

Many unanswered questions following attack on carnival procession in Germany

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More than 24 hours after a man drove his car into a carnival procession in the small town of Volkmarshausen in the state of Hesse, the investigators are conducting themselves with unusual restraint.

All that is known thus far is that the driver is a 29-year-old German man named Maurice P. who was not under the influence of alcohol during the attack. The police have refused to say anything about his motive, even though officers detained the man at the scene and searched his apartment the same day. The perpetrator is injured, being treated by doctors, and currently unable to provide testimony, police sources claimed.

Investigators did not even want to confirm that his actions, which caused dozens of injuries, amounted to an attack. Police could not even confirm whether the incident was a deliberate attack, commented a spokesman for the North Hesse police in Kassel on Monday evening. He added that he was unsure of the origin of the report that an attack had taken place.

The Frankfurt state prosecutor announced that an investigation had been opened against the driver for the crime of attempted murder or manslaughter. Investigations are ongoing in a variety of directions, they added. He also refused to comment on the motive of the accused and any statements he made.

However, according to several witnesses who spoke to various media outlets, it was immediately apparent that the man acted with intent. He drove around a blockade with his silver Mercedes van before driving at high speed into the carnival procession. He drove for about 30 metres through the festive crowds and continued to accelerate. According to some reports, police officers had to protect the driver from the outraged crowd.

More than 60 people were injured, although the

number is expected to rise as some people only belatedly reported their injuries to the police. According to the state prosecutor, the youngest victim was a two-year-old, while the oldest was aged 85. Eighteen children were among the victims. Some are severely injured, and 35 are being treated in hospital wards.

The police arrested a second man because he made a video of the bloody deed. It remains unclear whether he was an accomplice of the attacker, or whether he was filming a so-called onlooker video, which following recent legal reforms can be punished with a two-year prison sentence.

Reporters who spoke to residents of the town in northern Hesse have gathered some additional information, but it is hard to confirm its veracity.

A neighbour of Maurice P. told *RTL* that he said to her as he drove away, "Soon I'll be in the newspaper." According to DPA, he came to the attention of the authorities in the past due to insulting behaviour, breach of the peace, and duress. *Focus* alleged that he was part of the town's drug-taking community, which comprises some 100 people. Other reports have portrayed Maurice P. as quiet, with few friends and a reclusive lifestyle.

The incident and the reluctance of the authorities to provide information raise a number of questions. Just five days earlier, the right-wing extremist Tobias Rathjen shot and killed nine people with an immigrant background in Hanau, which is also in Hesse. Was the attacker in Volkmarshausen also a right-wing extremist? Or was he, as the *Tagesspiegel* speculated, motivated to carry out a spectacular deed by the right-wing terrorist attack in Hanau?

Unlike the attack in Hanau, the driver in Volkmarshausen did not target people with an immigrant background,

but a traditional procession full of children. However, it is not unusual for an enraged right-wing extremist to unload his anger and frustration with society by going on an indiscriminate rampage.

A similar attack occurred in April 2018, when Jens Alexander R. ran over several victims at a pub in Münster with his camper van, killing four and injuring 20. The largest right-wing terrorist attack in the United States, the Oklahoma City bombing by Timothy McVeigh in 1995, which killed 168 and injured 800, was directed against a federal administrative building.

Volkmarsen is only 40 kilometres from Kassel, where Halit Yozgat, the ninth victim of the right-wing terrorist group National Socialist Underground (NSU), was killed in 2006, and district president Walter Lübcke was shot dead last June. It is now known that both of these murders were closely connected. Lübcke's alleged murderer, Stephan Ernst, moved in the same circles as the NSU, which in turn had close ties to the Hesse state intelligence service (Verfassungsschutz).

The files that could provide information about this have been held under lock and key. On Monday, practically simultaneously with the attack in Volkmarsen, the "Group for the Release of the NSU Files" submitted a petition with 67,000 signatures to the Hesse Petitions Committee demanding the release of the files.

"We believe that we owe it to the victims, the victims' relatives, and Mr. Lübcke to secure this release," said Thomas Bockelmann, director of the Kassel state theatre and the spokesman for the group.

During the entire NSU trial in Munich, the state prosecutor repeatedly rejected "voices who called into question the thesis of an isolated terrorist cell," according to Bockelmann. "Given the recent developments, this is all the more grotesque. He always claimed it was an isolated cell. But they weren't isolated. There was also not just three of them, but at least 25 helpers working around them."

At trial, this was "repeatedly dismissed. There were redacted files and the oft-repeated comment, 'These questions go beyond the authority given to my client to testify,'" added Bockelmann. The Verfassungsschutz is part of the problem, according to Bockelmann. There were informants "who were working for the Verfassungsschutz while providing significant support to the NSU."

Against this background, it is impossible to take anything currently being said about the bloody attack in Volkmarsen by the authorities at face value.



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