

The right-wing extremist murders in Hanau, Germany, one year on

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One year after the Hanau murders, when right-wing extremist Tobias Rathjen killed nine strangers—eight men and one woman aged between 20 and 37—the background to this crime has still not been clarified.

The authorities are sticking to their version of a “confused lone perpetrator,” who also injured six others, some seriously, in the attack. Many unanswered questions point to links to right-wing terrorist networks that reach deep into the state. The murders are the result of profoundly right-wing politics.

For the bereaved, the enumeration of the names of those killed (#Saytheirnames) is more than a duty to prevent the memory of their loved ones from being cast into oblivion. It is a symbol for the active fight against right-wing terrorism. They want to ensure that Hanau is “not a transit station, but the final terminus of right-wing terrorism,” as the father of one of those killed put it.

The victims were:

- Hamza Kenan Kurtovi? (20), who had just completed his training as a warehouse clerk.
- Said Nesar Hashemi (21), a Dunlop worker and trainee technician. He had the postcode of his birthplace Hanau-Kesselstadt tattooed on his arm only a few hours before the murder.
- Vili Viorel P?un (22), a courier service driver. He had watched the killer commit the first murders and followed him by car to Hanau-Kesselstadt to prevent worse but was shot dead in a car park.
- Ferhat Unvar (23) had just completed his apprenticeship examination as a heating technician but would have liked to study further. He revered Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. On his Facebook page in 2015, Unvar wrote the sentence, “We are only dead when we are forgotten.”
- Sedat Gürbüz (29), owner of the Midnight Bar on Hanau’s Heumarkt, was known for his generosity.
- Fatih Saraço?lu (34), was killed on the street in front of the Midnight bar when he tried to raise the alarm.
- Kaloyan Velkov (33), a family man, was shot dead in the La Votre bar where he was working behind the counter.
- Mercedes Kierpacz (35), a single mother of two children, was about to get pizza for them when she was shot.
- Gökhan Gültekin (37) a bricklayer, was about to get married. His father Behçet Gültekin had terminal cancer and had to bury his son before his own death.

Shortly after the crime, the Attorney General’s Office took over all investigations. The background has still not been clarified publicly in any way to this day. “Today, one year after Hanau, we are just as far along as we were on the first day,” Ajla, Hamza Kurtovi?’s sister said in a detailed feature by the culture editorial team from broadcaster Deutschlandfunk. “To this day, we don’t know what really happened.” Not a single question has been answered, she says.

Unanswered questions

First, there is the question of how the murderer could kill unhindered for such a long time. He managed to visit several crime scenes one after the other. First, he entered the La Votre bar and the Midnight Bar on Heumarkt in the centre of Hanau, in the state of Hesse, where he gunned down a total of three people. He then drove to Hanau-Kesselstadt to kill six more people in the Lidl car park, in a kiosk and the Arena bar behind it. Unhindered, he returned to his parents’ house, where the police only entered at three in the morning. They found the killer and his mother shot dead.

As several eyewitnesses have said, the 110 emergency number could not be reached for a very long time. This probably cost at least Vili Viorel P?un his life. Vili had watched the first murders from his car. He drove after the killer and tried to call 110 three times, but no one answered. Then the killer stopped in front of him in Kesselstadt, got out and came back to Vili’s car, where he shot him through the windscreen.

Several other witnesses did not get through on the emergency number either. Survivors from the first crime scene tried for 20 minutes before they managed to pass on the registration number of the mass murderer’s vehicle. But even after that, Tobias Rathjen was not stopped.

Only a few days ago, the public prosecutor’s office started investigations into a locked emergency exit at the Arena bar. Time and again, relatives had pointed out that the victims’ escape route in this shisha bar had been cut off. Reportedly, due to an earlier police order, the door was locked to prevent patrons from escaping through the back door during frequent police raids.

Further, the personal details of the killer and his father raise serious questions. Tobias Rathjen, 43, had been known to the authorities as a racist, right-wing extremist and psychopath for at least 18 years. There have been four legal proceedings against him in which he was accused of various offences related to drugs and violence since 2002. Time and again, he also filed complaints with the attorney general and the Hanau Public Prosecutor’s Office, claiming that he was being spied on by a secret organisation. As a result of such a letter to the Attorney General’s Office, he was forcibly committed to a psychiatric ward in 2002.

So, he was anything but a blank slate. Despite all this, the killer held a firearms licence that permitted him to own several highly dangerous weapons and to train as a sniper. In the year before the bloody deed, Rathjen took part in several combat training exercises, including shooting exercises in Slovakia. Six months before the night of the murders in Hanau, Rathjen had openly posted a 24-page confession on the internet. In it, the “Trump supporter” fantasised about how many Germans were “pure-blooded and worthy” and had developed bizarre genocidal plans, according to which, the populations of more than two dozen states, including half of Asia and several cultures from North Africa and Israel, were to be completely annihilated.

Also, in summer 2019, the relevant authority in Gelnhausen granted the killer permission to significantly expand his hunting licence. This occurred even though only a few days before, the same authority had come under public criticism, having not refused a gun licence to the known racist who carried out the July 2019 murder attack on the Eritrean Bilal M. in Wächtersbach.

Rathjen's father Hans-Gerd, 73, has also played an extremely dubious role. The senior citizen, who continues to live undisturbed in Hanau-Kesselstadt, shares his son's conspiracy fantasies and had already attracted attention as a fanatical racist. As early as March 2017, he demanded to be served only by German employees in the citizens' centre of the city of Hanau; bringing a German shepherd dog, allegedly as "protection against foreigners."

