

# The scandal surrounding German MP Philipp Amthor: What is Augustus Intelligence?

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23 June 2020

The company Augustus Intelligence (AI) became known to a wider German audience on June 12 when *Der Spiegel* reported that the Christian Democrat (CDU) MP Philipp Amthor was engaged in lobbying activities for the US company. In return he was rewarded with luxury travel, stock options and a director's post. Since the publication of the article an aura of corruption is hanging over Amthor.

In the meantime, however, the question has arisen whether Augustus Intelligence is a genuine commercial enterprise or rather a covert intelligence service operation? Journalists investigating the company have repeatedly come across new oddities.

Augustus Intelligence appears to have unlimited funds. It puts up its guests in expensive luxury hotels, flies them across the Atlantic in a private jet and maintains office space in the New York World Trade Center—estimated annual rent: half a million dollars. At the same time the company appears to have no detectable economic activities.

Although the company is based in the US, it consists almost entirely of Germans. The executive staff and business partners include high-ranking representatives from Germany's security apparatuses and business world, including former Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg; former president of Germany's domestic intelligence agency (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) Hans-Georg Maassen; the former head of Germany's foreign intelligence service BND, August Hanning; the leading management consultant Roland Berger; and billionaire heir August François von Finck. Most of these figures maintain close ties to the ruling German grand coalition government and stand on the far right of German politics.

On its website, Augustus Intelligence declares its business aim is to provide "secure solutions for artificial intelligence." It claims to operate data centres in the United States and sell facial and object recognition software. Journalistic research in the US and on the internet, however, has failed to find any signs of significant business activity.

Two former managers who were fired last December and

are now suing the company accuse it of business practices permeated with "fraud, illegality and corruption." *Der Spiegel* quotes from the legal complaint: "In truth the company did not have the funding it claimed, it had no product, and lacked both substantial customers and revenue."

Nevertheless, Augustus Intelligence was able to move from its former more modest address to the expensive World Trade Center, where it resides in the immediate vicinity of the consulting and investment company "Spitzberg Partners" headed by Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg. The former German Minister of Economics and Defence is the most likely head of AI as well. He owns shares in the company and was named "President in charge of General Affairs" on the company's website until March this year. The designation has since disappeared from the company's website.

Augustus' official boss, Wolfgang Haupt, on the other hand, appears to be a mere frontman. The 33-year-old studied medicine and claims on LinkedIn to have already founded several companies across a wide range of businesses.

Guttenberg is the living embodiment of the connection between Germany's aristocratic elite, which, over a hundred years after the fall of the Empire, still forms an extremely reactionary closed society, and the government parties in Berlin. Born into a wealthy Franconian family of nobles, he joined the Bavarian-based Christian Social Union and became its general secretary in 2008. In 2009 he moved from Munich to Berlin and became economics minister and then defence minister in governments led by Angela Merkel. He was obviously aiming for higher positions. His political career suffered a downturn in 2011, however, following revelations that he had faked his doctoral thesis. He then moved to the United States while remaining politically active and clearly looking for the right opportunity to return to German politics.

Guttenberg's wife Stephanie, born countess of Bismarck-Schönhausen, is a direct descendent of German Chancellor

Otto von Bismarck. Guttenberg's own mother is also a countess from a long-standing aristocratic family that possessed extensive property in Croatia, until the land was expropriated in 1945. Her father, Jakob Graf zu Eltz, worked closely with the reactionary Croatian nationalist Franjo Tudjman and became a member of the Croatian parliament after the breakup of Yugoslavia. In 1985 Guttenberg's mother married a second time—Adolf Henkell-von Ribbentrop, the son of Hitler's foreign minister.

A central role at Augustus Intelligence is played by Roland Berger, the founder of the management consultancy bearing his name. Berger cultivates a dense network of relationships in German business and political circles. He advised the Treuhandanstalt—the organisation set up by the German government to privatise East German industry following the reunification of Germany in 1989. He was also active in drawing up Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010, which replaced Germany's existing unemployment benefits system with miserly welfare payments. Charles Édouard-Bouée, the long-time CEO of Berger's company, was named "President in charge of Business Affairs" at Augustus Intelligence at Berger's request. A photo published by *Der Spiegel* shows Berger together with Amthor, Maassen and AI founder Haupt at a five-star hotel in the Swiss luxury holiday resort of St. Moritz.

August François von Fink is one of the most important donors to Augustus Intelligence and is said to have invested \$11.2 million in the company. Fink inherited his fortune from his grandfather, the banker August von Fink, who commenced financing Adolf Hitler in the 1920s and benefited from the Aryanization of Jewish property after Hitler assumed power.

The Fink family remains one of the richest in Germany. For many years August von Fink junior, the father of August François, has provided financial support, amounting to many millions, to a range of far-right parties and movements which eventually led to founding of the extreme-right Alternative for Germany (AfD). He has also invested huge sums in the AfD itself. In 2009, the Mövenpick company, which was then owned by Fink, transferred €1.1 million to the neo-liberal pro-business Free Democratic Party (FDP), which in return reduced VAT tax for the hotel industry, directly profiting Mövenpick.

Hans-Georg Maassen, who headed the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution until November 2018 and had worked closely together with the AfD, has repeatedly been associated with Augustus Intelligence, including at the aforementioned meeting in St. Moritz. According to *Der Spiegel*, Maassen also flew with company founder Haupt in a private jet to the United States. He also provided help when an employee of the company sought to regain German

citizenship.

Maassen was forced to take early retirement in 2018 due to his proximity to the AfD. Since then he has been the mouthpiece of a stock reactionary grouping, the CDU Values Union, which has numerous supporters within the CDU and CSU, including Philipp Amthor.

August Hanning acknowledged to *Die Zeit* that he has a written agreement with Augustus Intelligence, involving "advice if you like to call it that." In return, he received stock options. Hanning did not reveal what exactly the content of his advice is.

Like Maassen, Hanning is a central figure in the German security apparatus. From 1998 to 2005 he headed the BND and from 2005 to 2009 he was responsible for police affairs, the federal police, internal security, migration, integration and refugees in the Federal Ministry of the Interior. In 2015 he published a right-wing paper against the refugee policy of the federal government

Amthor was apparently chosen as the figurehead for this right-wing conspiracy. According to *Der Spiegel*, he received at least 2,817 stock options from Augustus Intelligence and was a member of its board of directors from May 2019. He flew to New York for meetings at least twice, with further meetings taking place in Corsica and St. Moritz. In October 2018, he wrote to the German Economics Minister Peter Altmaier requesting political support for the company.

The 27-year-old, right-wing politician is currently being groomed by the CDU as a political boy wonder and had been chosen as the only candidate to chair the party in the state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, the constituency of Angela Merkel. In the wake of the AI scandal he has now declared he will stand down as the party's candidate in the state.

The Augustus Intelligence case sheds light on the right-wing character of the grand coalition. In order to implement its policy of militarism, social inequality and the suppression of all opposition, it is promoting the most right-wing forces in the state and political apparatuses. All those involved in the affair—Amthor, Guttenberg, Maassen and Hanning and Roland Berger—are closely connected to the ruling coalition in Berlin.



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