

Perpetrator of terror attack in Vienna was under state surveillance

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Reactions to Monday's brutal terrorist attack in Vienna, which claimed four lives and injured 22, have followed a well-known pattern. Politicians around the world express their horror, pay their condolences and then, in the same breath, demand further powers for the police and secret services along with tougher action against immigrants.

"We will fight terrorism together with determination," said European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, announcing a new EU counterterrorism agenda for next year. "Islamist terrorism is our common enemy. The fight against these murderers and those encouraging them is our common fight," said German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn called for "a strategy against Islamism." Interior Minister Horst Seehofer promised to make Europe's security situation the main topic of the next meeting of EU interior ministers on November 13. "We can only stop the terrorists and their backers together," he said.

Stephan Mayer (Christian Social Union, CSU), state secretary in the German Interior Ministry, demanded that every avenue be used to deport allegedly dangerous persons and serious criminals to their country of origin. Andrea Lindholz (CSU), chair of the Interior Committee of the German Bundestag, demanded "modern powers to monitor encrypted messenger services in justified cases of suspicion."

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said in an interview with the daily *Die Welt*: "The EU must in future focus much more on the problem of political Islam. I expect an end to falsely understood notions of tolerance and at last an awareness in all European countries of just how dangerous the ideology of political Islam is for our freedom and the European way of life."

The president of the EU Parliament, Antonio Tajani, called for the establishment of a European FBI to coordinate the work of the police and secret services throughout Europe.

French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted in flawed German: "We, the French, share the shock and grief of Austrians after an attack in Vienna. ... This is our Europe. Our enemies must know who they are dealing with. We will not give in."

US President Donald Trump wrote on Twitter: "After another heinous act of terrorism in Europe, our prayers are with the people of Vienna." He accused his challenger Joe Biden of wanting to increase the number of refugees from terrorist nations by 700 percent and "turn the entire [US] Midwest into a refugee camp."

The mantra that protection against terrorist attacks requires an upgrade of the security services and tougher measures against immigrants deliberately hides the real background to such attacks, in particular the role played by the secret services. In reality, the terrorist attack in Vienna—like similar attacks in France, Britain and Germany before it—serves as a welcome pretext for governments to create police states aimed, not at protecting the population from terrorist attacks, but rather the ruling classes from popular anger and discontent.

The world's ruling elites anticipate fierce class struggles resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, which has already claimed 280,000 lives in Europe alone due to the criminal policies of European governments, combined with the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. Former reformist parties and unions have moved so far to the right that they are no longer able to control and direct such struggles into harmless channels. This is why state surveillance and forms of state repression are being systematically

expanded.

What is strikingly characteristic about the Vienna attack is that it took place literally under the eyes of the police. Twenty-year-old Kujtim Fejzulai, who roamed through downtown Vienna armed with an AK-47 assault rifle, a handgun and a machete, shooting and stabbing passers-by indiscriminately, was well known to the authorities.

Born and raised in Vienna, Fejzulai had Austrian and North Macedonian citizenship. In September 2018, he was arrested in Turkey and sentenced to 22 months prison in Austria for attempting to join the Islamic State in Afghanistan and Syria. After eight months in prison he was released on probation in December 2019.

Following the terror attack on Monday, Austrian Interior Minister Karl Nehammer (Austrian Peoples Party, ÖVP) claimed the terrorist had managed to “deceive the judiciary.” The Derad association, which specialises in the deradicalization of Islamist offenders and was taking care of Fejzulai, contradicted this statement, reporting that he had never been considered “deradicalized” and was subject to strict conditions of parole.

This did not prevent him from travelling to Slovakia in July 2020 to buy ammunition for his AK-47 assault rifle. As the Slovakian newspaper *Denník N* reports, citing security circles, he did not receive the ammunition because he could not present a firearms license. Instead, the Slovak authorities informed their Austrian colleagues about his visit and attempt to buy ammunition. The Austrian Interior Ministry has confirmed this information following a request from the German news outlets the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, WDR and NDR.

The Austrian authorities were therefore warned of the danger but decided to let him roam freely although they could have immediately arrested Fejzulai on the basis of violating his probation. Whether elements in the Austrian security apparatus, which was under the control of the extreme right-wing Interior Minister Herbert Kickl of the Freedom Party (FPÖ) from 2017 to 2019, were involved in the attack, or whether they just looked the other way, remains unclear. But to claim that the attack took place merely due to unfortunate “mishaps” is untenable. The assassin himself can no longer be interrogated—he was shot by police.

In the meantime, the Islamic State has claimed

responsibility for the attack and the IS-related propaganda channel Amaq has published a video in which Fejzulai confesses to the crime. The Austrian authorities have arrested a number of persons and are investigating at least 14 people from the killer’s circle. Two young men have also been arrested in Switzerland in connection with the Vienna attack. It is not yet known whether they are part of any organisation or were merely in loose contact with Fejzulai.

In almost all of the major terrorist attacks in recent years, the perpetrators were under surveillance by the security authorities. For example, Anis Amri, who drove a truck into a Berlin Christmas market on December 19, 2016, killing 12 people, was being monitored by the state criminal investigation departments of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) and Berlin and also by the German intelligence agency, the Verfassungsschutz. On at least one occasion, Amri was personally driven from the Ruhr area (NRW) to Berlin by an undercover secret service agent. Cherif and Said Kouachi, who committed a massacre six years ago in the offices of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, were also known to the French authorities for more than 10 years and were under surveillance.

Islamist terrorist organisations such as the IS, along with Al Qaeda, which was responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US, owe their origins to the imperialist wars conducted in the Middle East and often maintained relations with imperialist intelligence agencies. Al Qaeda was originally backed by the CIA to recruit Islamist fighters against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. IS-related groups were then deployed in Libya and Syria to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad before they developed into an independent entity in Iraq.



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