On the night of the deadly assault, the police briefly arrested the older Rathjen, but then released him. According to his statement, he was fast asleep and did not notice anything, but a neighbour saw him handling his son's car in the street after the shootings.

According to a report by *Der Spiegel*, the killer's father not only displayed the same paranoia as his son but also expressed the same racist sentiments. For example, he had demanded that the memorials to those killed by his son be removed, describing them as "incitement of the people," and he had insulted Hanau Mayor Claus Kaminsky because he had said that those murdered were "no strangers." The father also demanded the return of his son's murder weapons and ammunition and demanded that his internet site be reactivated.

It only became known late in the day that the elder Rathjen had made a submission to the public prosecutor's office claiming his son's name and that of his family had been unjustly besmirched. He based this on the "specialist literature of Mr. Thilo Sarrazin," according to which "my country has been abolished." The letter contained a serious threat: "Restitution will require several lives."

(Sarrazin, formerly a long-time leading member of the Social Democratic Party, SPD, and state finance minister in Berlin, is the author of the anti-Muslim screed "Germany Abolishes Itself.")

All this has been made public by the bereaved groups and their lawyers, but not by the investigating authorities. The relatives believe Rathjen senior is a "ticking time bomb" and have filed criminal charges against him. They say he most likely knew about and approved of the planned crime at an early stage, and that he may have been involved in his wife's murder. In any case, he has since openly threatened further homicides.

All these clues together paint a picture. The Hesse state authorities allow such "ticking time bombs" to go completely unchecked. On the night of the murder, the Hanau police let the cold-blooded murders happen over a long period and only intervened very late on. And the public prosecutor's office, state interior ministry and other authorities have been trying for a year to let the investigations fizzle out. The questions arise: What do they have to hide? What friends or sympathisers did father and son have within the state apparatus? What connections and right-wing networks are being covered up?

To date, the Hesse police have not spoken to the relatives of the victims, allegedly because "the investigation is still ongoing." Ajla Kurtovi?, Hamza's sister, said she was "stunned" that the police did not answer a single question. Her family had not been told where her brother was for a week. She would never have believed that investigations could be so slow.

In fact, after the night of the murders, the authorities gave the victims' relatives—but not the father of the killer—an official "public endangerment warning." Etris Hashemi, brother of the slain Said Nesar Hashemi, reported on this in the *Tagesthemen* news broadcast last Thursday.

Etris himself had survived a bullet to the neck but was left with serious injuries. He had received a "public endangerment warning" when he was able to leave the hospital. He was told not to take revenge, not to commit a crime—"that I should lie low," as Etris said. "I took that as an insult at the

time. For me, it goes without saying that I would not commit a crime in this country. And then after months, almost a year, we get to hear that the father is making such racist comments!"

The political issues

The Hanau murders did not come out of the blue. As Hanau Mayor Claus Kaminsky (SPD) admitted on the anniversary: "I think the state has a great debt to pay here. But so far, clearly more is coming to light through the families than through the state itself."

It is intolerable hypocrisy that last Friday evening, Federal President Frank Walter Steinmeier (SPD) called for a "common fight against racism." "Don't let the evil deed divide us!" the president called out to those present at the commemoration ceremony in Hanau.

However, he did not name the real people responsible: the politicians of the federal and state governments. After all, it was none other than Federal Interior Minister Horst Seehofer (Christian Social Union, CSU) who coined the catchphrase about immigration being the "mother of all problems." It was also he who announced at an Ash Wednesday political gathering that the government would fight "to the last bullet" against allowing "immigration into the German social welfare systems."

Brutal deportations are regularly carried out not only by the grand coalition of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and SPD in Berlin, but also by the Hesse state government, in which the Greens sit alongside the CDU and the Left Party-governed Thuringia. Most recently, the coronavirus pandemic has shown that all parties are implementing the policies of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Nevertheless, the killing of the Hanau Nine had a special dimension: it was an open attack on the working class. Hanau-Kesselstadt is mainly home to working class families who originally came from Italy, Turkey, Bosnia and Romania and, later, from Syria and Afghanistan, and whose children were born and grew up here.

Their parents worked in construction or at Dunlop, Heräus technology group, electrical engineering company BBC and other Hanau industrial firms, many of which have since closed. The younger ones work in Frankfurt am Main, at the airport, in the Opel auto factories or the supply industry. In Hanau-Kesselstadt, everyone knows each other and feels they belong. It was against this international, proletarian neighbourhood that the fatal shootings were directed.

Here is also the key to understanding the unanswered questions. At the latest since 2014, with the turn to German militarism and an aggressive foreign and security policy, official politics have become less and less compatible with the needs of working people. The very existence of an alert and potentially rebellious working class poses a constant threat to the ruling politicians.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) strongly oppose the fascist drive. The SGP demands the dissolution of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, as the German secret service is called, an immediate halt to deportations and the closure of all deportation camps and for equal democratic and social rights for everyone living here.

In its election statement, the SGP writes: "Mass death, social inequality and war are incompatible with democracy. This is why the ruling elite around the world is turning to authoritarian forms of rule. ... The threat from the right is particularly acute in Germany. The police, army and intelligence agencies are infested with right-wing extremist terrorist networks that enjoy support from the highest levels of the state. Despite the deadly terrorist attacks in Halle, Hanau and other places, and the murder of Kassel District President Walter Lübcke, the leaders and

backers of these fascist structures remain free men. ... The AfD was systematically built up by the political establishment and media.”



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