NSU

members also belonged, was led by Tino Brandt, an undercover agent of the intelligence service in the eastern German state of Thuringia.

The NSU was first mentioned in public on the neo-Nazi The White Wolf web site, run by Corelli in 2002. "Thanks to the NSU, it has borne fruit. The struggle continues ...", read a posting on the web site. By that time, the terrorist cell had committed four murders. Six more were to follow over the next five years. The White Wolf had previously received a donation of €2,500 from the NSU.

In 2005, Corelli handed over to the BfV a CD with thousands of files, labelled with the abbreviation "NSU/NSDAP" (National Socialist Underground/German Nazi Party). It is alleged that this CD was never closely investigated by the BfV and only discovered by the federal criminal police agency in 2014. Corelli died before the federal criminal agency (BKA) was able to question him. Some of the files on this CD, consisting of right-wing extremist propaganda, were also found on the NSU terrorists' hard drives in their Zwickau apartment.

Corelli was a co-founder of a Ku Klux Klan group in the state of Baden-Württemberg, which also had connections with the NSU network. Two members of the group were officers from the 10-member police unit of Michele Kiesewetter, who was to become the NSU's last murder victim.

Because the federal intelligence agency repeatedly refused to comment on the role played by Corelli, the parliamentary control committee (PKGr), which is responsible for the federal parliament's monitoring of the country's various intelligence agencies, engaged former legal policy spokesman of the Green parliamentary faction Jerzy Montag as a special investigator.

Montag was permitted to examine files made available to him by the BfV. It is doubtful, however, that he had access to the complete record. The federal intelligence

agency itself decided which files to release for inspection, and thousands of records were shredded after the NSU's cover was blown in 2011. Nevertheless, Montag's 300-page report revealed some new insights. Although the report is classified as secret, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper and NDR and WDR broadcast journalists have been able to view it.

Montag discovered that the BfV had paid Corelli an agent's wage totaling almost €300,000. In 2002, he received a monthly sum of €1,000. He thus earned three times as much as Tino Brandt, who was paid a total of 200,000 marks (€100,000) by the secret service.

Like Brandt, who financed the establishment of Thuringian Homeland Security with money from the intelligence service, Corelli also invested a portion of the state funds into the development of neo-Nazi structures, such as the "National Demonstration Monitors" web site which he managed.

Whenever the police seized computers in raids, the secret service immediately stepped in. According to special investigator Montag, it was conspicuous that Corelli was able to benefit from the fact that "special bonuses were often paid, when his extensive computer system was completely or partially seized or confiscated."

Corelli also received money from the secret service to buy a car and pay off debts. In addition, the agency took over the costs of "accommodation in the service of friendly foreign parties" and "fees for a language training course abroad."

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Corelli was extremely active in the neo-Nazi scene. "Whenever right-wing extremists gathered anywhere in Germany, Corelli was usually not far away", writes the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Over the years, he supplied the secret service with a lot of material about neo-Nazi groups, right-wing forums, individuals and events, according to the paper.

Montag has recorded the history of Thomas Richter, alias Corelli, in detail. Richter came from Halle in the Saale region of eastern Germany and had already offered his services as a 19-year-old to the intelligence agency in the state of Saxony-Anhalt, which passed him on to the federal agency in 1994.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Richter had then fallen out with the far-right Nationalist Front, of which he was a member. He claimed he worked as an informer because he needed the money. He wanted to eventually get out of the business. But he was never able to do so,

apparently because the intelligence agency was reluctant to lose him.

Summarising Montag's report, the *Süddeutsche* concludes: "No consideration was ever seriously given to bringing the man into an opt-out programme and helping him to break away from right-wing extremism." The paper then quoted Montag's own view of the situation: "The authorities seemed to be unconcerned about the fate of a dropout, and only interested in (retaining) a potential secret service double-agent."

The intelligence service was said to have protected its agent from prosecution. The report declares that Richter was repeatedly guilty of offences under German law, including driving without a license and exhibiting images of swastikas on the Internet. Investigations into his activities had "frequently" been opened but left unpursued. It is clear then that a large number of the offences he committed must "be attributed to" the federal intelligence agency.

While Montag does not actually draw this conclusion, when one observes Corelli's "hyperactive" role and importance within the network of the extreme right, on one hand, and the efforts of the secret service to retain his operations in the neo-Nazi milieu and protect him from criminal prosecution, on the other, then it becomes obvious that the intelligence agency was instrumental in building up right-wing political extremism and helping it to thrive. In addition to this, Corelli was just one of about two dozen undercover agents from various German intelligence services who were proven to have operated in the NSU milieu.

The extent to which public authorities actually knew about the NSU's murderous activities, concealed their knowledge, or were even involved in the crimes are issues of increasing political importance. Montag was able—or preferred—to find very little in his investigation. Concerning the death of Corelli/Richter, he told the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper that "in all probability" there was no foul play though he was unable to completely rule out the involvement of a third party.



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