

New Year's Eve in Cologne, Germany: Growing inconsistencies

Ulrich Rippert
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For three weeks now, the events of New Year's Eve in Cologne, Germany have been exploited for the purposes of an unrestrained campaign of racism against immigrants and Muslims. Not a day goes by without media reports, commentaries, special bulletins and talk shows in which the growing threat of "foreign criminality" is raised, along with calls for the expedited deportation of "criminal immigrants".

The words "foreigner" and "asylum seeker" are overwhelmingly linked with the adjective "criminal". Integral to this campaign are demands for more police, more government surveillance and, more generally, a stronger state.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) is calling not only for the expediting of asylum procedures, but also for the immediate deportation of asylum applicants who have committed criminal offences. In a resolution entitled "Public Security", the Social Democratic Party (SPD) calls for the creation of 12,000 new posts for state and federal police by 2019. The Left Party also calls for a vigorous crackdown by police and the judiciary. The current "lack of enforcement", they declare, must be overcome.

The events of New Year's Eve in Cologne have been used repeatedly to justify this racist hysteria. But after three weeks of intense investigation and the establishment of a ten-member special police commission called "New Year", what really took place at the central train station of Cologne on New Year's Eve remains largely unclear. Many reports and pieces of information contradict each other.

On Thursday, the North Rhine-Westphalia committee on internal affairs met once again. In preparation for the meeting, North-Rhine Westphalia's Interior Minister Ralf Jäger (SPD) submitted a 34-page report. He also answered 19 pages of questions from the state parliament.

The report not only addresses Cologne, but also deals with three other cities in North Rhine-Westphalia. It states that, in connection with New Year's Eve, there has now been a total of 982 criminal charges filed: 821 in Cologne (359 of them relating to sexual offences), 113 in Düsseldorf (69 due to sexual offences), 28 in Dortmund (including 4 sexual offences) and 20 in Bielefeld (5 sexual offences).

That fewer than 100 complaints were received in the first 10 days of the New Year and the number only began to rise with the escalation of the media campaign is not examined in the report.

In the meantime, there are 30 suspects in the Cologne case, among them 25 Moroccans and Algerians, according to Jäger. The other suspects come from Albania, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Libya and Iran. Jäger does not explain why, after three weeks, only one suspect has been taken into custody for sexual assault. Two men arrested earlier have since been released because suspicions against them could not be substantiated.

Facts and evidence are apparently lacking, even though the central train station in Cologne is monitored by 80 video cameras, and several private cell phone recordings were analysed. The claim that it was too dark to make out the recordings from surveillance cameras is refuted by the release of videos showing the train station brightly lit.

In the past week, the police searched through several bars, casinos and Internet cafes in the Cologne district of Gremberg and in Düsseldorf. These efforts also produced no new information. "All 40 men arrested in Düsseldorf have been released, 6 cell phones and one laptop were seized, presumably stolen. Authorities did not say whether these originated from New Year's Eve in Cologne," wrote *ZeitOnline*, which received a copy of the investigation report.

With regard to the total number of rapes reported, the Jäger report also remains vague. In each case, the alleged

crimes are listed as “sexual assault/rape,” with some accompanied by notes indicating that acts committed by groups were, on occasion, full-scale assaults while others involved minor offences. *ZeitOnline* noted that “it is often difficult to distinguish between a sexual assault and a rape,” adding that “so far, two rapes have been reported.”

Immediately following the Cologne events, Federal Minister of Justice Heiko Maas (SPD) spoke of a “new form of organized crime.” North-Rhine Westphalia’s interior minister now contradicts this.

The Ministry of the Interior sees no “organized activity,” according to Jäger. There were “clear indications” that the “crimes were committed by different perpetrators or groups of perpetrators,” said Jäger. The minister explained that there were “heterogeneous motives” among the perpetrators: One wanted to commit a crime against property, another a sexual assault. Of the 30 suspects in Cologne, only six were accused of having committed a sex crime. Pickpocketing, receiving stolen goods, and robbery were the most common charges.

These investigation results stand in stark contrast to the hysterical media coverage about a new “dimension of sexual violence” and a runaway African “sex mob.”

One week ago, Thomas Fischer, a federal judge in the city of Karlsruhe, contributed “a small interjection on the theme of ‘sex mobs’ (*Bild*).” Fischer writes a regular column on legal affairs for *Die Zeit*.

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With bitter irony, he lashed out at the media campaign, pointing out that at this stage of the investigation in Cologne, it appears that what has taken place there is unfortunately precisely what often happens at large events with unrestrained alcohol consumption. Fischer writes: “Let us consider, rather, what we can learn from our experiences with sex mobs and hordes of young men drunk on alcohol and testosterone. We have here an especially disgusting example of it.”

Fischer cites a report about the Munich Oktoberfest from the September 29, 2011 edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*: “The shortest way to the bathroom is an absolute gauntlet. In the space of 30 meters, there are three hugs from complete strangers, drunken men, two slaps on the behind, a raised skirt and a torrent of beer poured deliberately onto your cleavage. It is 11 am on a Saturday at the brewery tent. Oktoberfest has just begun... also dangerous are the lawns beneath the Bavaria statue. Women especially (...) are defenceless victims.”

Because this is nothing out of the ordinary at the

Oktoberfest and is repeated each year, it is barely even noticed. To emphasize the difference between this indifference and the exaggerated and bizarre media campaign in the wake of the events in Cologne, Fischer writes sarcastically: “Yes, and so it was! We remember it like it was today. The different special broadcasts! The resignation of the police chief! The emergency debate in parliament! Angela Merkel’s video message to German women.”

The judge cites another press report on the Cologne carnival in the Zülpich quarter from 2014 which shows how dishonest and politically calculated the current racist smear campaign in the media is.

The report reads: “Officials have issued a total of 43 (88) dispersal orders and taken 47 (39) people into custody (the previous year’s figures are in parentheses). Police initiated 55 (46) criminal proceedings for offenses involving bodily injury, property damage, pickpocketing, robbery and narcotics violations. 18 (9) offenders were arrested. (...) As the night progressed and the alcohol continued to flow, the number of crimes involving bodily injury, property damage and abusive language also grew. Police provided security with rigorous interventions and by maintaining a visible presence, reported police commissioner H.”

Judged by these numbers, nothing different, or nothing more, happened at the central train station in Cologne than what has taken place at similar large-scale gatherings on other occasions such as Carnival or Oktoberfest. That has not prevented the media and politicians from unleashing an unprecedented international smear campaign that does not shrink from even the worst racist prejudices.

The reason for this campaign is not the events in Cologne. They serve only as a pretext to justify an unparalleled build-up of police and intelligence agencies domestically and new combat missions in North Africa and the Middle East.



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