

The fascist network behind the murder of Walter Lübcke

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Three months after the murder of Kassel's regional president, Walter Lübcke, there is mounting evidence that the Christian Democratic (CDU) politician was the victim of an extreme right-wing network that reaches deep into the state security apparatus.

Lübcke was executed with a headshot from close range on the terrace of his house on the night of June 2. Although it was known he had received threats from the extreme right, the German media initially played down the murder and the police reported they were investigating "in all directions."

The far-right terrorist background to the murder only became known after traces of DNA found at the crime scene identified the convicted neo-Nazi Stephan Ernst, who then confessed to the murder. Ernst later withdrew his confession, but his detailed knowledge, including the hiding place of the murder weapon, left little doubt about his involvement.

The investigating authorities were then insisting that he was acting alone. The neo-Nazi Ernst, with seven criminal offences on his record, the new narrative ran, retreated into private life 10 years ago and disappeared from the sight of the security services. It was only his anger about the refugee policy of the German government which reactivated him and prompted him to attack Lübcke.

It is now clear that this is a lie deliberately spread to cover up the scale of the conspiracy. Ernst had neither withdrawn from his far-right activities, nor had he disappeared from the sight of the security services.

Instead one must ask whether his alleged withdrawal from public political activity was the result of collusion with the security authorities. It took place after he was sentenced in 2010 to a seven-month jail sentence by the district court in Dortmund for attacking the traditional German trade union May Day demonstration along with several hundred other neo-Nazis.

The fascist mob attacked peaceful demonstrators with stones and wooden slats. Although Ernst had a criminal record—he had served a six-year juvenile sentence for a bomb attack on an asylum shelter—his sentence was suspended on probation. It can be assumed that he was called upon by state agents to provide some services in return.

In any event, the thesis of the individual perpetrator no longer holds up. At the end of June, criminal investigators arrested two

possible accomplices—the alleged arms dealer Elmar J. and the neo-Nazi Markus H.

Elmar J. was accused of having sold the murder weapon to Ernst, while Markus H. is said to have made the contact to the arms dealer. Initially the attorney general claimed that both men knew nothing about the plan to murder Lübcke.

Meanwhile Markus H. is under urgent suspicion of direct involvement in the murder plot and of the creation of a powerful terror cell, along with Ernst, which planned and carried out other attacks.

This is the conclusion from a decision made by the Federal Court of Justice (BGH) on September 13, which extended the pre-trial detention of Markus H. The BGH judges assume that Markus H. knew from at least July 2016 that Ernst was planning an assassination. He shared Ernst's "motives and goals" and encouraged him to "actually carry out the project," according to the BGH judgment.

The BGH decision also refutes the myth that Ernst retired to private life 10 years ago. Ernst and Markus H. had been further radicalized by 2014 at the latest, the BGH judgement says. They shared a right-wing extremist outlook, participated in far-right demonstrations and learned to handle weapons together at a shooting club. They had mutually confirmed that they intended "to arm themselves and become active in order to avert political and social developments in Germany they considered alarming."

The 45-year-old Ernst and the two years younger Markus H. had known one another for a long time since their involvement in the violent neo-Nazi milieu in the city of Kassel.

According to information from the ARD political magazine "Panorama" they were both active for years in the "Free Resistance Kassel" (FWK) group and already at this time has discussed procuring weapons and explosives. According to the TV program, Ernst participated in FWK activities up until at least 2011 and had maintained contact with the group's milieu until recently.

In 2006 Markus H. was sentenced to a fine by the Kassel district court for making a Hitler salute in a restaurant and shouting "Sieg Heil." In 2009, he participated along with Ernst in the attack on a trade union protest in Dortmund, where he was arrested, but unlike Ernst was not convicted.

On October 13, 2015, Markus H. and Ernst attended a meeting in Lohfelden just outside Kassel, where the murder victim, Walter Lübcke, confronted opponents of Germany's official refugee policy. Markus H. made a video of the meeting, which he published on YouTube. The video triggered a right-wing hate campaign against Lübcke, which included death threats.

