

German government bans neo-Nazi group “Combat 18 Deutschland”

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Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) banned the neo-Nazi group “Combat 18 Deutschland” last week Thursday. Seehofer justified his decision, saying that it was “a neo-Nazi, racist and xenophobic association, whose purpose was similar to that of National Socialism ... Today’s ban is a clear message: Right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism have no place in our society.”

However, the background and circumstances of the ban prove the opposite. “Combat 18” is a violent neo-Nazi group whose international connections, criminal leaders and links to the extreme right-wing terrorist scene have long been publicly known. Nevertheless, the Interior Ministry has long tolerated them. Whereas the group was mentioned in the 2017 report by the Verfassungsschutz (secret service)—who played it down—it did not appear at all in the 2018 report.

When public pressure for a ban increased, Seehofer warned the group, so that it could destroy any incriminating evidence, and any undercover Confidential Informants from the police and secret services could go to ground. Six months ago, at the end of June last year, the Interior Minister had publicly announced that he wanted to ban “Combat 18.”

“Political announcements of this kind in the run-up to a ban are unusual and ultimately counterproductive,” the *Tagesschau* commented. “Because those affected are forewarned.”

The EXIF website, which researches the right-wing and neo-fascist scene, expressed itself even more clearly. The consistent trivialisation of the neo-Nazi organisation by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (as the secret service is called) indicated “that ‘Combat 18’ Deutschland is riddled up to the highest level with spies from the secret services and/or police authorities,” it warned last summer. After years of surveillance of this group, there were grounds for suspecting that it was a

honeypot, “set up by the secret services and/or police to attract militants, spy on its international networks and direct its activities in the desired direction.”

“Combat 18” was created in the early 1990s to act as stewards for the extreme right-wing British National Party, then developed into the armed wing of the “Blood and Honour” group and quickly expanded to other countries. The number 18 in the name is derived from the first and eighth letters of the alphabet, the initials of Adolf Hitler. In 1999, six people were killed in bomb attacks on immigrants and homosexuals in London, for which the group was held responsible, with 180 being injured.

In 2000, “Blood and Honour” was banned in Germany. However, the ban did not extend to “Combat 18.” This did not change when the police in Schleswig-Holstein searched 50 apartments and meeting places of the group and arrested five of its leaders on suspicion of forming a politically motivated criminal organization, of extortion, as well as weapons trafficking and the shipping of banned neo-Nazi CDs. The neo-Nazi group “Combat 18-Pinneberg,” against which the raid was directed, had publicly threatened the head of the Elmshorn-based IG Metall union, Uwe Zabel, among others, with murder because he had founded an anti-fascist initiative.

At the latest since the Munich trial of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Underground (NSU), it has been known that the core NSU trio, responsible for murdering nine migrants and one policewoman between 2000 and 2007, received logistical and financial support from the ranks of “Blood and Honour.” During the trial, victims’ lawyers also repeatedly raised the role of “Combat 18” but were blocked from pursuing this.

“Combat 18” regrouped after the NSU flew apart in late 2011. Since then, the group has played a key role in the neo-Nazi scene, organised numerous rock concerts attended by neo-Nazis from all over Europe, provided stewards at events of the extreme right-wing parties NPD

and Die Rechte, and established links with other neo-Nazi groups.

According to EXIF, a key figure was Thorsten Heise, deputy chairman of the NPD. It was “obvious,” according to EXIF, “that its structures have been protected from persecution by the police and secret services for years.” The only conclusive explanations for this are that a close-knit network of Confidential Informers surrounds Heise and the authorities believe that they can monitor and control his activities through this—or that Heise himself is an informer in the employ of the state.

Heise also had connections to the NSU. In 2007, records of a conversation lasting several hours with the leader of the “Thuringian Homeland Security,” Tino Brandt, were found during a search of Heise’s house. Brandt, himself an informant for the Verfassungsschutz, reported in it how the right-wing scene supported the NSU trio Zschäpe, Mundlos and Böhnhardt with the proceeds from “solidarity concerts.” Officially, the existence of the NSU was not even known to the authorities at that time!

When two journalists filmed Heise’s premises in April 2018, they were attacked by his son and a neo-Nazi with a knife, baseball bat and wrench. Although they filed charges of attempted murder, nothing happened. The *Göttinger Tageblatt* remarked at the time: “Rarely has something stunk so much like this, and one can hardly shake off the impression that the LKA [State Criminal Police] only took over the investigation in order to protect the perpetrators.”

The two best-known leaders of “Combat 18,” who are now affected by the ban, Stanley Röske, 43, from near Kassel and the neo-Nazi Robin Schmiemann, 35, from Dortmund, have long been known to the authorities.

“Röske was feared in the scene because of his propensity to violence,” *Spiegel Online* reports. “The list of his contacts in the right-wing extremist milieu is long, as is that of his criminal offences: coercion, grievous bodily harm, theft, firearms violations.” In autumn 2017, Röske was stopped by a special GSG9 police unit when he returned from shooting training in the Czech Republic with other “Combat 18” members, but was only fined for violating the firearms law.

In the early 2000s, Röske was involved in the same neo-Nazi scene as the alleged murderer of leading Christian Democrat Walter Lübcke, Stephan Ernst. There are photos showing the two together at a neo-Nazi march in Kassel. According to a report in *Bild Zeitung*, Stephan Ernst and the NSU murderers Uwe Mundlos, Uwe Böhnhardt and “probably also Beate Zschäpe” were

present at Röske’s 30th birthday party, which took place in 2006 in the Kassel clubhouse of the rocker club Bandidos. A few days later, the ninth NSU victim, Halit Yozgat, was murdered in Kassel.

Robin Schmiemann is also considered to be prone to violence. During a robbery at a supermarket he shot a Tunisian immigrant for which he served a long time in prison. While there, he maintained a close pen friendship with Beate Zschäpe of the NSU, who was awaiting trial in Munich.

It is above all the fact that the close links between the militant neo-Nazi scene, the NSU and the Verfassungsschutz could not be so easily covered up after the Lübcke murder that persuaded Seehofer to take action against “Combat 18” now. Several state interior ministers had been pushing for months to dissolve the organization.

But one can be sure that the cover-up will continue. A 230-page report about the right-wing terrorist scene by the Hesse State Office for the Protection of the Constitution, which could provide clarification about the background of the Lübcke murder, remains under lock and key at the behest of former Hesse state Interior Minister and current state Premier Volker Bouffier (Christian Democratic Union, CDU).

It is also disturbing that the Interior Ministry justifies the ban of “Combat 18” not with the criminal activities of the group, but with its extreme right-wing political views. Experience has shown that this serves as a pretext for banning allegedly “left-wing extremist” organisations based on their views.



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