

# German interior minister demands centralisation of intelligence agencies

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Two weeks after a terrorist attack on a Christmas market in Berlin, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) is demanding a fundamental restructuring and centralisation of the security apparatus. The Federal Criminal Agency (BKA) requires strengthening, the various state domestic intelligence agencies must be dismantled in favour of a federally administered organisation and a genuine federal police force must be built, he argued.

De Maizière published a detailed guest commentary on Tuesday in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* titled “Outlines of a strong state in difficult times.” In it, he proposed a new structure for internal security that calls into question the entire structure of the Federal Republic.

The Interior Minister justified his proposal by stating that Germany had to assume a “leading role” in Europe. “But this obligation begins by putting our house in order, in our country,” de Maizière wrote. This required the federal state to have more competency to manage all security agencies in combatting terrorism as well as deporting rejected asylum seekers and tackling cyber crimes.

The key outlines of a strengthening of the domestic state apparatus include the following:

A “strong state” requires strong federal agencies. The federalism of the past was not appropriate for the security challenges of the day. “Security in the federation must be managed by the federal state.” Wherever “the federal state and the states cooperate on issues of federal security, the federal state must have management competencies over all security agencies.” The previous powers available to the BKA were “too narrowly defined” and should be significantly expanded, he said.

“We should discuss in the domestic intelligence agencies shifting all tasks to a federal administration.” The state offices for domestic intelligence should be integrated into a federal administration, he went on.

“We need more effective police stop and search powers.” The current restriction for the federal police to an area of 30 kilometres from the border is no longer acceptable. The federal police required comprehensive powers of search.

“The federal police should be gradually transformed into a real federal police force.”

He stressed the need for more federal police officers to be sent to Europe’s external borders, adding that it was of central importance to know who is responsible for overseeing the external borders of the Schengen Zone for the benefit of Europe’s security. The statement “we want to know who is coming to us” is correct, he claimed. But for Europe, it is better to apply the sentence to Europe’s external borders. “We don’t want a permanent re-erection of internal borders, but rather a strong Europe of freedom, security and of law.”

The establishment of a registry for arrivals and departures (EES) at the European level is currently under consideration. “The EES should be able to be expanded so that it can identify all travel movements across the external borders,” he added.

As far as the German army, he said, it also needs to be permitted to deploy domestically. Already today, the army is a “recognised partner in disaster response.” If the police reach their limits of capacity, “the German army should also find its place there,” he continued. The earlier debates on this had been understandable. “Now, that is no longer the case.”

He further insisted that a strong state must be armed and entrusted with the most modern technology. “Terrorist organisations use all available options to communicate: mobile and landline telephones, Skype, emails or instant messengers like WhatsApp,” he claimed. Therefore, he said, there should be no restrictions on surveillance by the security authorities. “We will therefore be combining the technical capabilities for the creation of IT tools for cyber surveillance this year organisationally into the Central Office for Information Technology in the Security Sector (ZITis).”

De Maizière connected the domestic strengthening of the state and centralisation of the intelligence agencies with a stepped-up campaign against refugees and asylum seekers. He wrote, “Given the anticipated rise in those who must depart following the completion of all asylum procedures,

we require a national pooling of resources on the issue of repatriation.”

To implement this “national pooling of resources” against asylum seekers, a “joint centre to support repatriation in Berlin” is to be established and “further improvements made to cooperation between the state and federal authorities in the area of operational repatriation.”

Further, it must be made easier to take rejected asylum seekers into custody. “We must significantly increase the current limit of four days for detention prior to departure,” he said. Sufficient places had to be created for deportation detention and departure custody. “Departure centres are already legally possible and could preferably be established close to German airports.”

The initiative from de Maizière, which was explicitly backed by Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday, is aimed at dismantling the entire federal structure and division of powers within the security apparatus. The separation of the police and intelligence services codified in Germany’s Basic Law and the restriction of the police to the state level were based on fundamental lessons drawn from the Nazi dictatorship. This is now to be done away with. The structures of a police state are becoming ever more apparent, which will not only view all foreigners, but also citizens, as potential enemies of the state and place them under surveillance.

The Interior Minister cited the terrorist attack on the Berlin Christmas market as justification for his proposal. The attack cost a dozen people their lives and seriously injured 50 more. At the same time, de Maizière declared that a large number of his security outlines had been worked out long before. This raises extremely troubling questions.

Since the horrific attack, a growing quantity of information about the close ties between the security agencies and the suspected perpetrator has come to light. It is now known that Anis Amri, who was shot while fleeing in Italy, carried out his attack quite literally under the noses of the police and intelligence agencies. He was placed under intense surveillance and categorised as unusually dangerous in a profile just days prior to the attack.

According to a report by Hans Leyendecker and Georg Mascolo in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, on 14 December, five days prior to the attack, the security agencies produced “the latest version of a personal profile, in which they gathered all intelligence about Amri.” It described “a man whose career which contains numerous similarities with previous perpetrators acting on behalf of the terrorist group Islamic State.”

According to the report by Leyendecker and Mascolo, the intelligence agencies knew almost everything to know about Anis Amri: his activities as a petty criminal who was

detained as a youth in Italy, and who allegedly committed theft in a German asylum accommodation centre; his connections with an Islamist cell and the preacher Abu Walaa, whose leaders were arrested in November last year; all eight identities used by Amri and his frequent changes of address and residency.

The fact that the interior minister is exploiting the attack to implement an intensification of domestic security and cooperation between the police and intelligence agencies that violates the Basic Law raises the question: was the attack seen as a means to legitimise precisely this policy of the strengthening of domestic state structures?

Nobody in official politics or in the media dares to examine this question seriously, despite the clear indications that the Christmas market attack and the huge police buildup in Cologne on New Year’s Eve have been used for the strengthening of the domestic state apparatus.

The reason for this reluctance is that all parties agree on the restriction of citizens’ rights, the strengthening of the police and the centralisation of the intelligence agencies, including the Social Democrats as part of the government and the opposition Left and Green parties, which are striving for a government coalition with the SPD.

De Maiziere identified the real reason for the strengthening of the state apparatus when he spoke of the “German leading role” in Europe. In the face of the rapidly deepening economic, social and political crisis in Europe, which has been intensified still further since the election of Donald Trump in the US, the ruling class is preparing for major conflicts.

The intention to intervene more as a leading power in Europe and throughout the world is deeply opposed by the population. The government is not only responding to this with an intensive propaganda campaign, but with the strengthening of the security apparatus and the buildup of the state. The return of German militarism thus goes hand in hand with the construction of a police state, whose powers increasingly recall those of the Nazi secret police (Gestapo).



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