

# German government exploits cancellation of football match to expand state powers

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Confronted with an alleged planned attack at a football stadium in Hannover, the German interior ministry is deliberately whipping up hysteria. The German government and opposition parties are exploiting this climate of fear to push forward with the expansion of state powers.

On Tuesday, the German Football Association (DFB) cancelled an international match between the German and Dutch national teams due to a warning of a terrorist attack issued by the interior ministry. The warning came just 20 minutes after the stadium gates had been opened, meaning that spectators had to be evacuated.

A major police operation throughout the city followed. This included the evacuation of passengers on an inter-city train and the closure of half of the platforms at the central train station because a man left a bag in the luggage compartment.

Police subsequently declared that although sniffer dogs had reacted and discovered several electronic components, the package contained no explosives. Sections of the train station were closed once again on Wednesday, because of a warning about one of the lockers.

During the entire police operation surrounding the cancellation of the match, no explosives were discovered and no suspects arrested. Nonetheless, police remained on high alert. Increased security was in place at concerts and other major events.

The authorities have remained silent about the background to the alleged planned attack. According to the parliamentary leader of the Left Party, even the parliamentary control commission (PKG), which is responsible for reviewing the intelligence agencies, and interior affairs committee were not informed.

The sole exception was Hannover's police president, Volker Kluwe, who declared on Tuesday, "We had a

concrete warning that someone intended to set off explosives in the stadium." According to press reports, the critical information allegedly came from French intelligence sources.

At separate press conferences and in statements German interior minister Thomas de Maizière, Lower Saxony's interior minister Boris Pistorius and German chancellor Angela Merkel refused to provide any information about the nature of the threat or the reason for the short notice evacuation of the stadium.

De Maizière justified this by claiming he wished to avoid panic. "Part of the answer would make the population feel insecure," he said and called for the population to give him and the intelligence agencies their "trust."

This authoritarian declaration is diametrically opposed to democratic principles. On this basis, the concealment of any information perceived to be unsettling could be justified, whether it be an environmental catastrophe, war, or even the most recent unemployment figures or wage patterns.

De Maizière's approach certainly had nothing to do with the avoidance of panic. Hundreds of jokes are now circulating on Twitter pointing to the absurdity of his remarks. It is obvious that his warning has produced far greater insecurity than a clear answer.

In the absence of any real information from the authorities, it is not possible to ascertain whether the warning of a terrorist attack was genuine. What is clear is that de Maizière's heightening of feelings of insecurity is preparing the way for the dismantling of democratic rights.

The government and opposition parties are seeking to exploit this hysterical atmosphere to enforce plans that have long been in the works for strengthening the state apparatus. Already prior to the Paris terrorist attacks,

the parliamentary committee responsible for Germany's spy apparatus adopted a proposal to expand the domestic and foreign intelligence services by 500 agents.

In the wake of the attacks, the parties are seeking to outdo each other with demands for a stronger state. On Wednesday, de Maizière appealed to parents to report their children to the authorities if they showed signs of radicalisation.

For his part, finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble called for the German army to be deployed domestically. "If we have a situation like Paris, with attacks in perhaps three or four locations, we would have to consider whether our policing capabilities would be sufficient," said Schäuble at a meeting in Düsseldorf. The police were "often already overwhelmed on a normal weekend."

A similar tone was struck by a motion from the Christian Social Union (CSU) party executive for an upcoming party congress. According to the motion, the party intends to include the German army in an integrated, comprehensive national security strategy. "We must enable our soldiers to protect and defend our domestic security in alliance with other security agencies through appropriate equipping, targeted training and clear legal regulations."

The strengthening of the state is also finding support among the opposition parties. The parliamentary leader of the Greens, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, told the *Saarbrücker Zeitung* that, while her party opposed the deployment of the military domestically, it supported the strengthening of the police.

Similar arguments are advanced by the Left Party. The deputy parliamentary leader of the Left Party and of the parliamentary committee for interior affairs, Frank Tempel, demanded an "increase in personnel and material resources" for the federal police. "Whoever wants to permanently overcome the challenges such as the surveillance of terrorist suspects or the prevention of weapons smuggling must provide adequate personnel and material resources," he said.

Parliamentary leader Dietmar Bartsch also welcomed the strengthening of the police. "The decision now adopted to increase the federal police by 3,000 comes far too late. We have been demanding this for years. The situation there has been catastrophic for many years, not just regarding personnel, but also

equipment."

He previously praised de Maizière for his composed behaviour during the Paris terrorist attacks, adding that as interior minister he could "expect in principle to have a store of trust from the opposition."



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