

German media and politicians demand increased state powers in response to Cologne assaults

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11 January 2016

The German government has moved rapidly to use alleged sexual assaults by refugees on New Year's Eve in the city of Cologne as a pretence to strengthen the state apparatus and crack down on asylum seekers.

The executive of the ruling Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chaired by Chancellor Angela Merkel outlined its plans this weekend in a document referred to as the "Mainz Declaration".

The document calls for accelerating the deportation of refugees convicted of crimes, as well as other asylum seekers. Under current law the deportation of refugees on the grounds of criminal violations is possible only after they are convicted of an offence and sentenced to prison for at least two years.

The aim of the CDU is to "lower the hurdles for the expulsion and deportation of foreign offenders" and, "in particular, rapidly repatriate rejected asylum seekers". At the same time national borders are to be sealed off and the terms of deportation clarified in order "to preclude abuse".

In addition, refugees are to be distributed to other European countries and "the causes of flight combatted, with support for transit countries and countries of origin". The German government defines "support for transit countries" as the confinement of refugees in so-called "hotspot" detention centres and close cooperation with authoritarian governments such as that of Turkey.

The aim is "to appreciably reduce the number of refugees". Chancellor Angela Merkel declared on Saturday, "We are working intensively on a sustainable reduction". Both the CDU and its sister party, the CSU, are urging the adoption of the so-called asylum package II, which would abolish the constitutional right to

asylum for a large group of refugees and accelerate deportations.

Simultaneously, the powers of the state are to be strengthened. According to the Mainz Declaration, the police should be able to conduct random identity checks "for the purpose of risk prevention".

More video cameras are to be installed around "railway stations and in public transport", and the number of police is to be expanded. The parliamentary group of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) has already called for the creation of 12,000 new police posts nationwide.

The police are to be protected with a vaguely specified "new offence against physical assaults and significantly higher imprisonment for violent attacks" on police.

The Mainz Declaration proudly presents existing plans to expand the powers of the secret services and announces new ones. "Extremists" are to be stripped not only of their passports but also their identity cards in order to prevent them from leaving the country. "People who are fighting abroad for a terrorist militia and possess dual citizenship, [should] be deprived of German citizenship", the report declares.

In addition, data collected from the recently re-introduced "data retention" bill is to be made available to all of the country's intelligence agencies.

The security authorities are to be "strengthened by unprecedented dimensions", the CDU writes "In total they are to receive around additional 4,000 posts and their equipment greatly improved". The document also proudly refers to the newly founded paramilitary elite force BFE+.

The SPD and the two opposition parties in the

German parliament—the Left Party and Greens—agree in principle with the boosting of state powers. Federal Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) declared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, that he would shortly submit the appropriate motions. He was conducting “good discussions about what consequences were appropriate” with Justice Minister Heiko Maas (SPD).

In an interview with the *Bild* newspaper last Friday, SPD leader and vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel called for the accelerated expulsion of refugees charged with a crime. They should serve their “detention in their home country”. He asked, “Why should German taxpayers pay for the prison time of foreign criminals?”

On the issue of expanding the police, Green Party leader Cem Ozdemir said on Thursday: “It is clear that more staff with an immigrant background are necessary”. Similar comments were made by the parliamentary group leader of the Greens, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, who said that the police must have the necessary technical capabilities and sufficient staff to reflect the size of the migrant population. Criminals without a residency permit in Germany should also be deported, she said.

On Thursday, the chairman of the Left Party, Bernd Riexinger, declared that budget cuts should not be made “at the expense of the proper functioning of the state”, and criticized the fact that “16,000 police jobs have been lost ... in recent years”.

The racist agitation pumped out by leading political parties, police and media plays directly into the hands of the extreme right. On Saturday, about 1,700 supporters of the far right Pegida organisation gathered in Cologne. Police broke up the demonstration after participants made Hitler salutes and repeatedly attacked police officers and members of the press with firecrackers and bottles.

A counter-demonstration with fewer participants and a demonstration by women’s groups was confronted by a large contingent of police. About 1,700 state policemen were complemented by squads of federal police.

Commenting Saturday on the events in Cologne, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted, “The events in Cologne are the pretext and not the reason for the call for more powers for the state”.

In response to the events in Cologne, Heinrich

Wefing, the deputy head of the political department of the newspaper *Die Zeit*, called for a “strong state”. He wrote that “Violence and misogyny” in “immigrant milieus” can only be countered by persistent prosecution by a well-equipped police.

While the call for expanded state powers targets migrants and refugees, it is, in fact, aimed at the population as a whole – to suppress growing opposition to social inequality, militarism, and the drive to war abroad.



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