

Did an undercover agent incite the Berlin Christmas Market attack?

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Last week, the *Berliner Morgenpost* and Radio Berlin Brandenburg (RBB) reported that the perpetrator of the Berlin Christmas Market attack, Anis Amri, may have been incited by an undercover agent for the North Rhine-Westphalia State Criminal Bureau (LKA). The agent, “VP 01,” with the cover name “Murat,” who had close contact with Amri, is said to have sought support for attacks, including one using a truck.

On December 19, 2016, Amri drove a truck into the Christmas Market at Breitscheidplatz in Berlin, killing 12 people and seriously injuring 50 others.

In his report, the special investigator commissioned by the Berlin Senate (state executive), Bruno Jost, raised serious criticisms of the police authorities in several federal states. The attack could have been prevented, according to this former federal prosecutor.

On October 18, we wrote in an article on the special investigator’s report that “the key to understanding the authorities’ actions is most likely to be in the Islamic network around Ahmad A., Abu Walaa.” Amri had joined this network in which the undercover LKA agent “Murat” was also active. In the trial of the terrorist group before the Celle Higher Regional Court, the suspicion was raised “that ‘Murat’ had acted as an agent provocateur and encouraged attacks in Germany,” as we reported. It could not “be excluded that an undercover agent in the Islamist scene had prompted Anis Amri to his murderous attack.”

Just one day later, the *Berliner Morgenpost* and RBB published the results of their research. This is based on internal investigations and statements by the co-defendants’ attorneys in the Abu Walaa trial. The charges against Abu Walaa and other suspected Islamists in further terrorist trials are mainly based on the statements of the undercover state agent.

Most of the group members had wanted to leave for

Syria to fight on the side of Islamic State (IS). They had not spoken about attacks in Germany. Agent “Murat” had several times said to members of the group: “Come on, you don’t have a passport anyway, do something here, carry out an attack.”

In a police interrogation in December last year, a former supporter of an Islamist group had already warned about a man named “Murat.” He was “extremely radical,” the witness said, according to information from those close to the investigation. “Murat” had also repeatedly said that one needed good men “who are able to carry out attacks.”

In a further interrogation, the witness is reported to have said that “Murat” wanted to talk more about Kalashnikovs than about prayers. When he saw youngsters and parents in a meadow, he said “they had to be killed because they denied God.”

A former supporter of the Abu Walaa group told *RBB* that “Murat” was “the most radical.” A former member of the Islamist scene—it is unclear whether it is the same man—reaffirmed to *RBB* reporters that “Murat” had prompted him to carry out attacks: “I can testify 100 percent that he also tried to do this with me.”

Several lawyers confirm the allegations. “My client has reported to me that VP-01 talked to him about possible attack locations and gave him the tip to shave off his beard so that he attracted less attention,” the Düsseldorf defence lawyer Johannes Pausch said. His client was sentenced to imprisonment for planning an attack. “Murat” had not sought to slow down his client, who was then a minor, but had “insisted” he act, he said.

The Cologne defence lawyer Michael Murat Sertsöz gave a similar account to the research team of *Berliner Morgenpost* and *RBB*. His client, Mikail S., who was recently convicted of spreading terrorist propaganda,

told him that VP-01 had repeatedly asked him to get a gun and carry out “actions.” “The way Mikail described the behaviour of VP-01, he was acting like an agent provocateur in the service of the state,” Sertsöz said.

The lawyer Ali Aydin from Frankfurt am Main, who represents one of the defendants in the recently opened proceedings against supporters of the “Abu Walaa Cell,” reported: “From my own research, I know that VP-01 has told different people, let’s kill these unbelievers.”

Aydin emphasizes that he has more than one source corroborating this statement. For him, it was clear that the undercover agent had “incited” attacks. The lawyer is demanding that there be an investigation into whether the LKA agent had also worked directly on Anis Amri to commit an attack. As is now known, the agent frequently accompanied Amri and had driven him to his accommodation.

He said the statements made by “Murat” or VP-01 may mean he had committed a criminal offence, such as incitement, accessory to murder and support for a foreign terrorist group.

An internal report of the North Rhine-Westphalian state secret service in September strengthens the conjectures of the lawyer. In the so-called “official affidavit,” which the *Berliner Morgenpost* and RBB have seen, the secret service reported on a private conversation, in which VP-01 had told one of his comrades that he was “looking for a reliable man for an attack with a truck.”

Lawyer Aydin concludes, “The question arises whether VP-01 worked upon Anis Amri, and it was only in this way that he came to the decision to carry out an attack.”

RBB reported that “internal interrogation records show the agent admitted to talking about attacks.” During an LKA debriefing, the agent had pointed out that following his orders, he had shown himself “always ready for action,” so as to obtain information.

The LKA had protected its undercover agent against the accusations, which were until now known only internally, writes the *Berliner Morgenpost*. “Statements that cast doubt on his role were discounted by the criminal investigators as unreliable.” For example, they claimed that the witness testimonies made in December 2016, which accused “Murat” of inciting behaviour,

were “not supported by any further findings, and are contrary to the findings here.” Instead, the LKA accused the witness of diverting attention from his own “criminally relevant acts.” The testimony of the LKA’s own agent was the only support for this assessment. According to unconfirmed information, the Turkish-born undercover agent is now in a witness protection programme.

It is unclear what the North Rhine-Westphalia state Interior Minister Ralf Jäger (Social Democrat Party, SPD), who was the head of the LKA and state secret service until June 2017, knows about the events. The LKA has refused to answer a comprehensive set of questions from the *Berliner Morgenpost* and RBB, citing the ongoing proceedings against supporters of the “Abu Walaa Cell” and the Committee of Inquiry on the Amri case in the state legislature.

A spokesman for the Berlin state interior minister, Andreas Geisel (SPD), claimed he had only found out accusations against the undercover agent from the press on Thursday. The Berlin state parliament’s Committee of Inquiry will convene in Berlin on 10 November.



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