Markus H. was also the individual who provided Ernst with access to weapons and shooting practice. Although he was known to be a far-right extremist and had a criminal record, the administrative court in Kassel granted him a permit to acquire firearms and ammunition in 2015, against the express will of the city administration. The measure was made possible by Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Verfassungsschutz), which certified, against all the facts, that Markus H. had had no connection to right-wing extremism for a period of five years.

It only became known in August, following an official query by Left Party deputy Martina Renner, that Ernst, Markus H. and Elgar J. had accumulated a huge arsenal of weapons. According to the German Interior Ministry a total of 46 firearms were recovered from the three accused, along with other articles such as powerful fireworks, knives and sports bows. Previously there had been reference by the police to just five guns, including the revolver used to shoot Lübcke, a pump gun and an Israeli Uzi machine gun.

It is obvious that such an arsenal had been assembled to prepare further attacks. As announced by the federal prosecutor's office in Karlsruhe on Thursday, Stephan Ernst is now also suspected of having carried out an assassination attempt on an Iraqi asylum seeker in January 2016. The man had been stabbed in the back with a knife and was lucky to survive.

The assault occurred just 2.5 kilometers from Ernst's house. The police had carried out a check of Ernst at that time—confirming that he had not disappeared from the sight of the authorities. For inexplicable reasons, however, this check was not mentioned in the official investigation files.

Everything indicates that Ernst and Markus H. are part of a much larger right-wing terrorist network. Their case bears striking similarity to that of the far-right terrorist gang, the National Socialist Underground (NSU). In the context of the Lübcke murder, 30 searches were carried out between June 8 and July 19, according to the Interior Ministry, including premises in North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony and Baden-Württemberg.

It is now known that the neo-Nazi milieu in Kassel maintained close contact with the NSU, which carried out a total of 10 murders, including their ninth victim, Halit Yozgat, in Kassel in April 2006. Shortly before this murder Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt, who together with Beate Zschäpe formed the core of the NSU, are alleged to have attended the birthday party of a leading neo-Nazi in Kassel. It is also likely that Ernst was present.

According to Hajo Funke, a leading expert on right-wing extremism, Ernst was active in a right-wing terrorist milieu that included “the who's who of Combat 18 and NSU supporters.” Ernst was also said to have been a member of a *völkisch* sect called the Artgemeinschaft Germanic Faith Community, which “stood in the tradition of the most brutal racial ideas of Heinrich Himmler” and which “clearly maintained demonstrably friendly relations to four of the five defendants who were convicted in the Munich NSU trial.”

This violent neo-Nazi milieu was in turn infiltrated by dozens of Verfassungsschutz informers and police. Ernst was friends with Benjamin Gärtner (code name “Gemüse,” vegetable), who worked under Andreas Temme as a Verfassungsschutz undercover agent. Verfassungsschutz officer Temme sat in the internet cafe run by Halit Yozgat when the latter was murdered. In the subsequent investigation Temme claimed he was not aware of the shooting. Temme later took up a position on the regional body headed by Walter Lübcke.

All information about this conspiracy has been ruthlessly suppressed by the state. In the course of the trial of the NSU in Munich, which lasted five years, even the most trivial detail relating to the main defendant, Beate Zschäpe, was presented to the judges. At the same time the court and the federal prosecutor blocked every attempt by advocates representing the victims to expose the role played by the security agencies and its agents in the murders.

The files of the Hessian Verfassungsschutz, which could provide information about the background to the Lübcke murder, are to remain under lock and key for decades, following a decision by the state government in Hesse. Funke commented that this “precisely confirms that information was being deliberately buried,” which could have possibly prevented the murder of Lübcke.

Professor Funke, who taught at the Free University in Berlin until his retirement in 2010, sees “a de facto *state of emergency* in a constitutional state which does not deserve the name and jeopardises up to the point of murder the safety of those entrusted to it.”



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