

Germany decides on massive tightening of security laws

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At its spring meeting in Dresden the conference of German state interior ministers (IMK) decided on a massive tightening up of security laws. The implementation of such measures, which are primarily aimed at increasing co-operation between the various security authorities while significantly expanding their powers, represent *de facto* moves towards the establishment of a police state. All of the proposals are justified with reference to the struggle against international terrorism, but in fact the ruling class is preparing for fierce class struggles.

At the centre of the three-day conference were plans to harmonise and coordinate the various security services of Germany's 16 states with the federal intelligence agencies. This was announced in advance by federal Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU).

The separation of the activities of the police and the secret services anchored in the German constitution was agreed after WWII to avoid repetition of the crimes of the Nazi era and the terror of the Gestapo. This separation has now been completely undermined by the establishment of the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (GTAZ) in Berlin, where representatives of more than 40 German security authorities work under the same roof.

Now, additional new laws are planned for the digital sector aimed at networking databases, enabling the security authorities to spy on all persons and groups alleged to be suspect. The latest security laws makes it possible to set up entire so-called "shadow databases" beyond any democratic control.

In the run-up to the IMK, de Maizière even raised the prospect of complete centralisation of the security authorities. In an interview with the *Tagesspiegel*, he said: "And it is certainly the case that we will continue to discuss whether, in view of the challenges, further changes are needed to our federal security architecture."

The networking of databases establishes uniform

guidelines for all state authorities. The interior minister of the state of Lower Saxony, Boris Pistorius (SPD), went further and also proposed joint disaster relief exercises. Joint exercises by the German army (Bundeswehr) and the police already take place at the level of individual states, something which also clearly violates the German constitution.

In addition to networking capacities the powers of the security agencies are being massively expanded. A look at the future powers adopted at the IMK makes clear that there is to be strict monitoring of the population. This concerns both digital communication and the monitoring of the public sphere.

For some time, leading interior ministers have complained that the security authorities are not able to access message services such as WhatsApp or Telegram because they are equipped with an end-to-end encryption, unlike an ordinary SMS. This encryption is now to be circumvented by permitting police and the country's foreign intelligence agency BND to carry out so-called source telecommunication monitoring (TKÜ) of suspect persons. This enables the security agencies to tap and observe the communications of a suspect prior to the message being encrypted.

Another planned measure is the so-called online search. It is intended to enable the use of Trojans to read hard disks without the need for physical access. In contrast to a house search, which has regularly been used to confiscate a suspect's hard disks, the victim of an online search does not know this measure is being carried out and therefore has no possibility of legal redress.

According to de Maizière, both the TKÜ measures and the online search are to be integrated into the country's criminal code before parliament breaks for summer.

Measures for facial recognition by video surveillance in public areas were also adopted. The existing large-scale video monitoring of railway stations and other public

places is evidently not enough for the authorities.

De Maizière formulated the plans for the targeted prosecution of suspects in *Tagesspiegel*: “We currently have video surveillance at railway stations. However, we have not been able to capture the image, for example, of a fleeing terrorist into the software, so that an alarm sounds when he appears at a station.” This had to function under difficult conditions, “for example, when it is dark or someone is wearing a hood.”

The contempt with which de Maizière regards the fundamental rights of every citizen is clear from his legal justification for the measure: “The restriction of basic rights is low-level, since uninvolved persons are not covered.”

In future, refugees and their children will be regarded en masse as suspect. Already, every asylum seeker over the age of 14 has to give his fingerprints at the time of his application for asylum. Now this degrading procedure is to be extended to children from six years upwards, announced IMK chairman Markus Ulbig (CDU).

Before the start of the IMK, Bavaria’s interior minister, Joachim Herrmann (CSU), called for an extension of the surveillance of under 14-year-olds. De Maizière then referred to an incident in Hanover, where a 14-year-old girl had stabbed a policeman after being radicalised by Salafists at the age of 11.

Spying on the population does not stop with communications and the video surveillance. In future, the authorities will be able to determine the age, skin colour, eye colour and the origin of suspects by DNA analysis.

The ministers of the interior could not agree on a unified position regarding stop and search operations. So far, this massive, systematic control by the police is already possible in 13 out of 16 states, the only exceptions being Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia and Bremen.

Objections raised against uniform introduction of the measure are not based on democratic considerations. As a spokesman for Berlin’s interior minister Andreas Geisel (SPD) explained, stop and search was not the right way to track down suspects: “The results do not justify the effort involved.”

In fact, all parties agree about the need to expand the powers of the security authorities. Tactical differences, when they come up, centre around how best to construct a police state.

Claims made in the media in the past few days that the Left Party rejects the new police powers appear to be groundless on closer examination. The Left Party participates in a number of state administrations, whose

interior ministers have agreed on the new measures.

Thuringia, where the state premier is a member of the Left Party, is one of the states where blanket stop and search is allowed and in Berlin, where the party is part of the ruling coalition, its representatives have been active in expanding the security apparatus.

At the start of this year the Berlin coalition of the SPD, the Greens and the Left Party adopted a “Security and Prevention package,” which provides an additional €45 million for internal security for the year 2017.

Klaus Lederer, Berlin culture minister and a right-wing spokesman for the Left Party group in the Berlin parliament, stated that such proposals were discussed on a “pragmatic” basis. The question of video surveillance in public spaces did not depend on the actual number of cameras, but rather, where they could provide the most security.

The erection of a police state is justified on the basis of fighting terrorism and Islamist threats. The attack on the Christmas market in Berlin and similar terror attacks in Paris, Brussels and Manchester are invariably cited. But this is obviously an excuse. All these attacks were not the result of any lack of surveillance. On the contrary, the assailants were well known to the security authorities, with some so well known that the involvement of state forces is highly likely.

Last week the WSWS wrote: “In the aftermath of terrorist actions, governments respond with stepped-up measures of repression and surveillance. Troops are deployed in the streets, democratic rights are suspended, and, as in France, a state of emergency is made the overriding law of the land. All of these measures are useless in terms of preventing future attacks, but serve very well to control the domestic population and suppress social unrest.”

This has been confirmed by the conference of interior ministers. Against a background of massive social inequality and growing political opposition the ruling elite is developing police state measures in order to deal with an impending social explosion.



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