

German state intelligence agency deletes data of right-wing extremists

Christoph Vandreier
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The decision by the state of Saxony's intelligence agency to delete data it had collected on members of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) highlights the close links between Germany's secret services, the national government and the right-wing extremist milieu, not only in Saxony but throughout the country.

Last Wednesday it was revealed that the Saxony Interior Ministry had instructed its intelligence service (officially known as the Office for the Protection of the Constitution) to delete all information collected on members of the AfD currently sitting in the Saxony state parliament. When the head of the agency, Gordian Meyer-Plath, refused to carry out the order to delete, he was immediately replaced last Tuesday by Dirk-Martin Christian.

Christian had previously headed the technical supervision section of the secret service in the Ministry of the Interior and had ordered the deletion of the AfD data. At the end of 2019, he had also forbidden the intelligence agency from monitoring the right-wing extremist Pegida movement in the city of Dresden, which conducts racist campaigns against refugees and threatens leftists and all those who oppose its politics.

Meyer-Plath is a longtime member of the far-right Marchia student fraternity and former undercover officer responsible for liaison with Carsten Szczepanski, a supporter of the neo-Nazi terror group, the National Socialist Underground (NSU), which carried out 10 murders. As head of the state secret service, Meyer-Plath has concentrated on targeting leftists and anti-fascists, while providing protective cover for far-right terror networks and the AfD. The fact that such a figure was dismissed because he was unwilling to delete the data of AfD members of parliament shows the extent of the cooperation between the Interior Ministry and the AfD.

Interior Minister Roland Wöllner (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) and Christian made this clear at a press conference on Thursday. Wöllner confirmed all of the allegations made and defended the deletion of the AfD data. This was necessary, he claimed, because the data had been “illegally stored.”

Wöllner was not referring to tapped telephone calls, statements by informants and/or other intelligence information. Christian stressed that the data had been collected exclusively from

publicly accessible sources and maintained that storage of the information was “illegal” because the data on AfD deputies did not contain sufficient evidence of their anti-constitutional activities. In other words, according to Wöllner, the intelligence agency, in the course of many years of work, had been unable to confirm that individual members of the AfD in Saxony pursued right-wing extremist goals.

This is a ludicrous claim aimed at justifying the deletion of the data. Even a superficial glance at the AfD faction in the Saxon state parliament makes clear that the majority of the grouping are right-wing extremists.

Jörg Urban, who has headed the AfD faction in the state parliament since 2014 and its state organisation since 2018, openly advocates far-right views. He calls for a “homogenous people,” glorifies “white European culture” and accuses “representatives of do-gooderism” of forcing “our girls to the butcher's block of the welcome culture” (a reference to Germany's acceptance of immigrants in 2015) and “into the arms of rapists.” Back in April 2019, a court in Dresden concluded that, on the basis of such opinions, it was admissible to call Urban a “neo-Nazi.”

Urban also makes no secret of his support for the nationalist “Wing” of the AfD, which was recently certified by the federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution as demonstrating “definite indications of right-wing extremist efforts opposed to a free democratic, constitutional order.” In his greetings to a meeting of the “Wing” held in Kyffhäuser in 2019, Urban called those in attendance “like-minded.”

Flying in the face of facts, Christian, Saxony's new head of the secret service, declared at a press conference on Thursday that so far no membership of the “Wing” on the part of AfD members had been proven. “We do more harm to democracy if we draw hasty conclusions and then go public and pillory people when we cannot prove it afterwards,” Christian said.

When asked why only the state of Saxony refuses to collect evidence on AfD deputies in contrast to other federal states, Christian explained: “We have the same legal basis as all of the federal states and federal government, but we have different individual cases. I cannot put a member of parliament from Saxony on a par with one from Brandenburg or Saxony-Anhalt. There are always people behind them.”

While Christian readily protects right-wing extremist agitators and the “people behind them,” his agency has been aggressively pursuing leftist and antifascist groups for years.

For example, in its 2018 report, the state secret service denounced four left-wing music groups—Dr. Ulrich Undeutsch, East German Beauties, Endstation Chaos and One Step Ahead—as “left-wing extremist.” To justify its claim, song lyrics were taken out of context and interpreted in a one-sided way. Last year, the Dresden Administrative Court ruled that the naming and observation of the bands by the secret service was illegal.

Earlier, the Saxony secret service had accused the organisers of an anti-Nazi concert, attended by 70,000 people following far-right riots in Chemnitz, of having given provided a platform for left-wing extremists—allowing them to influence “non-extremists with their extremist ideology.” As proof, the secret service referred to shouts of “Alerta, alerta Antifascista” from the audience—i.e., the call for anti-fascists to be vigilant!

While Wöller uttered a few platitudes about the importance of opposing right-wing extremism at the press conference, Christian made abundantly clear that the Office for the Protection of the Constitution under his leadership would continue to protect right-wing extremists and criminalise left-wingers.

Cristian described “extremism of any sort” as the “greatest danger” and stressed that the fight against right-wing extremism was just one focal point. He regarded his task as “putting a stop to political extremism as a whole.” Such phrases have become commonplace in recent years to justify the continuation and intensification of official cooperation with right-wing extremists.

This political course has the support not just of the CDU, but also its two coalition partners in the state, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens. Valentin Lippmann, head of the Green faction in the Saxon state parliament, defended Wöller’s evasions and declared: “One does not fight enemies of the constitution by using unconstitutional practices.” Lippmann expressly praised Christian’s response and his appointment to head of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

The Left Party also supports the absurd argumentation of Wöller and Christian that the secret service was unable to confirm right-wing extremism on the part of AfD members of parliament. According to Kerstin Köditz, spokeswoman of the Left Party for anti-fascist policy, the state intelligence agency was “too stupid to justify to the Ministry of the Interior why it has to store data on AfD members of parliament. In exercising its supervision, the Ministry therefore came to the conclusion that the storage was unlawful and that the data should be deleted,” Köditz said.

In addition to the claim that the Ministry and the authority had acted out of “stupidity” and not out of political conviction, the German media is also propagating the absurd notion that

what took place in Saxony was a local phenomenon.

In fact, Saxony is only the latest, very clear example of how closely parties and government throughout the country are linked to far-right networks operating within the state apparatus. Similar events to those in Saxony have taken place with the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) and at the hands of Interior Minister Horst Seehofer. According to recent reports, Seehofer was opposed to including the AfD and its “Wing,” as well as the AfD’s neo-fascist youth organisation, “Young Alternative,” in the intelligence agency’s annual report for 2019.

The BfV insisted, however, that these organisations be included in its report—not because it intended to take action against the party, but rather out of fears that the report would meet with “incomprehension from politicians, the media and the public,” according to an internal exchange of letters, reported by a German news source. Publication of the secret service report has been postponed indefinitely.

If the AfD or individual parts of it are actually included in the report, this would be the first time that the party appears in the chapter on right-wing extremism. Even far-right terrorist organisations such as Combat18, which has been involved in various attacks, were not listed in the last secret service annual report.

Instead, the secret service criminalises all those who oppose the far right. Two years ago, the Socialist Equality Party (SGP) was listed in the report for the first time as a left-wing extremist and as an object for surveillance. After the party filed a legal complaint against its being named in the report, the federal government defended surveillance of the SGP, arguing that “fighting for a democratic, egalitarian, socialist society” was not compatible with the German constitution.

The domestic intelligence service and its close ties to the extreme right-wing scene are being used by the government to intimidate anyone who opposes its policies of militarism, police-state build-up and soaring social inequality. This is particularly evident in the cover up of right-wing extremist structures by the Interior Ministry and state government in Saxony.



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